

Anderson, Alexander Leslie

Gunner

Royal Canadian Artillery

14th Field Regiment

B 142873



Alexander Leslie Anderson was born on February 4, 1924, in Toronto, which was a prominent Ontario city of 500,000 population in the early 20th Century. His parents resided there for the first seven years of his life. The Anderson family then moved northerly to Lansing, a postal village along the Yonge Street corridor which later was absorbed by Metropolitan Toronto.

His father, Alexander Leslie Anderson Senior, a butcher, and mother, Mary Anderson, had six children: Alexander, Joseph and David (who died young) as well as Isabelle, Jessie and Elizabeth. He obtained his senior matriculation from Earl Haig Collegiate.

He was fondly known by close family as "Acky" while his friends called him, "Alec" and his comrades-at-arms knew him as "Andy." On his military documents, he signed his own name: "Alexander Anderson Jr."

His father Alexander Anderson served in the First World War while his brother, Joseph Anderson, had served in the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War.

Alexander enlisted in the military on February 17, 1943, shortly after his 19th birthday. Prior to enlisting, Alexander had worked for one year and five months in Toronto at the Dominion of Canada General Insurance Company, as a clerk in the automobile department.

In his medical records he is described as standing five foot seven and a half inches tall, weighing 124 pounds, wearing glasses, and having grey eyes and fair hair.

Within six months of training at camps in Orillia and Petawawa in Canada, Gunner Anderson of the Royal Canadian Artillery was shipped overseas arriving in the United Kingdom on September 1, 1943. During this time, he qualified as a signaller and a driver of wheeled vehicles. On May 18, 1944, he was assigned to the 14th Field Regiment, RCA. He also was awarded the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp.

Alexander Anderson landed with the 14th Field Regiment on Juno Beach, in France on D-Day, June 6, 1944. He was a signaller who travelled by armoured personnel carrier with his regiment through the Battle of Normandy and then up the coast to participate in the liberation of the Channel Ports. This major offensive by the Third Canadian Division (Canadian First Army) was coded Operation "WELLHIT" which involved the capture the German fortress of Boulonge. More than 300 artillery guns of various sizes were deployed to bombard the fortress. More than 700 bombers also conducted heavy bombing runs on the location.

According to an article on *The Defining Moments Canada website*, Gunner Anderson was a hero in the battle. "The ultimately successful Canadian operations to capture the Channel Ports often came down to individual heroism in the face of well-defended positions and shortages of men and weapons. Gunner Alexander Anderson, a signaller with the 14th Field Regiment, was awarded a Military Medal for "great gallantry, coolness, and disregard for his own safety" as he ensured his guns received the orders they needed to accurately and effectively support the infantry attack on Mont Lambert near Boulogne.



His regimental commander, Lieutenant Colonel H.S. Griffin recommended the Military Medal immediately be awarded to Gunner Anderson for his actions. The Allied Command concurred with this recommendation.

This is an example of the Military Medal

A report on his commendation stated that during the heavy shelling, gunner Anderson understood the importance of restoring radio communication for a battlefield observation post. He returned to the (troop) carrier and listened to the wireless set which was passing on firing orders. Anderson received these orders and relayed them to the guns on his set to be filled out. This gave supporting fire and enabled the allied advance. Anderson's presence of mind and bravery while under enemy fire was exemplary and directly contributed to the important success of this attack."

In a January 4, 1945, letter to his mother, Mary Anderson, in Canada, Captain A.B. Dowker of his regiment wrote that: "You as his mother have every right to be proud of him as a son, a fine soldier and a worthy hero."



Alec Anderson.

The 14th Field Regiment continued through Northwest Europe, securing the Channel Ports, invading the Scheldt Estuary, liberating the Netherlands and then pushing into the Rhineland.

Gunner Anderson at age 21 was killed on February 27, 1945. In the town of Keppeln, Germany.

"I was with Alec in the same vehicle when a few stray shells landed right beside us," wrote Lance-Sergeant Arthur Symington in a March 5, 1945 letter to Mrs. Anderson. "The shelling came as "a complete surprise" in a quiet sector of the battlefield.

"Alec was killed instantly ... when I turned and saw Alec had been hit fatally, I felt I had lost my own brother. He didn't suffer Mrs. Anderson." wrote Sergeant Symington.

Signaller Alexander Anderson was buried in a temporary war cemetery at Bedburg, which is between Cleve and Udem. A few of his closest army friends attended the burial service. The padre, Captain E. Sigston, who conducted the service, wrote to Mrs. Anderson on March 14, 1945 that "The significance of his service is seen in the fact that he was wearing the Military Medal."

His parents received his campaign medals:

- 1939-1945 Star
- France-Germany Star
- Defence Medal
- War Medal
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp.

Alexander Leslie Anderson is buried at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **IX. B. 11.**

His headstone is inscribed:

"ON THE RESURRECTION MORNING
WE SHALL ALL MEET AGAIN."

Life story: Liam Cavanagh, student from All Saints H.S., Kanata, Canada for Faces to Graves.



FACES TO GRAVES

Stichting Faces to Canadian
War Graves Groesbeek

Biography made available for Faces to Graves courtesy of Vanessa Kirtz, teacher at All Saints H.S., additional research and editing provided by Kurt Johnson.

Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Library and Archives Canada

Virtual War memorial

Letter dated January 2, 1945, from Captain A.B. Dowker of the 14th Field Regiment

Letter dated March 7, 1945, from Lance Sergeant A.J. Symington of the 14th Field Regiment

Letter dated March 14, 1945, from Captain E. Sigston, padre of the 14th Field Regiment.

Information on Operation Wellhit according to the Official History of the Canadian Army -- The Victory Campaign

<https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/Victory/Victory-14.html>

Article in The Defining Moments Canada website about his Military Medal commendation: <https://definingmomentscanada.ca/veday75/canadas-finest-hour/race-to-antwerp/>