

## Boy Soldier

### Lance Corporal Kenneth Scott Ferguson (1925-1945)

On February 9, 1941, 15-year-old Kenneth Scott Ferguson made his way to Camp Petawawa, Ontario, and enlisted in the Canadian army.<sup>1</sup>

Although he had been born on August 6, 1925, Ferguson gave the recruiting officer a birth date of April 6, 1922. His claim to be 18 years of age may have seemed more convincing because he had earned his Grade X School Leaving Certificate and had already served six months in the ranks of the Lanark & Renfrew Scottish Militia Regiment. Equally, the recruiter may have just turned a blind eye. Ferguson stood five feet, five and one-half inches tall and weighed 125 pounds, with hazel eyes, and light brown hair. He was assigned Regimental Number C-30677.



*The Ferguson home on South Street, Lanark*

Born at Joe's Lake, Lavant Township, Lanark County, Ferguson was the eighth of 11 children<sup>2</sup> born to David Elmer Ferguson (1871-1954) and his wife Anna Beatrice Wright-Ferguson (1891-1962). At about the time their last child was born in 1931, Anna Ferguson was abandoned by her husband. She moved to Lanark Village where her son Kenneth grew up over the following decade.

Two of Kenneth's brothers had enlisted in 1940, joining the Canadian Forestry Corps [CFC]. Russell served with No.1 Company in Scotland and Cecil Alexander (1921-1999) served with No. 8 Company in Scotland and France.

After leaving school, recruit Kenneth Ferguson had worked for a few months for Lanark area trucker L. M. Paul, but when he presented himself for enlistment, he was unemployed. He hoped the military would train him as a mechanic and chose "*Army Mechanized*"<sup>3</sup> as his preferred posting.

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<sup>1</sup> The official minimum age for enlistment in the Canadian Army in 1940 was 18, but 17-year-olds could enlist with parental consent. The youngest to successfully enlist was 10 years old, the oldest was 80. The average age of the Canadian soldier in WW2 was 26. The youngest Canadian soldier killed in action died in the Battle of Normandy at age 16.

<sup>2</sup> Earl David (1906-1974), Edna Clara (1909-1993), Harrison E. (1912-1990), Iva (1913-1993), Russell J. (1917-1991), Cecil Alexander (1921-1999), Harrison Reginald (1924-1945), Kenneth Scott Ferguson (1925-1945), Inez Irene (1928-1992), Eunice Ilene (1931-2003), Donald Maxwell (1930-1988).

<sup>3</sup> Occupational History Form, April 23, 1941.

On February 15, 1941, Ferguson was assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion (Princess Louise Dragoon Guards), for training at Farnham, and then St. Hyacinthe and Sherbrooke, Quebec. After basic training he completed a motorcycle course and, when his unit embarked on Her Majesty's Troopship *Letitia* at Halifax on June 19, 1941, Trooper Ferguson was a qualified Dispatch Rider in No.1 Company.

Landing in England on July 2<sup>nd</sup> Ferguson's battalion was attached to the 18<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Car Regiment, 1st Canadian Armoured Corps, and quartered at Crookham, Hampshire. From September 1941 through August 1942 Trooper Ferguson was a Motorcycle Orderly with the Signal Troop and, in May 1942, was involved in some sort of accident and spent 12 days in a field hospital.

Then, on August 28, 1942, Ferguson was struck from the active strength of the 4<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion and assigned to the administrative wing. His mother had blown the whistle on his underage status.

Ferguson had already been a soldier for 18 months and, during that time, had served in England for a full year before Anna Ferguson launched a letter-writing campaign to have him returned to Canada. What prompted his mother's late interest in her son's army service is unclear, but it may be that she did not know, or understand, that he had been sent to England a year earlier. If Ferguson had indeed been misleading his mother, according to some accounts the truth was probably revealed when, on leave in London, he unexpectedly bumped into his brothers, Russell and Cecil.



