



**In memory of**  
**Private Bernard Oswald Keenan**  
**K79072, 9th Inf. Bde. Coy,**  
**Royal Canadian Army Service Corps**  
**who died age 30 on 03 June 1945.**

**Son of Patrick Joseph and Mary Agnes Keenan**  
**of Mission City, British Columbia, Canada**  
**Remembered with honour.**

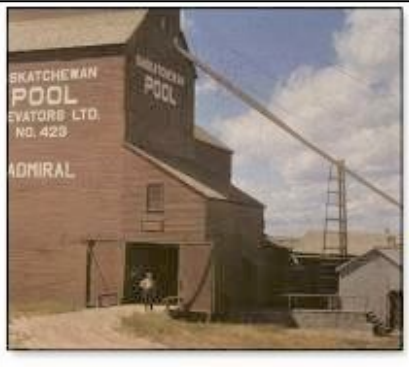
**Holten Canadian War Cemetery**  
**Commemorated in perpetuity by the**  
**Commonwealth War Graves Commission.**





About 1904, Thomas and Philomena Keenan, with five children arrived in Canada from England. In the 1906 Canada Census, we find the family settled in an area around Regina, Saskatchewan.

Their eldest son, seventeen-year-old Patrick J. Keenan, marries a local girl named Agnes and they take up a Western Land Grant in the Admiral, Saskatchewan area. Over the next number of years, this family, increasing to ten children, moves numerous times residing in Admiral, Maple Creek, Swift Current, Cabri and Portreeve.



**Bernard Oswald Keenan** was the eldest son.

Bert, to his family, was born February 22, 1915 in Admiral.

His early schooling may have been in many of the one-room schools (similar to the picture at right that dot the prairie landscape), as his family looked for a place to

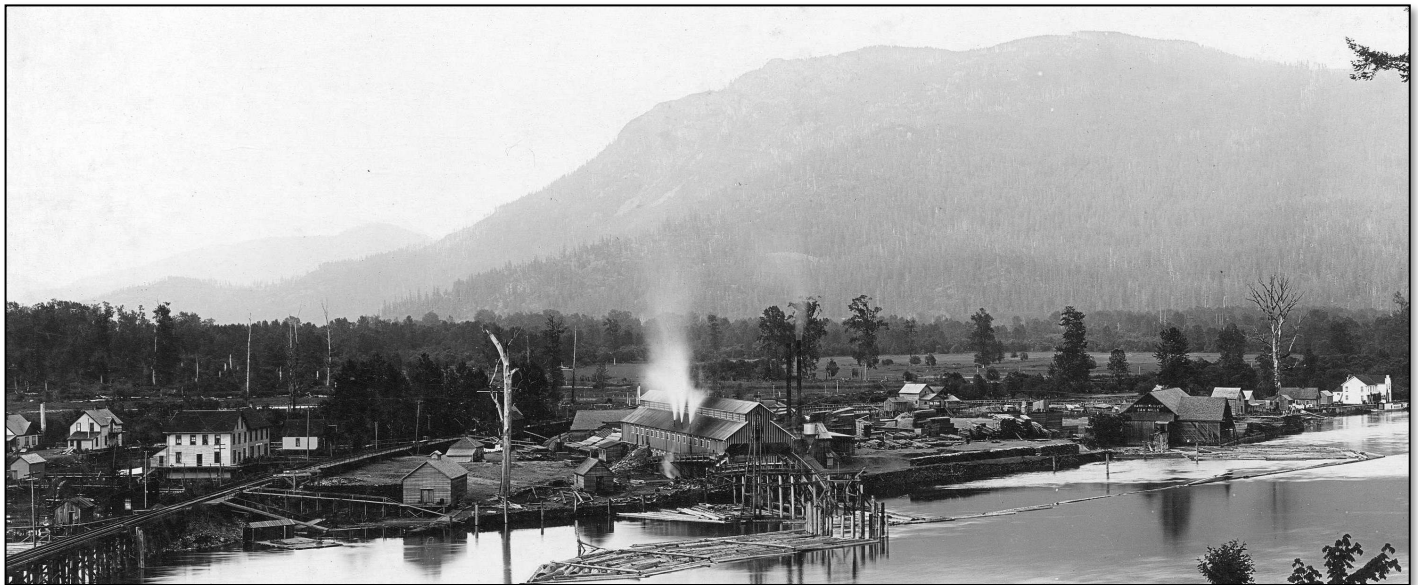


finally settle. By age 15, having completed grade 9, Bert leaves school and earns his living as a farm labourer. This is not unusual for the times. Between 1931 and 1938, Bert learns to proficiently operate and drive many of the heavy-duty machines needed to plant and harvest grain.

Bert also enjoyed team sports, playing hockey as a defenseman in winter, and baseball on second base in the summer. In 1938, the family give up on prairie life and move to Mission City in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia.

Living with them now is their widowed grandmother, Philomena Keenan.

It was still the depression and farm work was not very plentiful. So upon their arrival, Bert found work in the Harrison Shingle and Lumber Mill at Harrison Mills, BC as a Shipper.



In the 1939 & 1940 BC City Directories, we see the father Patrick listed as a carpenter, son Bert as a millhand and another son as a deckhand. This family of thirteen people is settled and supporting themselves. They are doing well for the times.

But things changed quickly when Canada declared war on Germany in support of England on September 9, 1939.

Bert enlists in the Canadian Army on June 21, 1940 at Vancouver, BC with service #K79072.

