

Abbl, Ernest Edward
Private
The Calgary Highlanders
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps
K – 1463



Ernest Edward Abbl was born on April 20, 1925 in Brooks, Alberta. He was the eldest son of American George Edward Abbl and Canadian Rachel Lewis. He had one brother, Albert, and one sister, Eleanor. Ernest's parents got married on July 18, 1924 in Calgary, Alberta. After their marriage, they lived and worked on a farm in Brooks, where Ernest was born. When he was six months old, the family moved to a place in Idaho, U.S.A.. They stayed there for four years and then moved to a place in Oregon, U.S.A.. When Ernest was fifteen years old, the family immigrated again to Canada and they lived on a farm in Prince George, B.C.. The family was Roman Catholic.

The surname Abbl was a corruption of the surname Appel. Ernest's grandfather, Johannes Appel, immigrated to the United States in 1873 from Tattenitz, Austria, present-day Tatenice in the Czech Republic. Johannes married Johanna Marschalek in 1878 and after many hardships they eventually settled in Minnesota. There Johannes learned the English language and became a clerk at a school. He also changed his name to John Abble.



John and Anna Abbl

Ernest went to school in Prince George. He did not enjoy it much. He left education after Grade 7 at the age of fifteen. He preferred to be on the farm with his father. He helped harvesting and threshing the grain. He also learned to drive a truck at an early age. During the winter months he went into the forest with his own truck to collect loads of wood. In the summer months he used his truck to transport gravel and tar.

On December 7, 1943, Ernest enlisted in Vancouver, B.C., for active duty in the Canadian Army.

ITEMS 17, 18 AND 19 WILL NOT BE COMPLETED UNLESS A MAN ENLISTS FOR GENERAL SERVICE ANYWHERE.

17. **DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY MAN ON ATTESTATION**

I, Ernest Edward ABBL, hereby engage to serve in any Active Formation or Unit of the Canadian Army so long as an emergency, i.e., war, invasion, riot or insurrection, real or apprehended, exists, and for the period of demobilization after said emergency ceases to exist, and in any event for a period of not less than one year, provided His Majesty should so require my services.

Date DEC 7 1943 E. Abbl
(Signature of Recruit)

18. **OATH TO BE TAKEN BY MAN ON ATTESTATION**

I, Ernest Edward ABBL, do sincerely promise and swear (or solemnly declare) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty.

Witness [Signature] Col E. Abbl
(Name) (Rank) (Signature of Recruit)

He was eighteen years old and single then. After his registration he was medically examined and this showed that he was a healthy young man. He had blond hair and blue eyes, he was 5ft7 tall and weighed 125lb. There was a large scar on his right hand. In the summer he suffered from hay fever. And although he had a dragging right foot due to a previous accident, he was considered fit enough to enlist.

After Ernest had spent the first month after his enlistment at the District Depot in Vancouver, he was transferred to Camp Camrose for basic infantry training on December 31. In his record he was described as a man with the right attitude and he seemed to adapt well in the military. There too he preferred to be practical rather than sitting at school desks for theory lessons. He continued this training in the infantry training centre A-16 in Calgary, Alberta, from the end of February 1944. There he was considered fit to go overseas. After two months, Ernest was transferred to Camp Windsor, Nova Scotia.

