

Cst. Bondurant G.E.



BONDURANT, GORDON E. - CST. Regimental No. 12965
January 8, 1944 - Ortona, Italy Age 35

Second World War - The Italian Campaign

The members of a provost company are basically military policemen and, as such, are responsible for maintaining law and order. Much of their work is in traffic control. However, their participation in the Italian campaign illustrates the varied and hazardous duties they were expected to perform.

In June of 1943, when the Allied armies sailed from the Clyde estuary in Scotland for the invasion of Sicily, the first responsibility for the provost company was to load the troops on the ship. This had to be done according to a meticulously organized plan. The troops would assault the beaches in predetermined waves and they had to be loaded in a manner that would best accommodate the order of attack.

When the army arrived at Sicily, the provost company had to direct the soldiers ashore and marshal the equipment, the ammunition and the stores into specified sectors. Once the beachhead was established, the provost company was expected to assist the army's inland advance by keeping the traffic moving - and in the right direction. Once a town or a village was taken, the provost company would protect that area against looting and other forms of lawlessness. When Axis prisoners were captured, the provost company was expected to build detention cages for the prisoners and to supervise guarding them.

No. 1 Provost Co. (RCMP) was a unit of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division which fought with the famed British Eighth Army under General Bernard Montgomery. In the Italian campaign, No. 1 Provost Co. (RCMP) were a tight little group of 79 men, proud to work hand-in-glove with such a formidable fighting machine. As the Allied armies raced across Sicily and fought its way up the boot of Italy, No. 1 Provost Co. directed traffic, kept the roads sign-posted and free of obstructing civilian traffic, and pointed out the best route for the trucks and tanks to follow. This could be perilous work for the provost company "pointsmen" because it meant they were constantly thrust into the vanguard of the advance where enemy shelling and mortar fire were the heaviest.

The Provost Company suffered several casualties while the Allied armies battled their way north through Italy. They not only lost men to shelling, but to fatigue, jaundice and malaria. There were, however, no casualties to any RCMP in the Provost Corps until the Allies crossed the Appennine Mountains and advanced north along the Adriatic coast. It was heavy going here in the mud, snow and rain of the Italian winter. As the army fought its way over the Moro River towards Ortona, Provost details were daily under shell fire and occasionally subjected to mortar and small-arms fire. At Ortona, Canadian troops were engaged in a week of ferocious house-to-house street fighting. On Tuesday, December 28, the day Ortona was finally captured, L/Cpl. Gordon Bondurant was hit by bomb fragments

and shells from an enemy plane at a bridge outside the town. He died of these wounds in hospital on January 8, 1944.

That same December 28, Sgt. Terry Watts and L/Cpl. Teddy Cameron were killed at their posts in Ortona by shell fire. L/Cpl. Dave Moon was also grievously wounded in the same shelling and died shortly after.

A letter from one of their Provost mates, RCMP Cst. F. N. Brien, tells of their deaths:

"... New Years eve was rather clouded with memories, as Terry Watts and section got caught in a nasty do. In which Terry, Teddy Cameron and Dave Moon were killed and Rex Rance wounded by shellfire. The same day Bondurant and a new lad Bugonas were unlucky enough to have a bomb land close. Bondurant was seriously wounded but I believe by now has been taken off the danger list. Sure hurt four of the 39'ers. In one day. If you see Ted's brother in law tell him, having picture taken of the grave and will send them to Ted's mother and sister..."

The burial service for Sgt. Watts and L/Cpl. Cameron was held December 29, the day after their deaths, at San Leonardo. Shortly after, L/Cpl. Moon was buried by his comrades at San Vito. At the end of the war, the remains of these three men and Cpl. Bondurant were interred in the Moro River Canadian War Cemetery near San Donato, outside Ortona. The cemetery is on the high ground near the coast road overlooking the Adriatic Sea. Of the 1,615 graves there, an overwhelming 1,374 of them were Canadian.

Gordon Bondurant was born in Olds, Alberta, the son of a farmer. His family moved east to Ontario where Gordon graduated from St. Catherines Collegiate and went on to become an office manager in a mining firm. He joined the RCMP in 1937 and served in Lethbridge and at Waterton Lakes National Park in southern Alberta. He was one of the first RCMP members to volunteer for the Provost Corps and joined them in November 1939. L/Cpl. Bondurant was a single man, survived by his widowed mother in Toronto.