

**Ackerman, Harold Albert**  
**Rifleman**  
**Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment**  
**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**  
**H/18706**



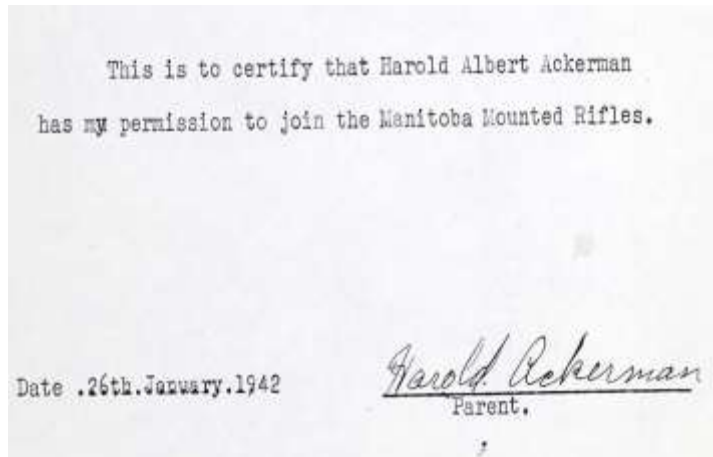
Harold Albert Ackerman was born 17 May 1925 at Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. His father William Harold Ackerman, of Irish/Dutch descent, married his mother Edith Violet Joyce at Jamestown, New York USA in 1924. The couple, both native Manitobans, had their two sons Harold and William at Portage la Prairie. They were back in Jamestown in 1930 during the Great Depression, where William was a metal factory worker for a period of time.

The Ackerman's were United Church members and had a quarter section of land (likely passed down from William's father Lewis) south of Portage la Prairie where they ran a mixed farming operation. Their house was a gathering place for the boys of the district. They rode horseback, played baseball, boxed, went shooting plus sleigh riding in the winter. Harold liked to read and stayed in school until age sixteen, completing grade 8 before going to work full time on his father's farm.



Harold joined the Non-Permanent Active Militia at Portage la Prairie 26 January 1942, getting written permission from his father (who went by his middle name Harold) to do so. He trained with the Manitoba Mounted Rifles part time while continuing to work on the farm.

Harold attested with the Canadian Army at Winnipeg 7 February 1944, age eighteen. He was then 5'9" tall and 133 lbs. During his initial interview about his post war plans, he said: "Farm work is kind of hot and hard. Guess I'll have to go back to the farm". Harold had driven tractors and was interested in mechanics. He wanted to join the Canadian Armoured Corps where some friends were serving but had to settle for infantry instead. He was assigned to Fort Garry in Winnipeg for his basic training.



Despite a clear medical examination, Harold was hospitalized for a total of 35 days in April and May 1944 for a variety of issues, including ear troubles plus removal of his tonsils and adenoids. When he finally completed basic training, he was sent to Camp Shilo for advanced infantry training 2 July 1944. His training officer at Shilo commented in his personnel file: "Should make a good, above average soldier. Willing and hard worker".



Harold was given embarkation leave in September and shipped overseas the next month, disembarking in the U.K. 13 October 1944 where he was posted to the Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit. Harold crossed the English Channel four weeks later and was taken on strength by the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR) as a replacement Rifleman 24 November 1944.

The RWR, also known as the Little Black Devils, along with the other 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade battalions (Regina Rifles and Canadian Scottish) of 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division were among the first Commonwealth infantry units to land at Juno Beach (Courseulles-sur-Mer) and suffered heavy D-Day losses. The next few days were even worse for them, experiencing another 300 casualties at the small village of Putot-en-Bessin, almost half of the battalion's combat strength. After a few weeks rebuilding with reinforcements, the RWR battled their way through Normandy and helped liberate Channel ports.

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The Little Black Devils and 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade had participated in the Battle for the Scheldt and were assigned to static operations near Nijmegen, Netherlands when Harold joined them, remaining there for almost three months.



The Little Black Devils were on the move with their 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in February 1945 as part of First Canadian Army to break out of their winter positions in the Nijmegen-Groesbeek area under Operation VERITABLE. This was a new role for them, changing from being liberators to invaders, pushing the Germans deeper into their homeland.

