

A Soldiers Voice - Arnhem 80

Sgt. Chesson



Full name: Sergeant Frank Herbert Chesson

Nickname: Cranky Frankie

Date of Birth: December 1914

Nationality: English

Date of Death: 19 September 1944

Place of Birth: Kent

Place of Death: Arnhem, Netherlands

Military units: Royal East Kent Regiment, Army Air Corps- 10th parachute battalion

Service number: 6285440

Rank: Sergeant

Frank was a boy soldier, joining the army straight from school and enlisting into the East Kent Regiment (The buffs). He was serving in the Middle East, supporting the Palestine police force when he volunteered for the airborne forces.

In February 1943 he completed parachute course K22 at RAF Ramat David, in Palestine. He successfully completed two jumps on February 18th, one jump on February 19th and one in the day and one at night on the final day, February 20th. The original course report for K22 states: 139 students enrolled, 113 passed the course, 2 injured during ground training, 1 fatality during ground training, 6 sick, 5 refused to jump and 6 were absent. So after graduating this course Frank was posted to 4 platoon, A company for the 10th parachute battalion, where he was appointed as a section commander.

Chesson was also posted with his best friend Sergeant Frank Bennett and the 2 Frank's were affectionately known as Cranky Frankie and Barmy Bennett.

However, during 'Operation Market-Garden' as they jumped onto the drop zone at Ginkel Heath on Monday 18th September 1944, under heavy enemy fire, in a valiant attempt to take

out a Spandau machine gun firing from the cover of a wooden cart, Sgt. Bennett was cut down and instantly killed along with their platoon commander, Lieutenant Patrick Mackey, leaving the platoon under strength right from the start.

The following day, Sergeant Chesson, along with 8 comrades was killed near the pumping station, at the junction of the Maasbergseweg and the Amsterdamseweg. The infamous picture of Chesson and his company laying slain on the path has been widely featured over the years, including on a German propaganda leaflet - *Das Searchlight* - and in a book written from a German perspective called "*It never snows in September*". Although the exact circumstances of their death are not known, the soldiers appear to have been ambushed as they passed the mile marker. The impact of 20mm cannon fire could clearly be seen upon the mile marker and probably happened during the same attack. It has also been questioned whether these men were victims of murder after being captured by enemy forces they had mistaken for Polish allies. Private Fennah reported a clash with SS forces on 19th September 1944, which first led to a group of soldiers being taken prisoner and then a number of them who were now unarmed, being massacred. Could this have been Chesson and his men? Conclusive evidence has not been found despite input from various informed sources, so how Chesson ultimately died remains a mystery.



Chesson and his comrades were initially buried beside the mile marker (see photos) before later being moved to plots beside each other at Oosterbeek War Cemetery.

Sergeant Chesson now lies at rest in the Oosterbeek CWGC Cemetery in plot 6 C18. (see photo)



In memory of Sgt. Chesson, Sgt. Bennett and their 10th Para comrades I have written this poem. Thank you for your service Cranky Frankie and Barmy Bennett 😊

AS We parachute down like a kite,
I Suddenly see enemies approaching
to fight.

AS my platoon take cover behind
the bank,

I will always remember my best friend
Frank.

Brave or stupid, im not sure,
Barney Bennett charges straight
into war.

AS I witness Frank shot dead,
Continuing this doomed battle
fills me with dread.

The next day we must move
forward,

AS Section commander I have
to act assured.

AS I hear a gunshot I shake
in fear,

the gunfire seems extremely near.
I'm hit and now I'm on the ground,
There are bullets flying all
around.

I feel pain all over my skin,
The air around me is cold
and thin.

I know that my life is about
to end.

At last I'm off to heaven to
see my friend.

By Morgan Ingkam-Fenton