*The Ferguson brothers, LtoR Kenneth, Russell and Cecil, reportedly photographed in London, England, c1942*

Whatever the impetus, on July 31, 1942 Anna Ferguson wrote to the Canadian Minister of Defence, Colonel James Layton Ralston (1881-1948).

*I am writing you to tell you I wish my son, Kenneth, returned at once to Canada. This boy is under seventeen years of age and is overseas with the 4<sup>th</sup> Cdn. Recce. Bn. (P.L.D.G.)<sup>4</sup>. His number is C-30677. I sent his birth certificate to the Army Headquarters but as yet have had no word from them. I did not mind having this boy serving in Canada and still wish him to remain in the army providing he is given duties in Canada. I know you will agree with me that this boy is too young to be over there. I would like this looked after at once. I have two other boys overseas. Please let me know.<sup>5</sup>*

Just four days later the minister's private secretary responded but pointed out that "Upon enlistment your son stated that he was born on April 6, 1922" and was "therefore given training and permitted to go overseas with his unit". The letter went on to explain that,

*Those who proceed overseas and are subsequently found to be under the required military age are, if over seventeen years of age, not returned to Canada, but are employed on less hazardous duties overseas. If you will be good enough to forward a copy of your son's birth certificate, I shall be glad to see that your request is given careful consideration.<sup>6</sup>*

Anna Ferguson was not going to be brushed off with some bureaucratic hair-splitting about her son's current age. She wanted him back in Canada. On August 6, 1942, his seventeenth birthday, she again wrote the Ministry of National Defence.

*This boy is just 17 years of age today, as you will see by this copy of birth certificate which I am including. I wish to have this boy sent back to Canada at once. I just can't let him remain over there as he is too young. I have two other sons over there and if I had other ones old enough I would gladly have them go, but I want my boy back here as soon as he can be sent. I can have no peace of mind until I have this matter taken care of.*

*Would you, I beg, look after this at once and have my boy sent back here. If you wish to keep him in the army here, and he wishes to remain, I am quite willing, as long as he is in Canada where he can get home. I have wrote three letters to Ottawa trying to get in touch with the men to look after this for me. Would it be asking too much to have you let me know that it is being attended to?<sup>7</sup>*

On August 19<sup>th</sup> the Adjutant-General's Office officially notified Canadian Military Headquarters in England that Trooper K. S. Ferguson, C-30677 should be assigned to non-combat duties.

*Attached hereto are photostatic copies of this soldier's record of birth, showing his true date of birth to be 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1925. At the time of attestation, Tpr. Ferguson gave as his date of birth 6<sup>th</sup> April 1922. The soldier's mother has been advised that the necessary steps are being taken to employ her son on less onerous and dangerous duties until such*

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<sup>4</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reconnaissance Battalion, Princess Louise Dragoon Guards.

<sup>5</sup> Letter, July 31, 1942, Anna Ferguson to Colonel James Layton Ralston (1881-1948), Canadian Minister of Defence 1940-1944.

<sup>6</sup> Letter, August 4, 1942, O. J. Waters, Private Secretary to the Minister of National Defence to Anna Ferguson.

<sup>7</sup> Letter, August 6, 1942, Anna Ferguson to Department of National Defence.

time as he reaches his nineteenth birthday. The Officer i/e Records at N.D.H.W. has been notified of this change in age, and the enclosures herewith are for your information and necessary action, please.<sup>8</sup>

On August 28<sup>th</sup> Trooper Ferguson was reassigned to administrative duties and on September 3<sup>rd</sup> his birthdate and age were officially corrected in army personnel records. Keeping her son out of the line of fire, however, was not enough for a worried mother back in Lanark. Anna Ferguson threatened the Department of National Defence with legal action.

