

## Esmond, Bertie. Sapper.

8-B-4



Joseph Harold Birthy, nicknamed Bertie, is the eldest son of Hubert Esmond and his wife Eléonore Esmond, née Chouinard. He was born on April 14, 1923, in New Liverpool, a hamlet in the neighbourhood of Lévis, south of the St. Lawrence River.

The 1931 census lists three sons:  
Bertie was 8 years old, Léo 6, and Albert 5.  
On May 24, 1932, another son was born, named Arthur Raymond.

Their mother, Eléonore Esmond, died on March 1, 1933.  
The family is Roman Catholic, French is spoken at home.

Bertie enlisted on October 8, 1943, in Montreal.  
He reports that he had completed elementary school and had worked for several months as a truck driver. Before reporting for active duty, Bertie had already served for several years as a reservist.

From May 1940 to March 1943, he served in the Ammunition Company of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps.

The father was sickly and often needed the sons' help.  
Bertie requested his reservist discharge in the spring of 1943.

(His father was a veteran, also a Sapper, of the First World War.)

CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE  
DISCHARGE CERTIFICATE  
THIS IS TO CERTIFY that No. 2281037 (Rank) Sapper  
Name (in full) Bernard Hubert enlisted in  
the 2nd Quebec Regt  
CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE at Quebec on the 24<sup>th</sup>  
day of May 1943  
He served in France and Germany  
and is now discharged from the service by reason of Medical Unfitness  
THE DESCRIPTION OF THIS SOLDIER on the Date below is as follows:  
Age 22 Height 5'7" Complexion Fair Eyes Blue Hair Light  
Signature of Soldier Bernard Hubert Signature of Medical Officer Wm. J. [illegible]  
Date of Discharge Jul 2 1943 Rank Sapper  
Date HALIFAX, N.S. JUL 2 1943  
NOTE: An duplicate of this certificate will be issued. Any person forging same is prohibited to  
possess it or in an unobscured envelope to the Registrar, Military Council, Ottawa, Canada.  
M.P.C. 204



The active duty for Bertie began on October 8, 1943, at District Depot No. 4, a training camp in Longueuil, also known as Montreal South.

By the end of October 1943, Bertie was in St. Jerome, Quebec.  
He was then taken on strength by the School for Army Instructions, a training institution under the NRMA.

*To clarify:*

*The NRMA in 1940 refers to the National Resources Mobilization Act of Canada, a law passed on June 21, 1940, to strengthen the war effort during the Second World War. It authorized the government to mobilize all necessary resources, including manpower, for the defence of Canada and authorized conscription for home defence.*

In mid-November 1943, Bertie spent a week in St. John's Hospital.

The reason for this cannot be found in his records.

A month later, on December 18<sup>th</sup>, he was transferred to the Royal Canadian Engineers (RCE) training center in Petawawa, Ontario.

The year 1944 began with a punishment for Bertie. He had been absent without leave (AWL) for a day. Three days 'Confined to Barracks' and two days' pay was the consequence. In February, his first training ended, and Sapper Bertie's pay was raised to \$1.40 per day.

On June 5, 1944, he was summoned before a board of inquiry.

In addition to his absence on May 1, he was also held accountable for the shortages in his personal equipment.

Initially, he was sentenced to 142 days' detention and withheld pay until \$23.60 was paid for the missing equipment.

The detention was later reduced to 69 days, and on October 20, 1944, Bertie was detained at No. 64 Military Detention Barracks in Petawawa.

The unit was scheduled to depart for the United Kingdom, and Bertie was transferred to Camp Debert on January 13, 1945.

*To clarify:*

*By the 1940s, Debert, Nova Scotia, had become a major military center.*

*It was a training point for the Canadian Army. The facilities were adequate to accommodate a division-sized force. (approximately 15,000 troops)*

*It also served as an assembling point for troops departing for Europe.*

It's striking that Bertie's embarkation leave was revoked.

On January 31, 1945, the unit embarked and arrived in the United Kingdom on February 9, 1945.

Bertie was taken on strength by a reinforcement unit of the Royal Canadian Engineers. (RCE).

Then came his crossing to the front in northwest Europe.

On April 11, 1945, he set foot on the mainland.

He was assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron RCE.

That unit was just recovering from a German raid on their headquarters in Sögel, Germany, on April 10, 1945.

That confrontation cost six of their men their lives.

The squadron, now with Bertie in its ranks, continued its advance towards Lorup, but barely arrived there, they were sent on to Neu Arenberg.

Towards Friesoythe, with a detour to the Küsten Canal.

Here, the RCE men faced a difficult time. The south side of the canal was riddled with mines, and the north side was heavily defended.

Bertie Esmond was killed while on a reconnaissance mission with Lieutenant Taylor. The Humber they were traveling in, sustained a direct hit.

*(The "Humber" was a British armoured vehicle used by the Canadian Army for reconnaissance, security, and communications.)*

It was April 28, 1945. Bertie had barely been at the front for three weeks. He was given a temporary grave in Osterscheps (Germany) and was later transferred to the CWGC Canadian War Cemetery in Holten. The grave reference is: Plot 8; Row B; Grave 4.

The headstone reads:

**We loved him in life,  
We will not forget him in death.**

*He was awarded:*

*The 1939-1945 Star; the France-Germany Star; the 1939-1945 War Medal; and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with clasp.*

In June 1945, there was still correspondence about the fact that Bertie had bequeathed his possessions to his brother Albert, even though his father needed it so much.



Sources:

[www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org); [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com); [www.canada.ca/library-archives](http://www.canada.ca/library-archives), [www.myheritage.nl](http://www.myheritage.nl)