

## **Lance Bombardier Guy Francis Wilbur**

**MCKNIGHT**

**10-H-13**

Guy McKnight was born on January 18, 1921 in New Jersey NB, the eldest son of Ellen (Nellie) Davidson and Francis ( Frank) Joseph McKnight. He attended school in New Jersey, leaving after grade seven and going to work in the woods and on the farm. He worked in the woods for one or two winters in Juniper, NB. His employer there was Flemming and Gibson, who ran a major lumbering operation at that time. Hugh John Flemming who was premier of New Brunswick from 1952- 1960 was one of the partners. The last winter he worked in the woods was at home, working for Bertram (Bert) Murray who was lumbering in New Jersey. Nellie was pleased to have him at home. In May 1938 he started fishing lobster with Dad, his half brother, Walter MacKnight. He continued in this capacity for five seasons, but had to leave before the end of the season in 1942 as he had received his "call" to appear in Saint John on June 29, 1942. His Enrolment Form indicates that he was "taken on strength of No. 7 National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA) Clearing Depot on that date, rank Pte. On the same day he was transferred to No. 7 District Depot, (CA) Fredericton, NB. On July 16, 1942 he was transferred to 6th Anti-Tank Regiment, RCA and on July 17, 1942 he was transferred to Petawawa, Ont. And "promoted" to Gunner. He signed on for active duty on January 25, 1943 while in Petawawa and was posted to the 56th Battery on that date. He served with that battery until he was killed on February 13, 1945. He

remained in Petawawa until being transferred to Debert, NS on July 7, 1943. This was a holding Depot where troops were assembled to be shipped overseas from Halifax. On August 10, 1943 the Regiment transferred to Halifax, on August 24 they boarded the Queen Mary and on August 25 they sailed, disembarking in England on September 1, 1943. The Queen Mary crossed the Atlantic unescorted on these voyages due to her speed, this was considered safer than being in convoy with slower ships. After ten months of training in England the regiment embarked on July 7 and disembarked at Juno Beach, France on July 9 and 10th 1944. (Guys service record indicates that he disembarked on July 9). Guy was awarded the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp on July 25, 1944. His unit was involved in the liberation of many towns in France, Belgium and Holland during the summer and fall. The tide was turning, we were winning the war, how long would it take? In a letter to his mother, Bernice McKnight, dated January 8, 1945, thanking her for the Christmas box he received that day, he added a PS "hoping to see you before this time next year". This was not to be. Guy was the Gunner in a crew of five operating a Self Propelled Gun, in addition to Guys position there was a Driver, Loader, Radio Operator and Sergeant. Roy Middlemass the Sergeant was proud of his crew and described Guy to me as "deadly with that gun". Here is another quote from the letter mentioned in the previous paragraph. "I got some parcels before X-mas but they don't last long, the five of us (the gun crew) always share our parcels, when I get one all hands eats, and when they get one I sure aint shy at getting

my share." It was sure a great crew, two were from NB, one from Ottawa, one from Saskatchewan and one from BC. It was quite a collection." (The one from BC was Roy Middlemass.) The History of the 6th Canadian Anti-Tank Regiment, page 29 covers planning for an offensive to clear the Reichswald forest of the enemy. This operation was named Operation "Veritable". The 56th Battery went into action on February 8th at 1600 hrs. They were involved in the hardest fighting they had experienced since landing in NW Europe. Guy was killed during this operation on February 13, 1945. Excerpt from War Diary of Sixth Canadian Anti Tank Regiment RCA, February 13, 1945, "Cloudy but mild today. Heavy mortaring and a lot of enemy infantry in the area. Several prisoners were taken by "D" Troop. "E" troop took four prisoners during an enemy counter attack. L/Bdr. McKnight CFW was killed today by a mortar bomb and Sgt. Middlemass was wounded." Guy was buried in the Reichswald Forest and after the war ended his remains were moved to Holten Canadian Military Cemetery, Holten, Holland. The tank on which Guy was the Gunner, the M10, was built on a Sherman tank chassis and weighed thirty two tons. They were initially equipped with 4" US naval guns which were later changed to "seventeen pounders". They were also equipped with machine- guns. The original design was an open turret. They were used this way for some time but they were always very concerned about a mortar bomb entering the fighting compartment via the open turret. Mortar bombs were short range weapons, fired at a sharp, steep angle and came down on the target