Initial progress was impeded due to severe flooding, requiring the use of amphibious carriers called Buffaloes.

Infantrymen of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in a Buffalo amphibious vehicle taking part in Operation VERITABLE en route from Niel to Keeken, Germany, 9 February 1945.

They fought some tough battles at Moyland Wood 16-21 February 1945. As an inexperienced replacement soldier, Harold was fortunate not to have been among the 183 casualties suffered by the regiment over five days.

The RWR and 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade remained in reserve during the next phase of the Rhine offensive, Operation BLOCKBUSTER. The Allies had decided to seize two crossings over the Rhine River with the main effort in the north in the Emmerich-Wesel sector.

The Little Black Devils were finally advancing on the evening of 27 March,



crossing the Rhine by means of a pontoon bridge that the engineers had constructed. Once across, they were ordered to capture the village of Netterden, as a precursor to a larger operation designed to seize the town of Emmerich, Germany on the following day.

*Rhine River pontoon bridge 1945*

The RWR and 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade accomplished their objectives between 28-30 March, capturing Emmerich despite some fierce resistance. They re-entered the Netherlands in April, with their war diarist commenting: "Liberating was to be our role – not conquering".



On the other side of the Rhine, March 1945, infantry of the Canadian Scottish from 7 Brigade advance with tanks of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers through Emmerich, 30 March 1945, in the dying days of Hitler's Third Reich, German resistance became variable – some days the enemy would give way but on other days they would fight to the death. The Riflemen never knew what the next day would bring. (LAC, PA-131818)

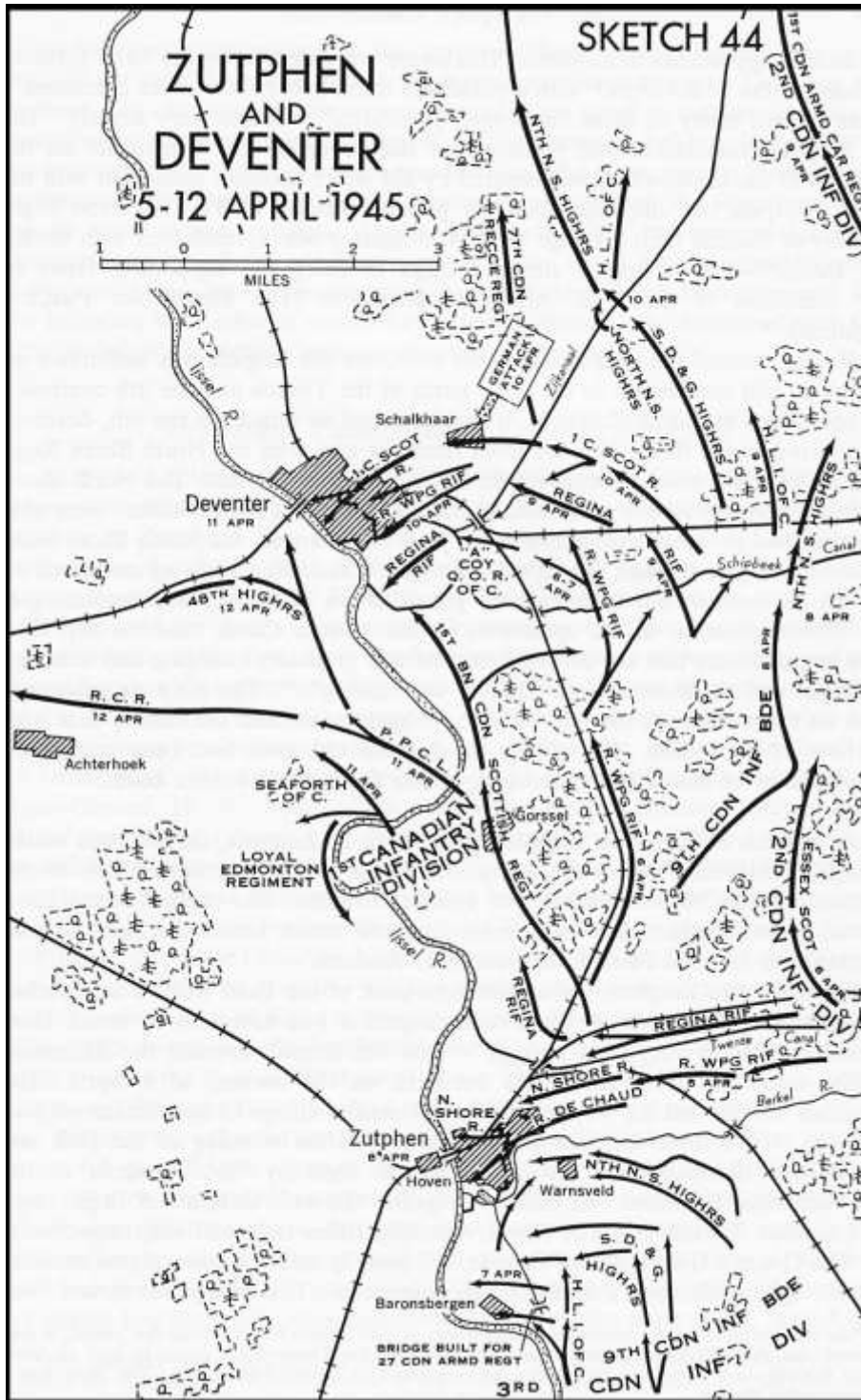
The Little Black Devils liberated Zevenaar 3 April and were advancing northward towards Zutphen 6 April against some sniping and mortar fire, taking some casualties. Pioneer platoons had to erect footbridges for the regiment to cross canals with bridges blown by the retreating Germans. After 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade struggled to cross the 'Zijkanaal' on the evening 9 April, Deventer was their next objective.



