

**Alto, William Wilfred**  
**Private**  
**Royal Winnipeg Rifles**  
**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**  
**H62769**



Hosti acie nominati- "named by the enemy force".

William Wilfred Alto was born in Mont Mine, Ontario, Canada on Wednesday April 6, 1910. Mont Mine was a mining village, where many Finnish emigrants lived. Son of Emil Alto and Elizabeth Kangas, both born in Finland. They were married in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA on Saturday October 26, 1907. Vilho Valfred (William Wilfred) had two brothers: John, who died in 1924, and Arvo Edward. The family also consisted of daughters Laini Elizabeth Alto (born 1912) and Taimi (Elma) Elizabeth Alto. In 1911 another daughter, Laini Elizabeth Alto, died. As a religion they belonged to Lutheranism (Protestant). They spoke both the Finnish and English languages. The family resided at 126 Huron Street, Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario, Canada.

He was educated until Grade 8 and at the age of 15 he left school. William Wilfred, like his father, went to work in the mines. He also worked as a woodcutter and from 1939 to 1940 he drilled for diamonds in Quebec. Father Emil got crippled in 1940 as a result of a mining accident. William Wilfred had blue eyes and dark brown hair. He was 6 ft. tall and weighed 153 lb.

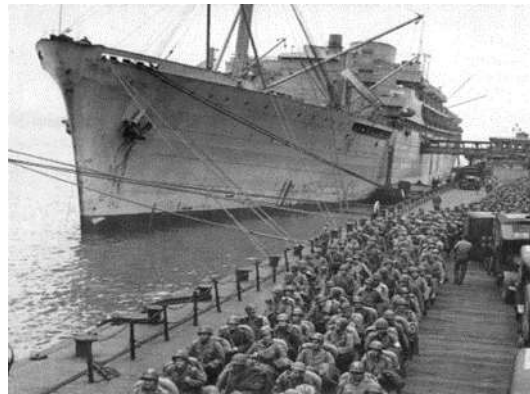
He had a scar from a vaccination on his left arm, a scar above his right ear and a scar on his left hand. And on his right index finger, near his nail, he also had a scar from a fracture. He enjoyed reading and was interested in firearms and enjoyed hunting and fishing. After the war, his old employer promised him a job as a miner in Coppercliff, Ontario, in the nickel mines.



On April 29, 1941, William Wilfred reported to the No 10 District Depot, Canadian Forestry Wing, Port Arthur, Ontario. Two weeks later, on May 14, 1941, he was assigned to the No 19 Canadian Forestry Corps at Valcartier. He was admitted to hospital on May 16 and left it again on May 20. The effect of intensive outdoor training and sports was clearly noticeable in the health of all ranks.

He was admitted with an inflammation of the larynx, Laryngitis. On June 7, Wilfred William was posted with the No. 20 Canadian Forestry Corps as a Bushman and on June 18 they left the Cove Field Barracks and the Corps arrived in Halifax on June 21 in order to depart overseas for Scotland from Pier 27 on the H.M.T. Stirling Castle.

Also on board were the No. 4 Mobile Laundry and Decontamination Unit, members of the Dutch army and ten officers of The Black Watch of Canada. The No 13 Company Canadian Forestry Corps was also on board to go to Scotland. The No 20 Canadian Forestry Corps was stationed in District 4, Camp 24 Torwood, Kincaig.



*H.M.T. Stirling Castle*

Composed of professional loggers, the Canadian Forestry Corps was first formed during the First World War, at the request of England, to help meet Britain's timber needs during the war. It was formed again in World War II to play the same role for the allied armies. Most of its activities were centered in the Scottish Highlands. There were 33 camps spread across the north east of Scotland. The Canadians brought up-to-date logging techniques and machinery, which were not yet widely used in Scotland. Many locals had never seen the types of tractor and winch yet used to pull the trees out of the ground. The local community was very pleased with the arrival of the Canadians. They provided the locals with shows, entertainment, free wood and tools, as well as husbands for the local girls.



