

Lieutenant William Gamblin Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders

Lieutenant William Gamblin was born in Codys, New Brunswick, in 1922. His father was a returning Great War veteran who would later go on to become Lieutenant-Colonel of the 8th Hussars Regiment. William was 13 years old when he first marched with his father's regiment during the Silver Jubilee marking George the Fifth's twenty-five years as King of England. During this time he was also placed on guard duty on Dock Street in Saint John. He received a hat and tunic of the 8th Hussars cavalry and riding breeches. Comically, because he was only thirteen at the time, he was too small for the breeches.



William (Bill) Gamblin was from a military family. His father Harold was Lieutenant-Colonel of the 8th Hussars. His father advised him to steer clear of the 8th Hussars because he was concerned about the perception of favouritism.

Photo courtesy of the Gamblin family

At the age of fourteen, he could enlist, and in 1939 William Gamblin joined the militia. A year later his father was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and received his primary orders to recruit a regiment. During January of 1941, William fell terribly ill and was in a poor state both mentally and physically. Because of this, his father advised him to avoid the recruiting stations for at least a year as they would reject him and place these health issues on record if he attempted to enlist again. With this in mind, William travelled to Saint John and found employment on May 15, 1941, at the Royal Bank. He was later transferred to Harvey, in York County, during late October. In the month of June, 1942, he asked for leave to join the army.

On August 2, 1942, William Gamblin enlisted and joined the Royal Canadian Artillery. This decision was heavily influenced by his father who would not have his own son in his regiment for fear of the perception of favouritism. He was sent to Petawawa where he became a member of the 120th Field Battery of the 8th Division. William was briefly sent to Val Cartier for further training but was promptly sent back to Petawawa for Officer's training. Upon completion of his training he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. From there Lieutenant Gamblin continued his ongoing training regime through a transfer to a camp in Tracadie where he received no leaves. Directly following that, he was sent to Debert, Nova Scotia, on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Getting an opportunity to ride a motorcycle, especially a Harley-Davidson, was always treasured and treated as a great privilege by William, who considered them to be absolutely beautiful machines.

Lieutenant William Gamblin was chosen for overseas duty in a draft that took place in December of 1943. Seventeen days before his departure, he married Edna Gallupe. On December 21, 1943, Lieutenant Gamblin landed in England. Upon his arrival he was transferred to an anti-tank division, which he despised. He went from handling 25 pound guns to 6 pounders, which he describes as being nothing more than "pea-shooters". However, over the course of time he was allowed the use of bigger guns such as 12 pounders, 17 pounders (which he describes as being merciless), and 40mm cannons.

During his period of time in Styning, England, Lieutenant Gamblin was transferred to the infantry; it is here that he experienced his most valued memories of the war. Immediately after transfer he received six weeks of battle drill school, and then a further two weeks of infantry tactics. He did not enjoy this process; however, there were a few perks that went with it, such as twenty percent extra rations, and on Saturdays they could go to the Quartermaster Headquarters, sign out a 9mm Browning and a box of shells. He would then proceed to the pistol range. He had never before experienced the privilege of doing something such as this, especially at such a critical time in the war effort when this would have been considered a misallocation of ammunition.

Lieutenant Gamblin landed in Turinchoot, Belgium, near the Dutch border, where he spent five days. It is here that he received his first introduction to the Front. One day after supper he was out taking a walk when he heard a horrendous explosion. He later found out that two men had found a Teller mine and proceeded to dismantle it. Unfortunately, the Germans had wired a second directly underneath it that went off when they pulled the first one out. A detail was sent out with baskets to pick up whatever pieces they could find.

Early in 1945, a requisition for officers was sent down. All of the officers present lined up. There were three called out for the Carleton and York Regiment. It was then that Lieutenant Gamblin heard a man behind him curse; he turned around and asked him what was wrong. He then noticed that the fellow officer had Carleton and York badges as well as a wound stripe, so the two of them discreetly switched places. Lieutenant Gamblin would have cheerfully gone with the Carleton and York, but was instead assigned to the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders. On April 8, 1945, Lieutenant Gamblin officially joined that regiment. The SD and G Highlanders were also nicknamed the water-rats due to their success in amphibious assaults. William Gamblin fondly remembered seeing a sign on his way to join the regiment that read "Keep it rolling transport men. The water-rats have done it again." He received a rather harsh welcome to the regiment. The regiment was engaged in a serious battle for control of a small village. During this battle the 13th platoon was reduced to practically nothing in a very short period of time.

On a separate occasion, he arrived in Lseuwarden with his platoon where they stayed for 3 days in the house of a Nazi doctor. It is here that they found a rare and excellent treat, a definite change from field rations: five milk cans full of sugar. Later in the month, on April 26, his platoon received the order to cross the Emms River and proceed to Lyre, Germany.

The platoon crossed the river in two "folding" boats. During the crossing, they were under heavy mortar fire and Lieutenant Gamblin's boat took a direct hit and half the platoon was lost. When his boat landed on shore, Lieutenant Gamblin crawled up the dyke to take a look around and spotted two Germans taking cover in a foxhole. He fired a quick burst at them from his Sten gun and went back down to the shore to gather his remaining dozen or so troops. While surveying the scene from his belly, he took a bullet through his right thigh. The bullet partially severed his sciatic nerve. Lieutenant Gamblin spent thirty-six days in a British field hospital. He was transferred, at his own request, to a Canadian hospital (in

Britain) where he remained for a further 37 days. Lieutenant Gamblin was injured three days before the Germans surrendered in Italy, eight days before they surrendered in Germany.

While in hospital, Lieutenant Gamblin received his first battle-dress and pair of boots that were a proper fit for him. One day, a man came along and took his boots. Lieutenant Gamblin asked why he was taking them and the reply was that he was going to sell them for personal profit. In response to that, Lieutenant Gamblin drew his service revolver from his pocket and threatened the young man to return his boots or the situation might get out of hand. That pair of boots is still in his family's possession.

In the federal elections of June 1945, Lieutenant Gamblin voted for his first time in a polling station situated in an old burnt out German bunker. As a final adventure, Lieutenant Gamblin hitchhiked to Brussels. He describes his war-time experience as "One great adventure. What will the next turn in the road bring?" William remained connected to the military for many years. Upon his discharge from military service, he went into business in Sussex where he owned and managed a dry goods store, and, subsequently, a music store. He was well known for the kindness he showed many young people, providing them with opportunities to purchase instruments for low payments, in the hope of encouraging their love for music.

When we arrived to interview William Gamblin for the Memoria Project, he met us at the door in his battle dress. A proud ex-soldier and a gentle and intelligent man, Lieutenant Gamblin passed away during the writing of this book.

He is the uncle of HHS teacher Peter Guravich.



In 2005, William Gamblin returned to Europe for the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Holland. He took part in a ceremony that involved naming eleven streets after the eleven men that were lost crossing the Emms River. It was also on this trip that he encountered an elderly women standing on the side of the road. He had seen her once before upon his arrival in 1945 after the liberation of the town. William Gamblin lived in the very home in which he and his father were born and raised, in Codys, New Brunswick. Sadly, Bill Gamblin passed away while we were in the final stages of writing this book. It was evident that when we spoke with him, he was very supportive of our project. The Memoria Team is so appreciative of his contribution. We will never forget that, and we will always remember him.