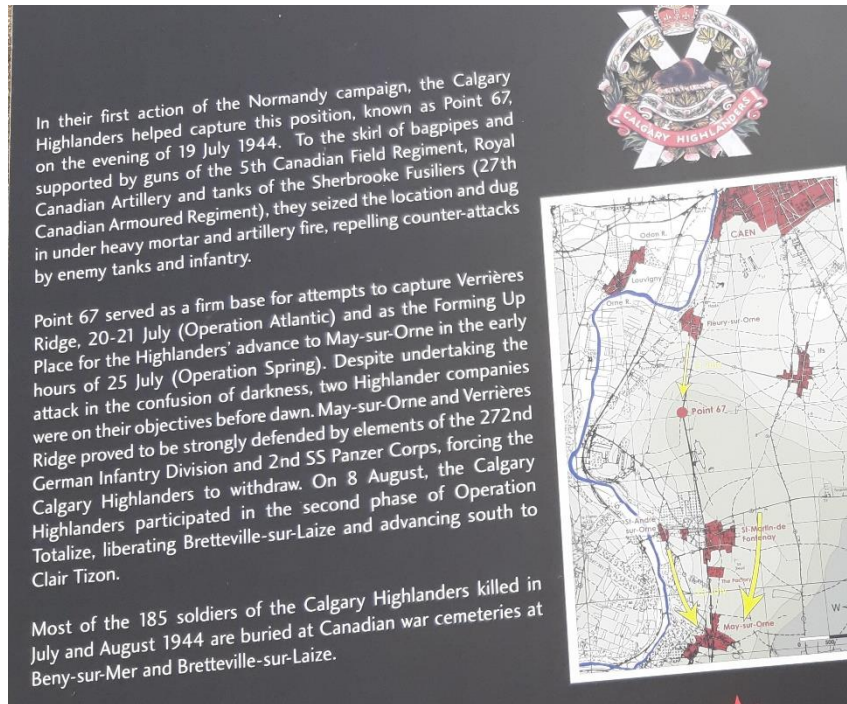
Ernest departed from Windsor on 3 June 1944. More than a week later he arrived in the United Kingdom and at the end of June he was assigned to the Calgary Highlanders regiment. More than a month later he made the crossing to France.

The Calgary Highlanders, part of the 2nd Division, were at that moment involved in Operation Atlantic and en route to La Haute and Fleury-sur-Orne in Normandy, France. Ernest was at the front from day one.

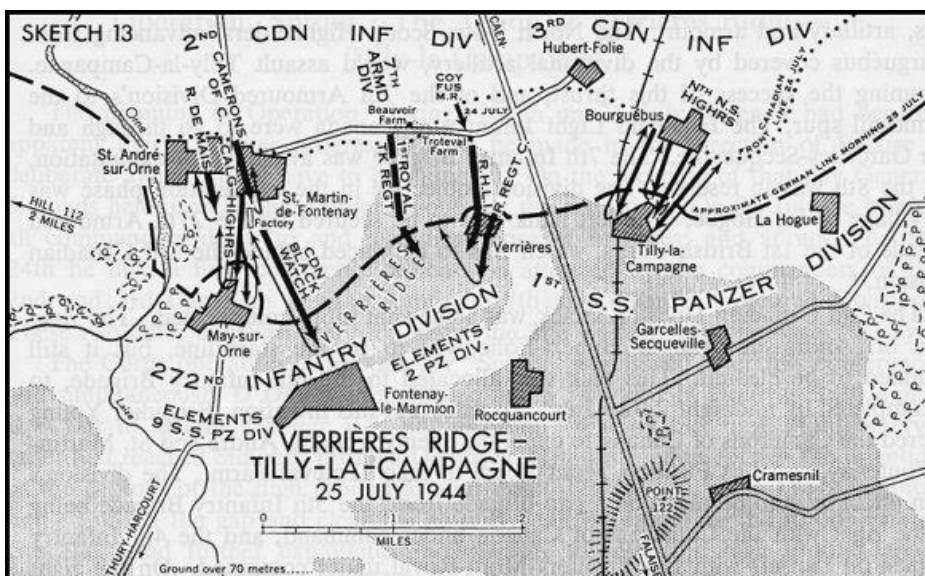
After the fall of Caen, the Germans withdrew to the Verrières ridge south of Caen, among

other places, and in this way they could keep an eye on all troop movements of the Allies. Likewise on Hill 67.

Thirty minutes after the Calgary Highlanders had taken over the hill on July 19, the Germans did not seem to surrender so easily. A three-day battle ensued, thirty-one Canadian soldiers were killed on Hill 67. The Calgary Highlanders continued south.



Monument on Hill 67 – Summer 2020



After the necessary days of rest, after the battle of Hill 67, plans were made for Operation Spring, to take the entire ridge of Verrières.

