

## Ouderkirk, Gordon William. Rifleman.

12-D-12



Gordon William Ouderkirk is born in Orville, Ontario, on February 7, 1917. He is the son of William Henry Ouderkirk and Minnie Dora Ouderkirk, née Barrager.

The family is Presbyterian and English is spoken at home. The family includes two other sons and four daughters.

Gordon leaves school at the age of 16, having completed Grade 8. For sports, he has chosen softball.

Gordon enlists for active service in Toronto on February 25, 1943. By then, he has already gained considerable life experience.

He has married Carrie Farrell on January 19, 1938. Their first son, Gordon John, dies after only six weeks. In 1943, Gordon states that they have two children: a three-year-old daughter and a son, not yet a year old.

He also has nearly ten years of work experience. He has worked for a metal-finishing company for more than four years; a year as a punching machine operator and he has four years of experience as a carpenter. His last employer is Dominion Bridge Co. in Toronto, a company that is closely involved in the war industry.

*In the 1940s, the Dominion Bridge Company, with a strong presence in Toronto and Ontario, switched to war production. The company played a crucial role in the production of materials for the war effort, including ammunition, cartridge cases, and support for the manufacture of cargo ships. During the war, it employed a diverse workforce, including women in technical positions such as welding and production.*



Gordon has to visit the doctors and undergo the usual medical examinations.

A scar under the left eye is noted as a distinctive feature. Gordon reports that he often suffers from pain in the lower back; kidney function may be causing him problems.

He takes medicine for this. He appreciates a task in the army that aligns with his work experience.

Furthermore, his file contains the usual details: 5'5" tall; weighed 130 lbs; he has brown hair and brown eyes. He is classified 'A1', fit for all services.

However, it is noted that, given his physical fitness, he might be less suitable for combat roles.

Gordon starts his basic training in Brantford and proceeds to Camp Borden, also in Ontario, in May '43.

He receives a few weeks of leave in July and returns to Camp Borden afterwards. After a relatively short training period, Gordon boards a troop ship that takes him to the United Kingdom (UK).

He arrives there on September 1, '43. After an initial assignment to a reinforcement unit, Gordon is taken on strength by the Royal Regiment of Canada (RRC) in November 1943. In June 1944, he is to be a Lance/Corporal.

The transfer to the battlefield in Western Europe was already imminent. On July 6, 1944, the regiment, with Gordon, lands on Juno Beach in Normandy.

On July 14, during the fighting around the city of Caen, he is wounded. The nature of the injury was apparently serious enough to evacuate him to the UK. During his stay in the UK, Gordon is registered as 'Absent Without Leave' (AWL) many times. After the 7<sup>th</sup> time, he is demoted and a Rifleman again.

Gordon returns to the battlefield, on October 17, 1944, he arrives in Belgium, still assigned to the RRC.

At the end of October, he is taken on strength by Queen's Own Rifles of Canada (QOR).

It is striking in Gordon William Ouderkirk's file that, after his assignment to the QOR, only one entry can be found: Killed in Action April 16, 1945.

Nevertheless, he must have experienced quite a few actions with this unit. The QOR War Diary provides somewhat more information.

In October '44, the regiment sees actions to liberate the port of Antwerp, 'Operation Switchback'.

This was General Eisenhower's order to Field Marshal Montgomery following the partial failure of Operation Market-Garden.

On October 10, 1944, the regiment starts an advance towards Sluiskil in Zeelandic Flanders. In the Southwest Netherlands, the QOR pays a heavy price. Gordon must have participated in the QOR actions in the second half of October 1944.

On November 3, 1944, Westkapelle is liberated. The QOR are allowed a brief rest; they move to Ledeborg, a district of Ghent in Belgium. They stay there until November 8, 1944.

In mid-November 1944, they move to the Netherlands and are stationed in the Groesbeek/Berg en Dal area.

The War Diary reads almost every day: cloudy-cold-foggy-night frost.

The weather conditions were downright bad.

The winter months are often described as relatively quiet; the Canadians guard the so-called river Maas Front on the Dutch side.

Nevertheless, patrols are conducted daily, which often result in skirmishes with the enemy.

The Canadians lost more than 50 men between mid-November 1944 and February 1945 (the start of the Rhineland Offensive).



Properly dressed for the occasion, the Queen's Own Rifles move out on patrol from the Nijmegen salient, January 22, 1945. (B.J. Gloster, National Archives of Canada, PA-114073)



*He is awarded:*

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

His family had the following text placed on his gravestone:

**The Lord gave  
and the Lord hath taken away  
Blessed be the name of the Lord**

*The battles at Wons and Pingjum were the last in which soldiers of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada fell in the Netherlands. It was therefore the explicit wish of the veterans to place their monument in Wons.*

*This Honour Roll bears the names of their comrades who lost their lives from D-Day until the liberation.*



Monument Wons © Wouter Gerbscheid

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); wikipedia, project '44, War Diary Queen's Own Rifles of Canada.