

GUNNER BOHDAN HAWRYLUK

Regimental # M605120

Regimental # M67442



Bohdan, was born on the family homestead near Bezanson Alberta on May 17, 1920 to Michael and Ksenia Hawryluk. Bohdan's parents had immigrated to Manitoba, with their parents in 1899 (Michael) and 1903 (Ksenia). Michael and Ksenia were married in 1905 in Manitoba. In 1917 the Hawryluk family travelled by train to Clairmont and by wagon to their homestead near Bezanson. Ksenia's sisters and their families also came at this time: Nick & Anna Kochalyk and Steve & Mary Sarmaga. The sisters' parents, Martin and Theodora Boyartchuk, followed in the fall. All four families homesteaded within a mile of each other.

Bohdan, his siblings and cousins attended the nearby Lindsay School, where they learned to speak and read

English, integrating into the English speaking community, forming life long friendships, of which many have carried on into the fifth and sixth generations.

Life was difficult for all the homesteaders in the area and the economic conditions of the thirties only added to peoples' hardships. People got on the best they could by growing their own food, bartering with neighbours and making their own entertainment with dances, music, ball games etc. but most people did not go out and pursue further education or a career. Bohdan was always a huge supporter of Public Education and ahead of his time in supporting further education for women. He always said that it was even more important for a woman to be educated than a man. A man could always get a job as a labourer and support his family but unless a woman had an education she wouldn't be able to make enough money to support her family in the same way. When I asked him why he hadn't furthered his own education he said, "It was a different time. There was no money and no job opportunities other than on the farm with Dad." Thus when WWII came along it was viewed with excitement by many of the young men, Bohdan included. Here was a chance to see the world, earn some money and have an adventure. In later years, when Bohdan talked about his Army experience, the part that he really enjoyed was travelling across Canada on the train, seeing new cities, meeting new people and making new friends.

Private Bohdan Hawryluk

Bohdan joined a Reserve Unit of the Canadian Army in Grande Prairie Alberta on December 5, 1941 at the age of 22. Here he underwent thirty-four days of Basic Training as a Private, Reg#M605120. Upon completion of Basic Training on January 8, 1942, Bohdan enlisted in the Canadian Army the next day and was then assigned the Regimental Number M67442. From Grande Prairie Bohdan was sent to Edmonton for a month and a half and then “shipped out” to Sussex NB in March. Bohdan was stationed in Sussex and Fredericton and then sent back to Calgary in July where he was given a Medical Discharge on September 9, 1942.

Bohdan did not agree with the findings of the Army Doctors who found him “Medically Unfit for Service Overseas.” He always maintained that the shadow, which showed up on the x-rays of his lungs, was from a bad bout of pleurisy that hospitalized him for two weeks in October of 1940, followed by influenza that had him ill for most of the winter, and not recovering until March of 1941. In addition, Bohdan had been exposed to an Aunt who died from TB within that time frame. The Army Doctors wanted to do surgery to investigate the thickening in the pleural sac but Bohdan said no as he had been told by “Old Doc O’Brien” that there was scar tissue on his lungs from the pleurisy.

Bohdan expressed disappointment in not being able to go “Overseas “ but when he told this story to me, as a little girl, I always experienced a feeling of overwhelming relief that he had been spared this horror. When my Dad talked with his friends who had been in the war, one of the stories that stood out in my mind was about the airplanes flying overhead and the scream of the bombs as they dropped. For years I would be terrified whenever a plane flew over our house thinking we were going to be bombed. .

After Bohdan returned to Bezanson he continued to farm with his Dad eventually taking over when his parents retired to Grande Prairie in the mid fifties. Bohdan married Ellen Ford in July of 1948 and together they raised their family of five on the family farm. Ellen died in 1975 and Bohdan continued to live on the family farm until his death in 1999.

To his family Bohdan was a very special, kind, gentle, man. His motto was “Live and Let Live” as long as you aren’t interfering or hurting anyone. He believed in helping people and treating people with kindness and respect whether you were 2 years old or 102, irrespective of color, race or religion. He didn’t preach but taught by example and good humour. Bohdan was also active within the Bezanson Community over the years being involved with the Bezanson Stampede, Curling Rink, Rural Electrification and West Smoky Legion.

Written by Maxine (Hawryluk) Robertson (daughter)

Reference

Service File