**Crossing a blown bridge.** The Germans relied heavily on demolition to slow the Canadian advance. While it hampered the movement of tanks, it did not slow up determined and sure-footed Riflemen. Here the Winnipeg Rifles cross a blown bridge on the far side of the Rhine. (Royal Winnipeg Rifles)

The attack went in 10 April, supported by Canadian Shermans and flame-throwing Crocodile tanks. Harold Ackerman suffered severe wounds to his head and abdomen that day from a High Explosive shell and was treated at 23<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance before transferring to a Canadian General Hospital. Deventer was captured within 24 hours, thanks in part to information provided by the Dutch Underground.

7<sup>th</sup> Brigade suffered 126 casualties and captured 500 prisoners. Harold Ackerman, age 19, died of his wounds the next day, 11 April 1945.



Rifleman Harold Albert Ackerman was temporarily buried at 's-Heerenberg Jewish Cemetery and later relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery near Nijmegen, Netherlands, grave reference **XVII. F. 12.**



Harold Ackerman's campaign medals:

- 1939-1945 Star
- France-Germany Star
- War Medal
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal/Clasp



Harold Ackerman's name is listed with their local WW2 fallen on the Portage la Prairie, Manitoba War Memorial.

*Portage la Prairie, Manitoba War Memorial*

Ackerman Lake, southwest of Nueltin Lake was named after him as a place of honour by the Manitoba Government in 1972.



Biography by Jim Little, Research Team Faces to Graves.

Sources Consulted:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Library and Archives Canada

Veteran Affairs Canada – Canadian Virtual War Memorial

Ancestry public trees

Portage la Prairie, Manitoba picture <http://www.prairie-towns.com/portage-5.html>

Royal Winnipeg Rifles <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/military-history/history-heritage/official-military-history-lineages/lineages/infantry-regiments/royal-winnipeg-rifles.html>

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Rhine River pontoon bridge 1945 picture  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pontoon\\_bridge\\_Rhine\\_River\\_1945.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pontoon_bridge_Rhine_River_1945.jpg)

Zutphen and Deventer information and battle map April 1945  
<https://canadianbattlefieldtours.ca/liberation-of-holland-battles/>

Portage la Prairie, Manitoba War Memorial picture  
<http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/portagewarmemorial.shtml>

Buchner, A. and Holm, G. (2002) *A Place of Honour – Manitoba's War Dead Commemorated in its Geography*

\* If you have a photo of this soldier or additional information please contact [info@facestograves.nl](mailto:info@facestograves.nl)