



William Douglas Tasker, known as Douglas or Bud, was born on December 5, 1924, on a farm near Merlin, a village in southwestern Ontario, a few kilometers north of Lake Erie. In March 1945, Douglas wrote that you could fire a cannon through Merlin without hitting anyone.

Douglas's parents, George Robert Tasker (1899–1976) and Clara Arenford Joyce (1904–1996), were both from Merlin. They married in 1920 and first had five sons — Jack, Douglas, Leo, Harold, and Max — and ten years later, a daughter, Georgean.

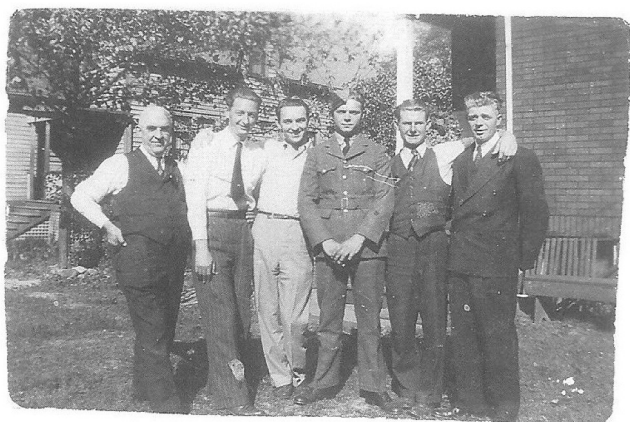
Douglas went to school in Merlin. He found school work "rather difficult." After ninth grade — eight years of Elementary School and one year of High School — he went to work on his father's farm at the age of 16.

Douglas could drive cars and tractors; he also had some experience in riding a neighbour's motorcycle. He spent a lot of time tinkering with and repairing motors. He also enjoyed hunting in the winter.

On June 14, 1944, Douglas volunteered for the Canadian Army in London, Ontario. During his interview, he mentioned that he had worked on his father's farm for three years, but he did not say that, following an argument with his father, he had left home and worked at *Canada Packers* in Windsor. A letter he wrote to his mother on June 15 reveals that he had enlisted in the army without his parents' knowledge. He wrote that he regretted what he had done, but that it was too late now. Apparently, things worked out in the end, because during his leave he visited his parents at their farm in Merlin.

Starting on July 7, Douglas underwent basic training in Chatham, Ontario, just 25 km from Merlin. In August, he applied to join the paratroopers and was deemed fit for service. In September, however, his transfer to Camp Shilo, Manitoba, was "canceled by a local authority" and he was transferred to Camp Ipperwash, Ontario, for standard infantry training. At the end of his training period he was assessed as an "average soldier, very quiet and dependable, willing to learn."

Leo, Douglas's brother, also served in the army, but he remained in Canada. Leo and Douglas were stationed together in Chatham for a time. Later, Leo was stationed in Petawawa, Ontario.



The men of the Tasker family: father, Harold, Max, Douglas, Jack and Leo.

Source: ICB Holten Archives.

After a two-week leave, Douglas left for Camp Debert in Nova Scotia on December 9 in anticipation of his deployment overseas. He embarked from Halifax on December 18 and arrived in England a week later. On February 9, 1945, he left England for Belgium, but he did not see combat immediately, as he was diagnosed with mumps a few days later. He remained at the Canadian hospital in Ghent until March 17 to recover.

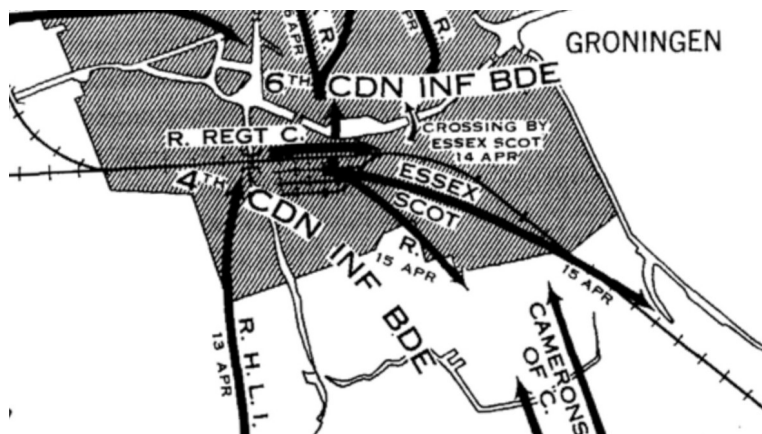
On March 23, Douglas joined the *Essex Scottish Regiment*, part of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. At that time, the Essex Scottish were stationed in Kranenburg near the Reichswald Forest in Germany. The regiment was given a rest there after the heavy fighting during the Rhineland Offensive. Also, the regiment needed to be reinforced.