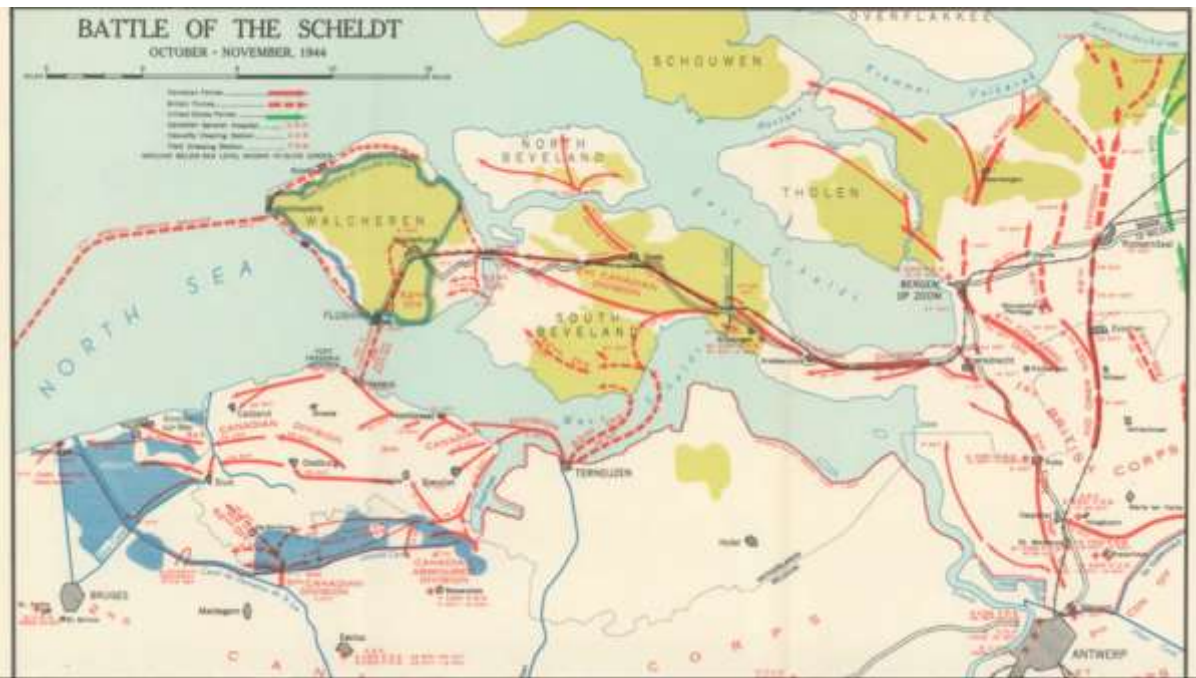
Canadian Forestry Corps No 20 Compagny, where William stands is unknown—photo Bob Briggs

William Wilfred Alto became a husband, too. He applied for leave to marry Jean Grant Ross, born in Corner Cottage, Nethy Bridge, Inverness-shire on 14 February 1919. Their wedding was on Friday, August 10, 1943. Before a soldier got married, he had to ask permission from the army. When granted, the document was signed by the OC of the Coy, the OC of District HQ and then the OC of Canadian Forestry Company HQ.

On June 15, 1943 William Wilfred was assigned to the No 1 Canadian Army Reinforcement Unit in the rank of Gunner. An assignment with the Rocky Mountain Rangers followed on August 26, 1944. He still enjoyed a five-day leave before sailing to Northwest Europe on November 4, 1944, and being assigned to the Royal Winnipeg Rifles on November 11.

During the Battle of Fish Creek, Saskatchewan, on April 24, 1885, Canadian forces attempted to suppress the Northwestern Rebellion. Enemy soldiers were taken prisoner and they watched the battle and noticed that the forest green uniforms of the 90th Battalion (the predecessor to The Royal Winnipeg Rifles) looked black in the distance. They said that they knew the red uniform of the British, but asked "*who are these little black devils?*" The name stuck and the regiment adopted the name and placed a black devil on its badge.