The ridge was defended by the German 1st SS-Panzer-Division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, the elite troops of the Waffen-SS. The Highlanders continued from there to May-sur-Orne. The attack was launched on the night of July 24, but Operation Spring ended in a disaster. The Calgary Highlanders were too inexperienced compared to the German army and a lot went wrong in the communication between the different army units. Thirty-seven Calgary Highlanders were killed. The men who survived were given a few days of rest in Fleury-sur-Orne.

After the days of rest in Fleury-sur-Orne, the next target was Tilly-la-Campagne. British and Canadian troops had tried to capture it twice before, but in vain. Now it was the Calgary Highlanders turn. They fought for twelve hours in a thick fog. But the Highlanders also encountered great resistance. And although a number of men managed to penetrate the village, the Highlanders also failed to take Tilly. In less than a day 36 men were killed.

On August 8, 1944, the Calgary Highlanders were deployed in Operation Totalize. Their assignment was to take the bridge over the Laize at Bretteville. Just after midnight, the Ifs regiment left for Verrières, arriving there at 1:30 am. All night long they listened to planes approaching and to the sound of heavy bombing. After about four hours they left their trenches and marched on to Rocqancourt. In the morning light they saw the silhouettes of hundreds of trucks, tanks and other military vehicles. And a lot of men. At 11 am the regiment moved on towards Caillouet, two miles from their target, Bretteville. On the route they saw stranded army vehicles, wreckage from artillery and many fallen German and Canadian soldiers. The road to Bretteville was heavily bombed and barely passable, but the advance was progressing well. There was virtually no German resistance. At 5 pm the Calgary Highlanders, together with the Regiment de Maisonneuve, secured the bridge over the Laize. But the hills around the village were still teeming with German troops and it was not until the next morning that they surrendered, but not without a fight. After twenty-four hours of marching, attacking and waiting for counter-attacks, everyone was tired, hungry and dirty and there was time for a few days of rest. Eleven Calgary Highlanders were killed during Operation Totalize.

On August 12, the regiment was deployed at the Battle of Clair-Tison.

Clair-Tison was a village with some stone farmhouses, situated in a valley. After a day of walking, it was very hot, the Highlanders went into the night without sleep. At 1.45 am, it was a dark, misty night, the attack was launched. First, Le Mesnil was taken, a village north of Clair-Tison. On August 13, at 2 pm, the attack on Clair-Tison was launched. The Canadians were under heavy fire from German army units, but in the evening a bridge over the Laize was also taken there.



Bridge at Clair-Tison – August 18, 2020

What followed in August was a long route across Normandy through fields, forests and villages with battles large and small, and with little time for rest and food, on the way to the River Seine.

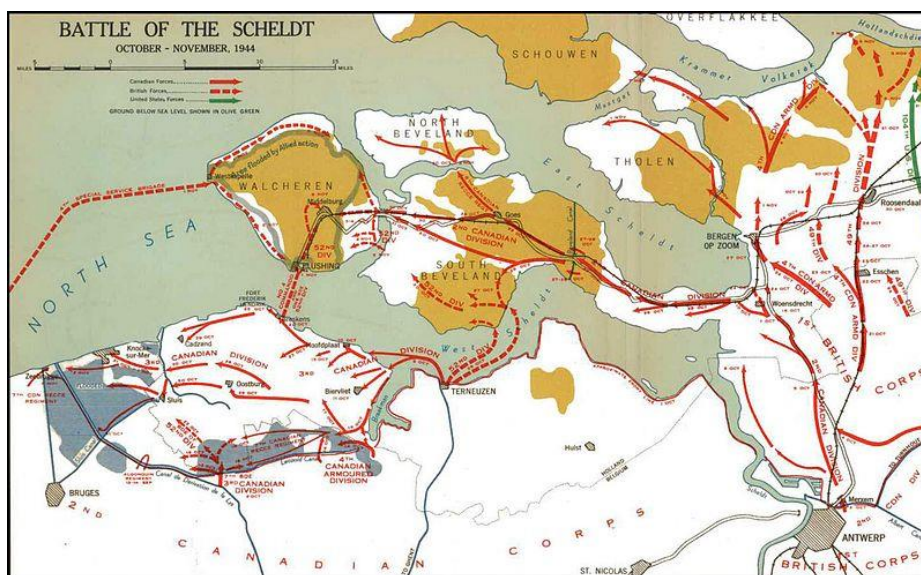
After fierce fighting in the Forêt de la Londe, where the Canadians first became acquainted with the tactics of the German forces of firing mortar shells into treetops, not only causing shrapnel flying around, but also burning treetops, the Calgary Highlanders crossed the Seine at Elbeuf on August 28.