His mother, Agnes Mary Keenan dies on October 30, 1941 age 48.

In 1942 a younger brother enlists in the Royal Westminster Regiment.

And his youngest sister enlists in the Canadian Women's Army Corps.

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It is noted in the military file that Bert could drive and handle heavy trucks.

So he is assigned as a "Driver" in the Canadian Army Service Corps.

He was initially sent to Victoria, BC, but by January of 1941, Bert is transferred to the

Army's new Training facility in Nova Scotia. He visits with family before he leaves.

The Army keeps very good records and we can follow Bert's assignments month by month.

It shows his training and courses taken for the mechanical maintenance of vehicles, as well as the testing of his skills driving many different types of vehicles.

Camp Debert, in Nova Scotia, is the final staging area for embarkation to the UK.

Bert left Halifax, arriving July 30, 1941 in Scotland.

His skills are used extensively as an ambulance driver. He adapts to driving on the left side



of the road and quickly transports the wounded to aid stations or hospitals as needed. His ambulance may have looked something like the one on the left.

He was stationed throughout the southern areas of England and was sent to wherever he was needed.

Britain was under constant bombardment.

Her cities, ports and airfields were under attack.

In addition, wounded personnel were continually

being sent home via ships into those ports and needed transport to medical facilities.

This was vital work, and Bert performed his duties continuously from his arrival in July of 1941 to July of 1944. He is awarded a Good Conduct Badge on February 22, 1943.

D-Day had taken place on June 4, 1944.

It was now time to send in another wave of support personnel of which ambulance drivers were a very needed part. Bert landed in France July 12, 1944

and was immediately back at work.



As the Allies cleared areas held by the enemy, medical personnel moved forward right behind them to assist with the wounded - both military and civilian.

Some areas of the Netherlands were liberated in the fall and winter of 1944. The rest followed. May 5th, 1945 is considered liberation day for the Netherlands.

As Bert moves forward with his medical unit, he finds himself south of Amsterdam in the Utrecht area in late May of 1945.

He is given nine days leave, and we presume he spent it in Utrecht. He was walking towards Utrecht on June 3, 1945, when he accepted a ride from a friend who was returning to the same area. Bert hopped onto the back of the motorcycle and they headed out.

The report states that about 19:30 hours, while crossing a bridge a bicycle darted out in front of the motorcycle. In order to avoid a collision with the cyclist, the driver swerved but lost control of the motorcycle and it slammed into the railing of the bridge. Both men were thrown into the canal. People came to help and two local doctors were in the area and on the scene quickly. The driver survived. Bert was pronounced dead at the scene. An inquiry was held as the incident was on a public road. The Inquest ruled it an accident.

The official telegram below was sent to the family in Mission, BC.

Follow-up letters of condolence as well as all personal effects were returned to the family.

On June 25, 1946 the family were advised that their son had been reverently reburied in grave 12, row F, plot 9 of Holten Canadian Cemetery which would receive care and maintenance in perpetuity. Bert never married, but all his siblings married, and there are many nieces and nephews to remember him and carry on the name.

The following medals were sent to the family:

1939 - 45 Star,

France-Germany Star,

Defence Medal,

War Medal,

Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with clasp.

M.F.M. 287  
SOM-2-45 (6986)  
H.Q. 1772-35-1989

**CANADIAN NATIONAL  
HRJ TELEGRAPHS**

FILE H.Q. 405-K-11320

CASUALTY (REPORT DELIVERY) OTTAWA 15 JUNE 1945

TO:- MR PATRICK  
MISSION CITY B C

93481 REFERENCE THIS HEADQUARTERS AIRMAIL LETTER DATED  
THIRTEENTH JUNE 1945 STOP DEEPLY REGRET INFORM YOU K79072 PRIVATE  
BERNARD KEENAN HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY REPORTED TO HAVE DIED ACCIDENTALLY  
AS RESULT OF INJURIES RECEIVED THIRD JUNE 1945 STOP YOU SHOULD  
RECEIVE FURTHER INFORMATION FROM THE UNIT IN THE FIELD

**We will remember them !**



## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Chilliwack Military Museum, 45915 Wellington Avenue., Chilliwack, BC  
with thanks to volunteer Robert Bussell, Royal Canadian Engineers, Rtd.
2. Mission Museum and Archives online
3. Royal Canadian Legion Mission Branch Facebook
4. Retired Teacher and Researcher Maureen Presbury Bigham - Newspaper Archives
5. Royal Westminster Regiment Museum and Archives

## Photo Credits:

**Page 2:** Grain elevator: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Admiral,\\_Saskatchewan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Admiral,_Saskatchewan)

**Page 2:** School house: [Saskatchewan One Room School project](#)

**Page 2:** Harrison Shingle Mill: [Vancouver City Archives](#)

**Page 3:** Austin K2 Ambulance taken 19 August 2007 by Dave Deben

**Page 4:** Copy of the telegram from Library and Archives Canada files of WW2 War Dead

**Page 4:** Medals from Veterans Affairs Canada [www.veterans.gc.ca](http://www.veterans.gc.ca)

**Page 5:** from Mission City Record, wreath laying service for  
Remembrance Day, Nov. 11, 2019 at the Royal Canadian Legion building - Bob Friesen photos



**Royal Canadian Legion, Branch #57**  
**32627 Logan Avenue**  
**Mission, BC**  
**V2V 6K4**  
**Links to Facebook.**

Prepared by Marlene Dance