*Your letter received in which you stated that it was not your policy to have soldiers returned after they had attained the age of 17. Now Kenneith is underage and went over seas without my permission and I can claim my boy as he is underage and if you still refuse to have him returned to Canada, I will be compelled to take legal steps to have him returned.*

*I do know soldiers are needed here and you could grant my request if you wished to do so. I have two older boys overseas and am willing for them to be there, but Kenneth is just a boy and wishes to come back and I intend to see that he is brought back. He is just a home sick boy. There is plenty of duties he could be given to do here. I hope you will grant a mother's plea and send him back here. I don't wish to be unfair, but I will await an early reply as I know I can claim my son and will take steps to do so at once. Please see to this at once. I expect to hear from you immediately.<sup>9</sup>*

Anna Ferguson's relentless campaign and threats of legal action drew a prompt response dated October 6<sup>th</sup> from Lieutenant Colonel Henri Joseph Marie Romeo DesRosiers (b.1880), Deputy Minister of Defence (Army).

*This will acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1942, again requesting the return to Canada of your son, No. C-30677, Tpr. K. S. Ferguson, due to his being 17 years of age.*

Received..... Checked..... Card..... Observations.....

DUPLICATE  
(To be completed in triplicate. Copy designation to be shown by striking out terms not applicable.)

Unit: *C.M.T. C#30 Lanark* Regimental Number: *C-30677*

**CANADIAN ACTIVE SERVICE FORCE**  
 ATTESTATION PAPER

1. Surname: **FERGUSON**

2. Christian Names: **KENNETH SCOTT**

3. Present address: **LANARK ONTARIO CANADA**

4. Date of birth: **6 APR 1922** *1925* *18 NOV 1942*

5. Place of birth: **CANADA ONTARIO**  
(Country) (County or Province) (Town or Township)

6. Religion (state denomination): **U.C.O.C.**

7. Trade or Calling: **STUDENT**

8. Married, Widower or Single: **SINGLE**

9. Name of next of kin: **MRS. ANNA FERGUSON**

10. Relationship: **MOTHER**

11. Address of next of kin: **LANARK ONTARIO CANADA**

**WSG COMPLETED**

**Service Record Date of Birth Correction**

*Under date of 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1942, you were advised that, at the time of his enlistment which occurred on 9<sup>th</sup> February, 1941, this soldier gave as his date of birth 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1922, indicating that he was, at that time, 18 years 10 months old. It is pointed out that 18 and a half years is the legal age for enlistment into the Canadian Army and the consent of his parents or guardian is not necessary.*

<sup>8</sup> Letter, August 19, 1942, H. F. C. Letson, Major-General, Adjutant-General, to Senior Officer, Canadian Military Headquarters, 2 Cockspur Street, London, England.

<sup>9</sup> Letter, September 23, 1942, Anna Ferguson to Department of National Defence, Ottawa.

*Therefore, this soldier was given training and proceeded overseas with his unit after passing the age of 19 years, as the age he declared on attestation was accepted as correct.*

*As the representation received as to your son's true age were not brought to the attention of this Department until he had passed his seventeenth birthday<sup>10</sup>, it is regretted that no further action can be taken regards his return to Canada. However, you may be assured that Tpr. Ferguson will be employed in a less dangerous capacity until such time as he reaches his nineteenth birthday.<sup>11</sup>*

At this point, Anna Ferguson seems to have struck her colors and surrendered; at least Kenneth Ferguson's army service files contain no further communication on the subject.



*Lance Corporal Kenneth Ferguson (1925-1945)*

an unknown item of equipment and the deduction of three days pay for returning six-and-one-half hours late from leave in January 1943.

Whether, as described by his mother, Trooper Kenneth Ferguson was in fact a "home sick boy" who wished to "come back" may be in question. Considerable evidence suggests otherwise. An evaluation completed by the army in October 1942, as they considered what might be done with their underage charge, describes an enthusiastic, capable and forward-looking soldier.

*Department - good; Appearance - neat; Physical Appearance - good build, youthful; Discipline - eager, enthusiastic; Military Knowledge - average; Map Reading - fair; Type of work desired - aircraft work; Notes - wants to get to Air Force. Suggest training as a driver-operator and employed at #1 CACRU [1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Replacement Unit] until reaching age for field service.<sup>12</sup>*

The only disciplinary actions ever recorded during Ferguson's army service were a fine of £0.7.9 in June 1942 for the "loss by neglect" of

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<sup>10</sup> Not strictly true. Anna Ferguson had launched her letter writing campaign when Kenneth Ferguson was still 16 years of age.