After crossing the Seine, the regiment set off, via Rouen, to Dieppe, where they arrived on September 3. Dieppe was a black page in history for many Canadian fighters. In August 1942, more than 900 Canadian soldiers were killed there. The Calgary Highlanders held a memorial service at the Canadian Cemetery, which was maintained by the residents of Dieppe during the occupation all these years.

The peace in Dieppe was short-lived. In the early morning of September 5, when it was raining cats and dogs and it was cold, they were transported by truck to Montreuil, 40 miles south of Dunkirk. Dunkirk and its surroundings were heavily defended by the Germans. With Dunkirk in sight, the Calgary Highlanders fought from farm to farm under constant artillery fire. It was dangerous and depressing. In the end, they failed to take Dunkirk. On September 18, the troops left Loon Plage by truck for Antwerp, occupied by the British on September 4, through the fields of Ypres that still clearly bore the traces of the First World War. Dunkirk remained in the hands of the Germans until the end of the war. Ernest and his regiment were on their way to the Battle of the Scheldt.

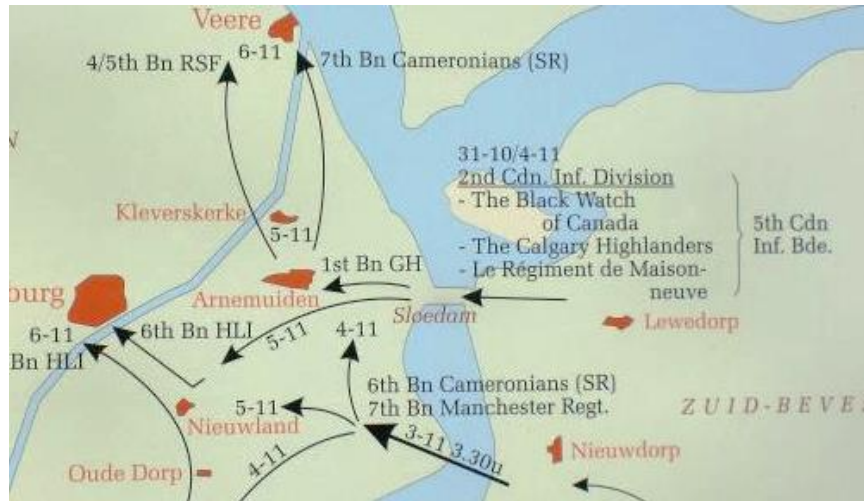
During three days Ernest got some rest. From Antwerp, the Calgary Highlanders then fought over the Albert Canal, the start of the Battle of the Scheldt, to the Turnhout Canal towards Eindhoven, where they stayed until October 3, 1944.

And while a huge force was leaving for Bergen op Zoom on October 23, the Calgary Highlanders were the regiment that lead the battle towards the Oosterschelde. Their assignment was to conquer from Woensdrecht the terrain that was bordered by the Oosterschelde and the railway line to Walcheren. Much of the land had been submerged or was extremely wet. It was shaped on the map like a coffin and the battle would later be renamed the "Coffin Show".



In the days that followed it was cold and wet. Ernest and his regiment fought their way along the track towards Kruijningen. On 29 October they crossed the Canal through Zuid-Beveland, towards the Sloedam.