By the end of March, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division was able to cross the Rhine after a bridgehead had been established on the other side of the river. A rapid advance into the northern Netherlands began.

On April 2, 1945, Douglas wrote a letter to his father from a slit trench looking at "three wild duck about a good gun shot from me." He thanked him for the beautiful wristwatch he had received. That same day, he also wrote a letter to his mother, thanking her as well for the wristwatch. He planned to send the watch back to Canada because he was afraid of losing it or damaging it.

On April 13, 1945, after Assen had been liberated, the 2nd Infantry Division advanced toward Groningen. At the city limits, the lead troops came under fire from *Flak* anti-aircraft guns and machine guns. This marked the beginning of the Battle of Groningen, which would last until April 16.

On April 13, soldiers of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry — the *Rileys* — managed to clear the Paterwoldseweg south of the Parkweg and to capture the Stadspark. They also attempted to capture the strategically important Parkbrug bridge over the Noord-Willemskanaal. That attempt failed twice that day.



Attack on the southern part of Groningen by the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division.

Source: C.P. Stacey, The Victory Campaign (1960).

On April 14, the entire 4th Infantry Brigade was deployed in the southwest of Groningen. The Rileys fought on the north side of the Paterwoldseweg. During the night, the Royal Regiment of Canada managed to cross the Noord-Willemskanaal by boat, thereby opening a second front. By 7 a.m., they had secured control of the Parkbrug.

By late morning, the Essex Scottish were deployed to support the Royals. They were tasked with securing the district across the canal, south of the railroad tracks. In doing so, they engaged in fierce house-to-house fighting. German snipers had entrenched themselves on the top floors of the apartment blocks. Slowly, the Essex Scottish advanced toward Hereweg, the key north-south route into the city center. The German troops faced the danger of being cut off from the city center; they launched a massive counterattack and succeeded in pushing the Canadians back. With strategically placed anti-aircraft guns, they kept the Parkbrug and the Parkweg under fire. Only after tanks had neutralized the German artillery were the Canadians able to advance again and reach their objective for the day.

Although this was not among their objectives for the day, the "A" Company of the Essex Scottish, commanded by Major D.W. McIntyre, turned its attention to the Herebrug. This bridge provided access to the city center. The Germans had not had time to demolish the bridge. A German soldier had attempted to open the bridge, but he had not gotten very far — the bridge deck had been slightly lifted and turned. A platoon attempted to cross the bridge on foot. Two soldiers succeeded, but were shot down by machine-gun fire before they could take cover. One of them was Douglas Tasker.

A few hours later, the Essex Scottish Regiment managed to cross the Herebrug using Kangaroos — tanks without turrets — and overrun the defenses. This bridgehead served as the basis for the 6th Infantry Brigade's attack on the city center. Major McIntyre received a high decoration for his decisive action.

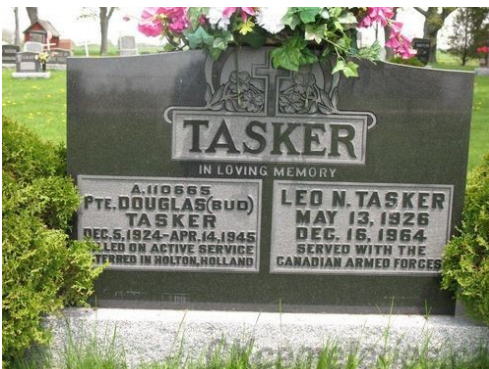


Groningen, April 17, 1945. The pipe band of the Essex Scottish marches across the Herebrug.

*Source: Library and Archives Canada.
Photo: D. Guravich.*

Douglas was buried at the temporary military cemetery in Eelderwolde, on the southwest side of Groningen. In 1946, he was reinterred at the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, where he now rests in grave 05.E.02. The inscription on his headstone, without an emblem, reads "SOME DAY / WE HOPE TO MEET YOU, DEAR / IN A BETTER LAND / NEVER TO PART AGAIN."

A similar inscription appears on his parents' gravestone at Victoria Cemetery in Merlin: "WE HOPE TO MEET IN A BETTER LAND / NEVER TO PART AGAIN." His brother Leo is also buried at Victoria Cemetery, and Douglas is commemorated on Leo's gravestone.



After his death, William Douglas Tasker was awarded the following Canadian military decorations: the *1939–1945 Star*, the *France and Germany Star*, the *War Medal 1939–1945*, and the *Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp*.



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