



It is July 25, 1925 when Samuel Wilkie McGowan sets foot on Canadian soil with his parents John and Elizabeth and his one and a half year old brother. They have been travelling from Glasgow for a week. His father lived in Winnipeg, Canada from 1912 to 1919 and they will settle there. The McGowan family turns their backs on Scotland. Samuel was born there in the factory town of Camelon (Stirlingshire), 2 km west of Falkirk, between Glasgow and Edinburgh.

After graduating from high school, he enters the army. He enrolls in the "Permanent Force of Canada", the standing army of Canada on August 23, 1938, and is assigned to the Princess Patricia's

Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). He signs for 3 years. During his military career, he is regularly promoted.

After the declaration of war on Germany, the first Canadian soldiers were sent to the UK in December 1939. Samuel is also there and he is back in Scotland for a while. In February 1940 he is in Cornwall (England) where he is trained in shooting with a Bren Carrier. He is granted leave in August and September 1941 so that he can marry Priscilla. They live with sea views in Saltdean (Sussex, England). After more training, he is allowed again on leave, this time to Winnipeg. In Canada, he was admitted to officer training in August 1942, resulting in giving mortar lessons to recruits as a lieutenant in February 1943. In March of that year, an important career change follows as he is being trained as a paratrooper. Military paratroopers (troops) and parachutes were first widely used during World War II for troop distribution and transportation. Paratroopers are often used in surprise attacks, to capture strategic targets such as airports or bridges.



80m high jump-off tower for para training

He goes through training and is assigned to the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion in early July 1943. At the end of that month, the unit is in England. As a result, he just misses the birth of his son, Michael David, in Winnipeg. So his wife must have come to Canada too.



PARATROOPERS OF THE 1ST CANADIAN
PARACHUTE BATTALION

At 01:00 on June 6, 1944, Samuel is part of the Allied troops that land in Normandy on D-Day (June 6, 1944). His unit jumped in the Varaville region, northeast of Caen. The paras carried silk maps, printed on both sides, light in weight and stronger than paper.

In July and August, the battalion fights its way to the northeast. Then it is done with front service after 3 months because on September 6 the battalion will leave by ship for England.

Here Samuel enjoys the relative rest and is promoted to Captain on December 21, 1944.

The Allied troops have meanwhile advanced further towards Germany where they become involved in the Ardennes Offensive, or as the Allies call it, the Battle of the Bulge, in December 1944. Thirty years after fierce fighting in the Ardennes between the French and the Germans, it is now mainly the Americans who are fighting the Germans.

But the Canadians are also involved in this. Via Ostend they arrive in Belgium and move towards the Ardennes. Via Marche, the battalion arrives in Bande, where the residents want to show them what happened shortly before on Christmas Eve. The village had become a victim of a German war crime; 34 young men are murdered in retaliation for previous attacks on German officers.

Sam Mc Gowan participates in patrols around Bande at the beginning of the new year. He and two comrades suddenly came across a German machine gun post. Fortunately, it was not manned and they quickly ran back and hid in the snow. From there they saw that the Germans were looking for them but they gave up. A little later, the Germans began bombarding them with mortar shells. According to Corporal Harper, it was Sam McGowan who saved their lives by, during breaks in the shooting, leading the patrol to the place where the grenades had just landed. Sam explained to them that the breaks were used to re-direct the mortars to a different goal. In the end, that was their salvation and they were able to get away.

In early January 1945, the battalion travelled to Rochefort, Belgium, then to Swalmen, the Netherlands. They were active in carrying out patrols and establishing bridgeheads. Despite the heavy shelling of the Canadian positions, there were very few casualties. Especially considering the time they were there

and the strength of the enemy. At the end of February, the battalion left for England for rest.

That came to an end on March 7, 1945 when they started training for what would be the last airborne operation of WW2: Operation Varsity, the crossing of the Rhine.

Varsity was intended to help the attacking allied forces to get a foothold over the Rhine in Germany by landing two airborne divisions on the eastern bank of the Rhine near the village of Hamminkeln and the city of Wesel.

On March 24, 1945, more than 16,000 Allied paratroopers and several thousand aircraft participated in the largest airborne operation in history, carried out in one day and at one location.

Operation Varsity would be the largest single-lift airborne operation conducted during the conflict; more significantly, it would contradict previous airborne strategy by having the airborne troops drop *after* the initial amphibious landings, in order to minimize the risks to the airborne troops learned from the experiences of Operation Market Garden.



C-47 TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT DROP HUNDREDS OF PARATROOPERS AS PART OF OPERATION VARSITY

For Sam, the jump and landing goes as planned and on March 28 he marches towards Lembeck. There, his unit is fired at by German artillery, which is soon eliminated by the Canadians. During the next day in Lembeck troops receive well deserved peanuts, chocolate and cigarettes.

On March 30, 1945, they leave Lembeck by truck in the morning in the direction of Coesfeld. A and B coys debussed and climbed on tanks and the advance continued. It was quite an experience for the Rifle Coy personnel as it was the first time the personnel had ever ridden on tanks. The tank crews congratulated unit personnel on their splendid cooperation, most commendable because of their *inexperience* in this type of work.

But then a terrible tragedy happened; the much-loved commander of 'B' Company, Captain Sam McGowan, was killed. Not by enemy fire, but by a exploding grenade he was carrying on his belt. It nearly tore him in half.

Sergeant Andy Anderson recalled: *"we lowered him to the ground, and i held him in my arms, semi-conscious, and he died in that position. This death, and the manner in which it happened has left all the men in the Platoon & Company feeling a great sadness, even though death of friends is an everyday occurrence"*

He was the only one death that day and must have died somewhere near Greven. He was buried in Altenberge.

His widow Priscilla remarried Douglas Corrie on October 10, 1945 and they moved to Kimberley, British Columbia.

In 1946, Samuel McGowan was reburied at the Canadian Cemetery in Holten where he rests in plot 12, row H, tomb 8.

Honours:
1939-45 Star
France&Germany Star
Defence Medal, War Medal
1939-45 CVSM & Clasp



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