almost vertically. To provide increased protection for the crew the M10's were taken to a shipyard in Antwerp, Belgium and had « steel armour welded around the turret and a 1" lid on the top of the turret. The lid was supported by 1" angle iron studs which extended about 6" above the turret. This resulted in a 6" opening to observe the action when necessary. A quote from "The Gunners of Canada" describing the modifications says in part "The lids were constructed with a moveable flap which could be folded back to give No.1 full view when required; when down it afforded complete protection from anything except an artillery shell." On the morning of February 13, 1945, Sgt. Roy Middlemass was outside the M10 trying to repair a machine gun when he was wounded by shrapnel from a "Bazooka". He was evacuated and later the crew were ordered to fire on a German house where a machine-gun nest was located. After firing on the house a German Panzer tank appeared from behind the house and the crew turned their attention to it. They fired at the tank and Guy stood up in the turret to observe, via the 6" opening, mentioned above, to determine if they had hit the Panzer. At that instant a mortar bomb hit the gun shield of the M10 and Guy was killed by the concussion. No one else was injured. This is as described to Roy Middlemass by the crew when he returned from hospital in Belgium in April. Roy reiterated that Guy did not open the turret lid. He didn't know that Guy had been killed until he rejoined the crew, he described it as "a great shock to him." Nellie was informed on February 21, 1945 that Guy had been killed in the age of 23 years old. The

information was delivered to her by an individual on behalf of the CN Telegraph Office in Chatham. "H" (Halliday) McKnight drove the individual, by horse and sleigh to Nellie's home. Edgar Savoy drove to Burnt Church by horse and sleigh bring over the message. Guy's dad and sisters were out in the yard in late afternoon when Edgar arrived with the sad news, Nan was five years old and remembers it well, as does Carman. Dad went immediately to break the sad news to Uncle Douglas and Aunt Ethel. That evening the family went to New Jersey to be with Nellie. This surely must have been a terrible shock for her, remember she lost her husband in 1929, her Son Gordon in 1932 and now Guy. Then in 1954, her step-son, Uncle Ernest who lived with her, died suddenly, she certainly had more than her share of troubles. Guy was a small man, his Enrolment Form indicates ; Height 5'9 1/4", Weight 143. He enjoyed life to the fullest, loved to be with people, certainly not a loner in any way. He enjoyed the Burnt Church dances or any other party. If he had returned who knows what life would have held for him. Perhaps he would have married and had a family. Would he have lived in New Jersey or moved somewhere else to work, of one thing I am sure he would have provided good home for his mother. Guy had a brother Gordon, born 1922 died 1932. He had a half sister Evelyn and three half brothers, Douglas Walter and Ernest, children of Franks first marriage to Agnes Sewell. A river was just behind the house, a real attraction for a kid of six or any age. He always had an alder fishing rod ready to try for trout, which were quite plenty full at that time. He fished

lobster with his dad. His mother was pregnant at the time and unable to take on any additional work. On May 14, Carman was born and Guy moved from the shanty around June 1st. Carman was born in the morning, once his father realized that all was well with mother and the "Baby", he decided that he should go fishing. There had been a nor'easter earlier in the week and some traps along Fox Island had been washed ashore. This was a beautiful calm day, his father decided a good time to put Guy ashore and they would recover the traps. He chose a spot where the water was deep close to shore and nosed the bow in as close as possible. Guy climbed over the bow and lowered himself down, the water was over his hip waders but he waded ashore, dumped them, rung his sox and was ready to retrieve traps. Meanwhile Dad had anchored the boat as near shore as possible, Guy had taken a long line with him. He tied the traps to it, one at a time and his father was able to pull them to the boat. There were several of his father's traps as well as others. They were all recovered and dropped at the end of each fisherman's line." This was an exciting adventure. As Guy landed on Juno Beach, France, on July 9, 1944, he might have remembered that day six years earlier when he landed on Fox Island, Miramichi Bay.