<sup>11</sup> Letter, October 6, 1942, Lieutenant Colonel Henri Joseph Marie Romeo DesRosiers (b.1880), Deputy Minister (Army) to Anna Ferguson.

<sup>12</sup> Soldier Qualification Card, October 27, 1942.



In late 1942 or early 1943 Ferguson made the above unofficial entry in his Pay Book.

There are many reasons a young soldier in 1943 England might be late returning from leave but, at the risk of a speculation too far, young love seems a very likely explanation. While his mother was demanding his release from the army, Ferguson had met a young woman named Ann Richardson from Woking, Surrey, a town only 20 miles southwest of Crookham, Hampshire, where the Canadian Armoured Replacement Unit was quartered. Over the next year that relationship developed to the point that they planned marriage.

By December 1942 Trooper Kenneth Ferguson had been restored to the ranks of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Car Reconnaissance Unit (ACRU) and promoted Lance Corporal. On January 16, 1944 he was awarded the Canada Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp (CVSM) recognizing 60 days service outside of Canada and a month later he applied for a commission in the Canadian Armoured Corps.

In recommending Ferguson to the officer cadet course, his commanding officer Major D. H. Campbell completed an evaluation highly rating his candidacy.

*Leadership - ready to take initiative; Sense of Responsibility - very responsible and dependable, abundant common sense; Alertness - learns quickly, quick at grasping new ideas; Energy and Persistence - active, industrious, persevering; Group Value - polite, conscientious in fulfilling obligations, helpful and considerate of others, generally liked; Appearance - distinctly favourable impression, neat; Speech - clear articulation, expresses ideas clearly; Basic Knowledge of Arms - excellent; Instructional Ability - good; Remarks - keen, hardworking and despite his age, most dependable.*<sup>13</sup>

The officer training application also showed Lance Corporal Ferguson had rated 'very good' on the 'Test of Elementary Training', had qualified as an armoured car driver, completed weapons training and the CMHQ battle course, as well as passing courses in unit assault, mortars and grenades.

Nothing in the record of Ferguson's military service in 1942-1944 suggests a "home sick boy" who wished to "come back" to Canada. He clearly appears to have had other plans; marriage with a possible career as a commissioned army officer.

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<sup>13</sup> Application for Commission in the Canadian Armoured Corps, February 26, 1944.

On May 24, 1944, Lance Corporal Ferguson was sent to the 'Action Selection Center' and, on August 24<sup>th</sup>, two months after the allied landings in Normandy and two days before he turned 19, he crossed the English Channel as a replacement assigned to the 12<sup>th</sup> Manitoba Dragoons, part of the Canadian Cavalry Recce (Reconnaissance) Regiment within the 18<sup>th</sup> Armoured Car Regiment.



Ferguson joined his new unit in France as it reached the River Seine and, serving in a reconnaissance unit, was on the leading edge of the Canadian Army's advance through northern France and Belgium. In the winter of 1944-1945 he was stationed on the frontline near the Dutch rivers and in February 1945 saw action destroying German defences in the Reichswald Forest and the subsequent Rhineland Offensive.

At about the time the 12<sup>th</sup> Manitoba Dragoons reached the Rhien River, Lance Corporal applied for leave so that he might briefly return to England to be married. His request was approved effective April 25, 1945 and a wedding date set for April 27<sup>th</sup>. Presumably the bride-to-be was Ann Richardson whose name and address he had written on the inside cover of his pay book.

The 18<sup>th</sup> Armoured Car Regiment crossed the Rhine on March 31, 1945, and regrouped at the German village of Bienen, with Lance Corporal Kenneth Ferguson's C-Squadron of the 12<sup>th</sup> Manitoba Dragoons concentrated a short distance north around Elten.