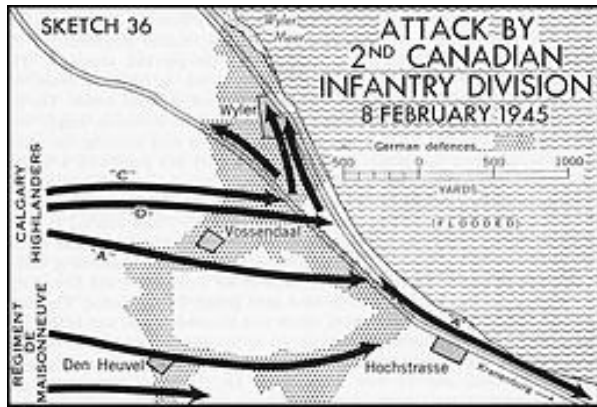
The Battle of the Sloedam began on October 31. The Black Watch regiment was the first to attack the dam. They suffered such heavy losses that the Calgary Highlanders were deployed the next day. They did not get any further than halfway the dam either. The fighting took place at such close range that hand grenades could be thrown back before they exploded.



On the morning of November 1, the Highlanders managed to secure the west side of the dam, but on November 2 they failed to advance beyond the beachhead at Walcheren. Finally British commandos landed on Walcheren and they expelled the Germans. This made the Battle of the Sloedam unnecessary with hindsight. It cost the lives of 107 Calgary Highlanders.

Ernest was injured on the dam on November 1 and spent more than two months in hospital. Initially at the No 9 Field Dressing Station in Antwerp, Belgium, where specialist surgeons were present. More than a month later, he was transferred to a rehabilitation centre. On February 4, he returned to his regiment.

The Calgary Highlanders spent the winter months near Nijmegen, the Netherlands. When Ernest rejoined them, they were in the woods near Berg en Dal, a village east of Nijmegen. The days before, they had prepared for Operation Veritable, the Battle of the Reichswald. The Calgary Highlanders were tasked with taking Wyler, Germany, at the start of the operation. They could see the village from the woods. The Germans had converted Wyler into a fortress. Bunkers above and below the ground and trenches formed a network in and around the hilltop village. The fields around the village were littered with landmines. It was defended by the German 84th Infantry Division under General-Major Heinz Fiebig. But a lot of information had been collected by Canadian military intelligence during the month of January. And when the attack was launched on 8 February at 0.50 am, they initially used the forest as a cover.



The Calgary Highlanders paid a heavy price for the attack on Wyler. After eight hours of fighting, the Germans surrendered. Fifteen Calgary Highlanders died that day. More than 60 soldiers were injured.

One of the dead was 19-year-old Private Ernest Edward Abbl, less than a week back at the front.

Ernest was buried at the Jonkerbosch military cemetery in Nijmegen. On 27 July 1945 he was reburied at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **V.A.14.**

On his headstone is the following text:

MEMORIES LINGER ON, DEAR ONE.
 SADLY MISSED
 BY DAD, MOTHER,
 ALBERT AND ELEANOR



Ernest received the following awards:

- 1939 – 1945 Star
- France & Germany Star
- War Medal 1939 – 1945
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp

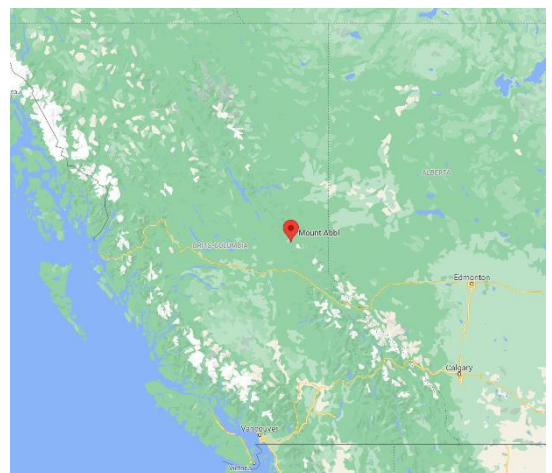


Life Story by Sigrid Norde: Research Team Faces to Graves.

Do you have a photo of this soldier or additional information, please contact info@facestograves.nl

In the Miscinhinka Ranges in the Northern Rocky Mountains, B.C. is Mount Abbl, a peak over two thousand meters high. Named in tribute to Ernest Edward Abbl.

Coordinates: 54°41'02"N 121°42'33"W



Mount Abbl

Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Library and Archives Canada

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War Diaries – Calgary Highlanders – 1944 / 1945

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<https://nl.findagrave.com/memorial/135599732/john-abbl>

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