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, part of the 38 Canadian Brigade Group of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, were one of the first Allied units to land on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles fought during the battle in Normandy near key cities such as Caen and the Falaise Gap. Via France they went to Belgium and took part in the Battle of the Scheldt.



When William Wilfred arrived at the regiment on November 11, they went north via Oosterzele, Belgium, towards Antwerp, Turnhout, Eindhoven, Best, Boxtel, 's-Hertogenbosch, to finally arrive in Grave, late at night at 10.30 pm. On November 21, 1944 the weather was cloudy with a few showers. During the afternoon German planes flew over and dropped about 12 bombs near their area.

This was the first experience with enemy aircraft in a long time. Fortunately there were no casualties. For a few weeks, many patrols were conducted to determine the enemy positions. On November 29, a Spitfire crashed nearby, the pilot was not seriously injured. He was taken care of and brought to safety. On November 30, the regiment enjoyed a Canadian Army Show in Grave and a movie night in Nijmegen. The following days the regiment rested, paraded and enjoyed shows. On December 6, their positions were taken over by the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment. They themselves then left for the vicinity of Leuth.

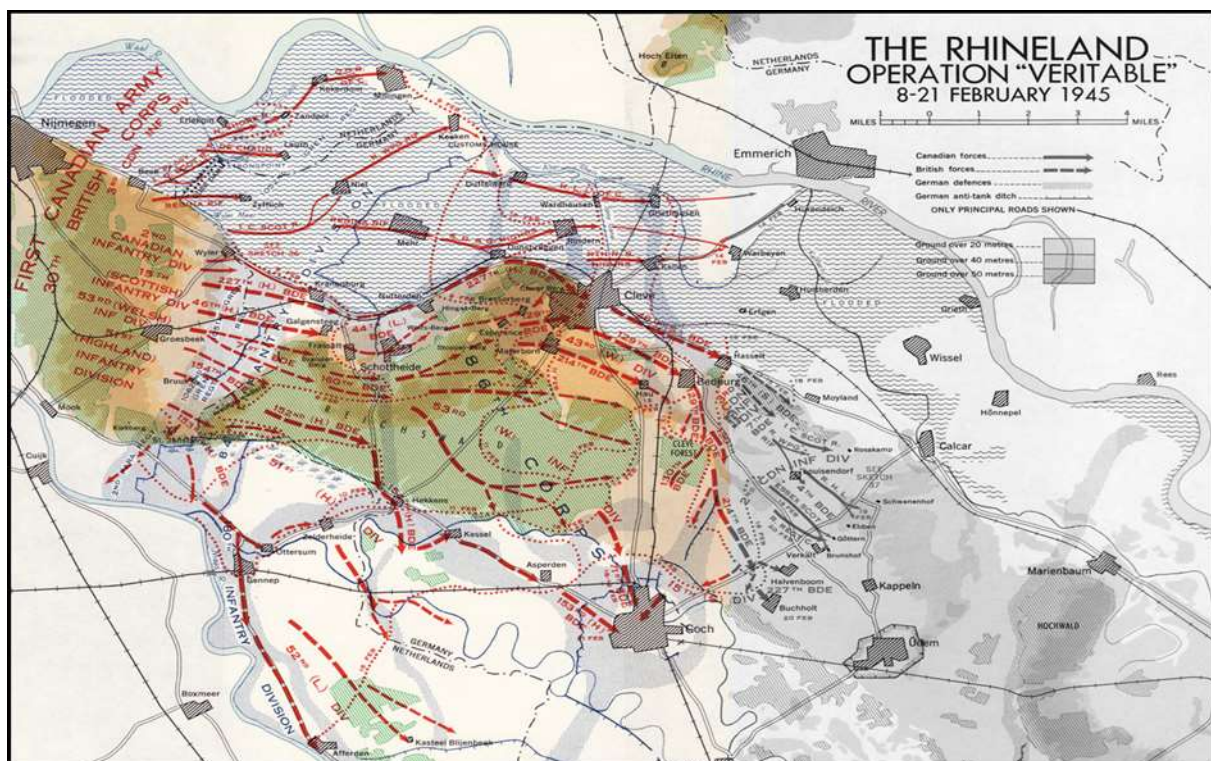
On December 11, 1944, son William Arvo Alto was born in Scotland, son of William Wilfred and Jean Grant Ross. The regiment had to check a Bailey bridge on this day after the water in a river had risen. The next day a Carrier slid off the dike, causing seven soldiers to drown and they were buried the next day at 11 am. The regiment remained in the Nijmegen area and were engaged in patrols.

