

Atkinson, Robert Weldon

Corporal

G68

8th Princess Louise's Hussars

**5th Canadian Armoured
Regiment**



Personal Information: Robert Weldon Atkinson was born on May 25, 1920 in West Sackville, N.B. He was 5 feet 9 inches and weighed 150 pounds. He had light hair and blue eyes. He was the second youngest of six children born to Fred Atkinson and Lalia Atkinson. Robert was a Baptist. He was unmarried and working as a farm labourer but no longer wished to do so. He decided to enlist with the dream of becoming a hydro lineman after serving his country. He enlisted with the 4th Canadian Motorcycle Regiment (later known as the 8th Hussars) on the 17th of July 1940, in Sussex, N.B. He started out as a trooper. He received training at Camps Borden and Debert.

Military Movements: Robert was sent overseas to England on October 10th, 1941 on the SS Monarch along with hundreds of other Hussars and representation from various other regiments. The weather was clear and warm. The sea was calm and beautiful. This created a perfect day, causing the men to forget their first fears. They went about getting used to the life aboard a troop ship, which included bingo games, cards, amateur night, and sleep.

But on the 11th and 12th, the sea was no longer calm. It tossed and heaved and became extremely vicious causing a wet, wretched night. There was no joking and laughing, or playing cards, only the sight of people being sick. The following morning everything was back to normal.

At 6:30 am October 16, 1941 the Hussars had their first sight of Liverpool, England. It was another two days before the 8th Hussars could go ashore, as the sea was too rough for disembarkation. As they proceeded into the harbour they could tell things had been rough. They could see the remnants of six ships wrecked by the German blitz. There seemed to be sunken ships all the way in. On shore they could see the beat-up wrecks of houses and stores and other buildings. The whole place looked like it had been through a lot, maybe too much, but it was busy and full of life and fascinating for them to watch. They disembarked on October 20, 1941.

While in England they did lots of training. On June 19th, 1942, Robert participated in one of the great successes in the unit's preparation the "Big Shoot". Robert's squadron (C) went off to Caesar's camp in the Aldershot area to practice firing the Bren-Gun from their tanks, an exercise enlivened by a fire the tracers started on the field. It took the help of reinforcements to control a blaze that kept going till dark. Under this sort of pace, fitters and mechanics of all squadrons were kept busy well into the night to keep the tanks running and ready. This sort of preparation went on right up to July 10, 1942. Exercises such as this undoubtedly prepared them for the eventual battles the Hussars would fight.

Robert was obviously well thought of as he was promoted often. On November 1, 1942 Robert was appointed Acting Corporal. Then he was confirmed Corporal on February 1, 1943. His position changed over the years, between Acting Corporal, Lance Corporal, and Corporal.

At 1:30pm on November 13th, 1943 the order came that led everyone to board the train, and they traveled through the darkness over England and by morning they found themselves back in the tattered harbour where they had come ashore just over two years ago, back in Liverpool.

On the 14th, Robert left England and disembarked in Italy on November 27, 1943. In Italy, the 8th Hussars contributed greatly to the advance through the Liri Valley, the breaking of the Gothic Line and the capture of Coriano Ridge. Robert Atkinson and the Hussars departed Italy on February 21, 1945 and disembarked in France two days later. From here they proceeded north and were to play a major role in the liberation of Holland which had been under Nazi rule for five years. The Dutch were thrilled to see them. In April of 1945, Robert enjoyed a nine day leave to England. Upon his return he would continue to help with the liberation.

The Final Days: On May 4th, 1945 in Holland, the weather was unpredictable with heavy showers throughout the day. At 10:30 pm that night they received the long awaited message, "Cancel all offensive operations, cease fire at 8:00 am on May 5th, 1945." The Dutch were ecstatic as were their liberators. Unfortunately on May 5th, 1945, Robert Atkinson passed away as a result of Methyl Alcohol Poisoning. There was a mixture of rain and sunshine on this day with a slightly warm breeze outside. Celebrations were taking place as rumours started to spread of a possible surrender from Germany which meant that the allied forces would finally gain victory after six long years of war.

The squadrons were still continuing with the maintenance as ordered to do that day. During the day rumours broke forth once more and by evening the rumour had been confirmed. The joyous news that had been heard was that on May 8th, 1945 Europe would have victory. The regiment celebrated.

Victory in Europe Day was a beautiful day with the feeling of summer in the air, the temperature continuously rising. The celebrations began on a minor scale at 11:15 am and continued moderately throughout the day. During the afternoon, the regiment gathered spontaneously in small groups to hear the prime minister of Great Britain proclaim that victory had been won in Europe. The entire day was a holiday for all ranks. It is certain that the Hussars took time to reflect on their losses and certainly the loss of Robert Atkinson on the day that the cease fire was declared.

Lest We Forget: Robert Atkinson is buried at Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands, just outside of the city Nijmegen, grave Reference **II. A. 5.**

Corporal Robert Atkinson was 25 years old when he died. His mother was the beneficiary of his \$1000.00 life insurance policy. This would be little consolation for the loss of her son.

Video courtesy of Belleisle Regional Highschool:

http://youtu.be/N6IATu_hTbQ?list=UUOgnx5r2YVkmivgsdDXI-pg

Biography courtesy of the Lest We Forget initiative of Belleisle Regional High School located in Springfield, N.B.



Biography made available for Faces To Graves, with courtesy of Stephen Wilson, Belleisle Regional High School.

Photo Robert Atkinson: Tom McLaughlan, 8th Hussars Museum.

Bibliography

How, Douglas. The 8th Hussars: A History of the Regiment. (Sussex, N.B: Maritime Publishing, 1964).

Archival Reference

Military service files of Corporal Robert Weldon Atkinson obtained from Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario.

War Diary- May 4th, 1945- May 5th, 1945 and May 10th, 1945. Provided by the 8th Hussars Museum located in Sussex, N.B

Internet Sites

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission: Debt of Honour Register
<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2662570/ATKINSON,%20ROBERT%20WELDON>
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial-Veterans Affairs Canada:
<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/collections/virtualmem/Detail/2662570>

- 8th Canadian Hussars
http://www.army.forces.gc.ca/37cbg_hq/unites/8ch-eng.asp



Robert Atkinson is buried at Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery. Photo from the collection of the 8th Hussars Military Museum located in Sussex, NB.