On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, Easter Monday, Ferguson was assigned to accompany Lieutenant Maurice Gordon Farr (1922-1990) in conducting a reconnaissance northward, back into the Netherlands. Their orders were to locate the Headquarters of the 17<sup>th</sup> Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars, another Reconnaissance Regiment operating on their left and believed to be somewhere in the vicinity of the Dutch town of Zevenaar.



*Ford Lynx II Scout Car*

Each of the Manitoba Regiment's five reconnaissance troops were equipped with two 15.5-ton Staghound armoured cars and two 4.5-ton Ford 'Lynx II' scout-cars. Farr and Ferguson set off in their Lynx with Farr driving and Ferguson manning its Bren Gun<sup>14</sup> and .30 calibre machine gun.<sup>15</sup>



At Babberich, about halfway along their journey to Zevenaar, they found a railway crossing had been blown up, leaving its control gates blocking the road. The official War Diary of the Manitoba Dragoons for Monday, April 2, 1945, recorded the action that unfolded ...

*... they decided to turn around and bypass the crossing. All of a sudden, a civvy [civilian] opened up with a Panzerfaust and hit the ground by one of the back wheels, damaging it. L/Cpl Ferguson let go with his Bren and Lt Farr, who was driving, rapidly reversed and then L/Cpl Ferguson changed over to the .30 Browning MG mounted on the car. The civvies continued to MG [machine gun] the car and fired three more Panzerfaust. L/Cpl Ferguson was then hit by a SA [soft point] bullet on the back of the head ...*

*The "Civvies" were probably Jerries in civilian clothes. L/Cpl Ferguson died a short time later, our first casualty in operation 'Plunder'<sup>16</sup> and 'Haymaker'<sup>17</sup>. He was to have left for England on leave 25 Apr. and to have been married on 27 Apr.<sup>18</sup>*

Ferguson died just a month before the surrender of Nazi Germany and four months short of his twentieth birthday.

The 'civvies' who attacked Ferguson and Farr<sup>19</sup> were probably a detachment of the Volksstrum, a militia created by Nazi Germany in September 1944 in a desperate effort to defend the homeland in the final days of WW2. The Volksstrum was manned by those too old or too young to serve in the Wehrmacht and by men disabled while fighting in the regular forces. The Volksstrum had no standard issue uniform and many units served in civilian clothes augmented only by sleeve band insignia. The Volksstrum was armed almost exclusively with rifles, pistols and Panzerfaust.

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<sup>14</sup> The Bren gun (Brno-Enfield) was a Czechoslovak designed .303 calibre light machine gun produced by the United Kingdom from the 1930s. Fitted with a bipod for infantry use, it could also be mounted on a tripod or be vehicle-mounted.

<sup>15</sup> American manufactured Browning M1919 .30 caliber vehicle mounted and general service machine gun.

<sup>16</sup> 'Operation Plunder' was the military operation that crossed the Rhine on the night of March 23, 1945.

<sup>17</sup> 'Operation Haymaker' was the northward advance of 2nd Canadian Corps after the crossing of the Rhine.

<sup>18</sup> *War Diary*, Manitoba Dragoons, April 2, 1945.

<sup>19</sup> Four days later, on April 6, 1945, Lieutenant Maurice Gordon Farr, born in Saskatchewan, the son of Maurice Gordon Farr Sr. (1885-1978) and Addie Thomas (1887-1988), won the Military Cross. Leading another patrol of two armoured cars he was attacked and surrounded by a company-strength German force when scouting near the village of Het Loo, on the outskirts of Apeldoorn, Netherlands. According to his citation, under Farr's "skillful direction" his detachment fought their way out, "under heavy small arms, machine gun and sporadic Panzerfaust fire" killing 10 to 15 enemy troops. "He then withdrew to a covering position where he kept the enemy under observation and reported by wireless to his squadron headquarters", calling in infantry support.