On Christmas Day, they received new orders to reposition themselves and came under fire from some enemy grenades, thankfully with no casualties.

On New Year's Eve 1945, the Germans heralded the New Year by opening with significant mortar fire a few minutes before midnight. The Canadian artillery responded immediately and at 00:15 am it was quiet again for the rest of the night. On January 22, the regiment again received orders to go to the area south of Nijmegen. The next day the weather was cold and foggy with poor visibility. A patrol was sent out and they remained on the dike and fired in the direction of the enemy positions. The enemy fired back, but as a result the MG positions were noticed. The next day the positions of the Royal Winnipeg Regiment came under heavy fire from the enemy.

The snow had almost completely gone when on February 3, 1945 the commander explained in detail the objectives and plans of the battalion. The general plan was to take the ground on the banks of the Rhine, just south of Millingen. On February 7, the water in the river was still rising and was almost close to the Nijmegen-Kleve road. All companies were being notified of the operation that was to start the following day. Aerial photos were being studied extensively for Operation Veritable which began the following day.

Carefully they entered Germany and on February 15 they were ordered to attack and hold the high positions from which an attack on Kalkar could be launched. In the afternoon they arrived in the Keeken area opposite Tolkamer.



On February 16, the troops of the Royal Winnipeg Regiment were taken with Kangaroos to their targets in the vicinity of Essen at 07:30 am. The companies reached their targets at 5 p.m.

The whole area was heavily shelled by the enemy and despite the troops being relocated in Kangaroos, there were several casualties. One of them was William Wilfred Alto, who died at the age of 34.

He was temporarily buried in Kalkar, and on March 5, 1946 reburied in the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **XXV. B. 14**.

FORM 6 This form if placed in an envelope, marked "Dominion Statistics-Free, penalty for improper use \$100," and properly addressed will pass through the mail "FREE"

### PROVINCE OF ONTARIO—CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF DEATH

1. PLACE OF DEATH (County or District of IN THE FIELD (Germany) Township of \_\_\_\_\_  
 If in City, Town or Village \_\_\_\_\_ (Name) Street \_\_\_\_\_ House No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 (If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give the name instead of street and number)

2. LENGTH OF STAY (in years, months and days)  
 (a) In City, Town or Township where death occurred \_\_\_\_\_ (b) In Province \_\_\_\_\_ (c) In Canada (if immigrant) \_\_\_\_\_

3. PRINT FULL NAME OF DECEASED ALTO (Family name) William Wilfred (Given name or names in usual order)  
 RESIDENCE No. 126 Street Huron City, Town, Village or Township Sault Ste Marie Province Ont.  
 (Residence means usual place of abode. Post Office Address for residents in rural parts not sufficient)

4. Sex M 5. Nationality (Citizenship) \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Racial Origin \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced WIDOWED

8. BIRTHPLACE Ont. (Province or Country)

9. DATE OF BIRTH April 6th, 1910 (Month) (Day) (Year)

10. AGE in Years 34 Months \_\_\_\_\_ Days \_\_\_\_\_ If less than one day old hrs. or min. \_\_\_\_\_

11. Trade, profession or kind of work as Miner & Lumberjack  
 12. Kind of industry or business, as cotton-mill, lumbering, bank, etc. \_\_\_\_\_  
 13. Date deceased last worked at this occupation \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Total years spent in this occupation \_\_\_\_\_

15. If married give name of wife or husband of deceased \_\_\_\_\_

16. NAME ALTO, Emil  
 17. BIRTHPLACE \_\_\_\_\_ (Province or Country)

18. MAIDEN NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 19. BIRTHPLACE \_\_\_\_\_ (Province or Country)

20. Person giving information sign here \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Relationship to deceased \_\_\_\_\_

21. Place of Burial, Cremation or Removal Germany  
 Date of burial or removal \_\_\_\_\_

22. Burial Permit was issued by \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_

23. UNDERTAKER \_\_\_\_\_ (Name and address)

24. DATE OF DEATH Feb. 16th 1945  
 (Month) (Day) (Year)

25. I HEREBY CERTIFY that I attended deceased from: \_\_\_\_\_  
 and last saw him \_\_\_\_\_ alive on \_\_\_\_\_

CAUSE OF DEATH		PHYSICIAN
I. Immediate cause Give disease, injury or complication which caused death, not the mode of dying, such as heart failure, aneurysm, aneurism, etc. (a) <u>Killed in action</u>		To define the cause to which death should be charged satisfactorily
Marked condition, if any, giving rise to immediate cause (stated in order proceeding backwards from immediate cause). (b) _____		
Other morbid conditions (if important) contributing to death but not causally related to immediate cause. (c) _____		
26. If a communicable disease is mentioned on this certificate, give (a) Date of appearance _____ (b) Duration of disease _____ days		
27. If a woman, was the death associated with pregnancy _____		
28. Was there a surgical operation? _____ Date of operation _____ State findings _____ Was there an autopsy? _____		
29. If death was due to external cause (violence) fill in also the following:— Accident, suicide or homicide: _____ Date of injury _____ Manner of injury: _____ (How sustained) Nature of injury: _____ Specify whether injury occurred in industry, in home, or in public place _____		
Signed by _____ M.D. Address _____ Date _____ 19 _____		
30. Division Registrar's Record No. _____		
31. Filed _____ 19 _____ (Division Registrar)		

MAY 30 1945

WRITE PLAINLY WITH UNFADING INK THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD

THIS FORM MUST BE FILED FORWARDED WITH THE ORIGINAL TO THE DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS THE DEATH OCCURRED BEFORE A BURIAL PERMIT CAN BE ISSUED (See reverse side for instructions)

Every item of information should be carefully supplied.

Awards William Wilfred Alto:

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

## WILLIAM ALTO KILLED IN ACTION

Mr. and Mrs. Emil Alto, 126 Huron Street, have received word that their son, Rifleman William Wilfred Alto, has been officially reported killed in action.

Overseas nearly five years, Rifleman Alto saw action in both Belgium and Holland. He trained in England and Scotland after going overseas.

Two years ago he married Miss Jean G. Ross, Nethy Bridge, Invernesshire, Scotland, and they have one son, William Alto, Jr., who is

one year old.

Besides his parents here he leaves two sisters and a brother, Mrs. John Bigg, of this city; Mrs. Wayne Sord of Fort William and Pte. Arvo Alto, St. John's, N.B. Mrs. Charles Rauta, Bloor Street, is an aunt. A cousin, Norman Rauta, M.M., was killed in action in Italy December 15.

Rifleman Alto was born in this city 34 years ago and grew up here attending King Edward School. He enlisted in Port Arthur.



The inscription on his tombstone reads:

HOWEVER LONG WE LIVE  
WHATEVER JOYS  
OR GRIEFS BE OURS  
WE WILL REMEMBER YOU



**FACES TO GRAVES**

Stichting Faces to Canadian  
War Graves Groesbeek

Life story: Gijs Krist, Research Team Faces to Graves.

Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves
- Library and Archives Canada
- Canadiansoldiers.com
- Special thanks: Bob Briggs
- Newspaper: Operation Picture Me

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