*Volksstrum Troops armed with Panzerfaust*

The Panzerfaust ('tank fist' or 'armor fist') was a single-shot man-portable anti-tank weapon developed by Nazi-Germany during WW2. It was the first single-use light anti-tank weapon based on a pre-loaded disposable launch tube. Within its limited range of about 30–60 meters it was a highly effective against light armour.

The 'Field Service Death Report', prepared by Regimental Chaplain Captain

Rev. John Livingston Duncan (1912-1970) on April 11<sup>th</sup>, included an inventory of the personal effects taken from the body of Lance Corporal Ferguson; a "red 'I' [identity] disc<sup>20</sup>, wallet, pipe, pipe cleaner, broken fountain pen, diary, some photos, letters and a gold signet ring". Captain Duncan's report incorrectly stated that Ferguson had been killed in Germany -- he had, in fact, died a few miles across the frontier in the Netherlands.

Despite all her efforts, Anna Ferguson would never see her son returned to Canada. Instead, she received a letter dated April 14, 1945.

*It is with deep regret that I learned of the death of your son, C-30677, Lance Corporal Kenneth Scott Ferguson, who gave his life in the service of his country in the Western European Theatre of War on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of April, 1945. From official information we have received, your son died as the result of wounds received in action against the enemy. You may be assured that any additional information received will be communicated to you without delay. The Minister of National Defence and the members of the Army Council have asked me to express to you and your family their sincere sympathy in your bereavement. We pay tribute to the sacrifice he so bravely made.<sup>21</sup>*

At first, Lance Corporal Kenneth Ferguson was buried at Bienen, Germany, where his unit happened to be headquartered that day. However, General Harry D. G. Crerar (1888-1865), commander of the First Canadian Army during World War II, did not want his soldiers to lie in German soil. In July 1946 Ferguson was reburied in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, near Nijmegen, Holland<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> The round disc was the equivalent of an American soldier's 'dog tag'. Canadian soldiers wore two, one reddish and the other one greenish in colour. The string holding them was tied so that the red disc could be cut off in the event of the soldier being killed, the green one remained with the body.

<sup>21</sup> Letter, April 14, 1945, Major-General, Adjutant-General, Alfred Ernest Walford (1896-1990) to Anna Ferguson.

<sup>22</sup> Grave-3, row-G, plot-17. One of 2,610 graves.

In addition to the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp (CVSM) received in 1944, Lance Corporal Kenneth Ferguson was the posthumous recipient of the 1939-1945 Star, the France & Germany Star, the War Medal 1939-1945, and the Defence Medal.



Ferguson had been sending his mother a \$20 per month stipend from his pay. In August 1945 the army sent her the balance of his pay and allowances owing, in the amount of \$355.77. She would later receive a War Service Gratuity of \$903.77.

Her worst fears having been realized, Anna Ferguson memorialized her son with a stained-glass window in St. Andrew's United Church, Lanark. His name is also included on the plaque at Clyde Memorial Park that honors Lanark's fallen of WW1 and WW2.



*Ferguson Memorial Bridge, Zevenaar, Netherlands*

In the Netherlands, when a bridge was constructed over the Betuweline (a new double-track railroad between Rotterdam and Germany), replacing the level crossing where Lance Corporal Kenneth Scott Ferguson died, the municipality of Zevenaar named it 'Fergusonbrug' (Ferguson Bridge) in his honor. The official dedication ceremony on April 2, 2004, the 59<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ferguson's death, was conducted by Zevenaar Mayor Jan de Ruiter (b.1952) and Canadian Ambassador to the Netherlands Serge April (b.1943) and was attended by Ferguson's sister Eunice (1931-2003) and several of his nephews.<sup>23</sup> The memorial plaque mounted at the bridge reads.

Kenneth Scott Ferguson C-30677  
Lance Corporal of the XII Manitoba Dragoons, R.C.A.C.  
Died on 2 April 1945 near the former crossing east of this bridge  
during the liberation of Zevenaar  
To honor him, this bridge will be named  
Ferguson Bridge  
From 2 April 2004

- *Ron W. Shaw (2025)*

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<sup>23</sup> The sons and grandsons of his brother Cecil.