

**Ashford, James**  
**Lance Corporal**  
**Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment**  
**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**  
**F/97479**



James Ashford was born on Memorial Day, 1 July 1924 at Rose Blanche, Newfoundland, located about 45 kilometers from Port aux Basques. His parents John Thomas Ashford and Annie Best were married at Rose Blanche



in 1919 and adopted Walter Best from Annie's side of the family. Claude was their first born child, followed by James and then Russel. The Ashfords moved to North Sydney, Nova Scotia when James was three years old.

*Rose Blanche, Newfoundland lighthouse*

The Ashfords identified with the Church of England and James didn't enjoy attending school, only completing grade 5. Referring to himself and his brothers, he said "none of us got along very well in school". James wasn't involved in sports and went to work at age fourteen. He took on seasonal employment over the next three years as a fish plant worker earning \$0.35 per hour and as a farm labourer making \$12 per month.

Civilian work was slack and Second World War activities were very apparent, with trans-Atlantic convoys forming in Sydney Harbour, when James and a few of his friends decided to join the Army together. His preference was to become an infantryman with the Prince Edward Island Highlanders, who were then assigned to home defence duties. James attested at Sydney,

Nova Scotia 19 March 1942, mis-stating his birth year as 1923 because he was only seventeen at the time. The Army later discovered he was underaged when enlisting but didn't update their records. James's medical examination recorded him at 5'8" tall and 141 lbs. He was sent to the Canadian Army Basic Training Centre at Yarmouth, Nova Scotia 11 April 1942.



*Canadian Army Basic Training Centre at Yarmouth, Nova Scotia during World War Two*

James was posted to the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (RCASC) and assigned to the #6 Vocational Training School at Halifax in August 1942. He worked in the cookhouse there among his other duties and was granted periodic leave time. He met Phyllis Hatcher the next year, also born in Newfoundland and living in Sydney, and was granted permission to marry her by the Army. James changed his next of kin from his father John to his new wife following their marriage at Halifax 15 December 1943.

James was re-assessed in April 1944 at Halifax and deemed suitable for overseas deployment. He was Absent Without Leave when ordered to the transit station at Windsor, Nova Scotia, likely to spend time with his wife before embarkation. Phyllis was nearing the end of her pregnancy with their first child when James disembarked in the U.K. 27 July 1944, where he was assigned to the Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit.

James received news that his son, also named James Ashford, was born 29 August 1944 while Phyllis was in North Bay, Ontario. The new father was sent across the English Channel, arriving in France 6 September 1944 and was taken on strength with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR) 18 September.

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 their strength the Little Black Devils rejoined the Battle of Normandy that summer. They were preparing for an attack on the Channel port of Calais, France when James joined them as a Rifleman replacement. James participated in the Capture of Calais with the RWR and 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade 25 September – October 1, 1944, with surrendered German prisoners numbering about 7,500. James was admitted to a field hospital in France the day after the battle ended for undisclosed treatment and transferred to 13 Canadian General Hospital in the U.K. 3 October 1944. He was discharged three weeks later and posted to the administration wing as the first step in re-entering the reinforcement stream.

James returned to Northwest Europe the next month and finally caught up to his regiment 17 December 1944 while they were engaged in static operations near Nijmegen, Netherlands.



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.

7<sup>th</sup> Brigade's orders for 16 February were to move eastward from Cleve to Udem, running parallel with the British advance to the Rhine through an area that was only wide enough to use one brigade at a time. They were tasked with the capture of Moyland Wood and the ground to the immediate south, opening the way to Calcar. The Little Black Devils supported by tanks from a Guards Armoured Brigade assaulted the village of Louisendorf to the southeast at 1200 hours. German artillery and rocket fire was extremely heavy, but both the speed and protection afforded by the Kangaroo's armour meant that casualties in the approach to the village were light.

Louisendorf was held by a battalion of Germans, and casualties were heavy in the ensuing fighting. However, the village was captured and

approximately 240 prisoners were taken in what was a successful operation compared to the near disaster that befell the Regina Rifles at Moyland Wood.

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles suffered heavy losses that first day of battle. Constant German shelling and machine-gun fire kept them pinned down on the following days. On 20 February the RWR were given the task of capturing Moyland Wood, after successive failures by the Regina Rifles and Canadian Scottish battalions. Their well planned and carefully coordinated attack the next day was ultimately successful but came at a high cost of 183 casualties over five days of fighting.



James was given a field promotion to Lance Corporal 23 February and the RWR performed training exercises in the ruins of the German city of Cleve while the next phase of the Rhine offensive Operation BLOCKBUSTER got underway. The RWR were advancing the next month when James was seriously injured from a mine explosion 24 March 1944. A telegram was sent to his wife informing her of his wound.



James's left lower leg had to be amputated at a field hospital and he seemed to be stable following the operation.

Sadly, he died three days later, 27 March, from a suspected brain embolism (blood clot), aged 20 years old.

M.F.M. 287  
50M-9-41 (5634)  
H.C. 17238-198

**CANADIAN NATIONAL  
TELEGRAPHS**

AL FILE H.Q. 405-A-3400

CASUALTY (REPORT DELIVERY) OTTAWA 28 MARCH 1945

TO: MRS PHYLLIS ASHFORD  
MARGARET ST  
NORTH SYDNEY N S

67585

SINCERELY REGRET INFORM YOU F97479 LANCE CORPORAL  
JAMES ASHFORD HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY REPORTED WOUNDED IN ACTION  
TWENTYFOURTH MARCH 1945 NATURE OF SECOND CASUALTY DESCRIBED AS  
TRAUMATIC AMPUTATION LEFT FOOT STOP NO FURTHER INFORMATION WILL BE  
FORTHCOMING UNLESS THE PATIENTS CONDITION CONSIDERED SERIOUS OR  
DANGEROUS BY MEDICAL AUTHORITIES STOP WHEN ADDRESSING MAIL ADD WORDS  
IN HOSPITAL IN BOLD LETTERS OVER NAME OF ADDRESSEE FOR QUICK  
DELIVERY STOP TO PREVENT POSSIBLE AID TO OUR ENEMIES DO NOT DIVULGE  
DATE OF CASUALTY OR NAME OF UNIT

PREPAID DIRECTOR OF RECORDS 31

29th March, 1947.

Mrs. Phyllis Ashford,  
Margaret Street,  
North Sydney, N.S.

F.97479, L/Corporal James ASHFORD

Dear Mrs. Ashford:

With reference to your letter of March 19th I enclose herewith as requested a photograph showing the grave and marker over the resting place of your late husband, the marginally named.

In this regard, I am directed to inform you that all Canadian Military Cemeteries overseas are now in the hands of the Imperial War Graves Commission for care, maintenance and the erection of permanent headstones. I can assure you that your husband's burial place will receive proper care and attention for evermore and you need have no apprehension whatever in that connection.

Yours faithfully,

*H.M. Jackson*  
for H.M. Jackson, Lt.-Col.,  
Director of Records,  
for Adjutant-General.

Two years later, the Army sent a letter to Phyllis Ashford in response to her inquiry about James's burial place and provided her with a picture of his grave marker.

The personal inscription that Phyllis chose to be engraved on his headstone reads:

NEVER SHALL THY MEMORY FADE.  
SWEET THOUGHTS EVER LINGER  
WHERE THOU ART LAID

Lance Corporal James Ashford was temporarily buried at Bedburg, Germany and later relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery near Nijmegen, Netherlands, grave reference **XI. B. 3.**

James's campaign awards included:

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



*Photo courtesy lestweforget1945.org*



L. Cpl. James Ashford, pictured above, is now serving in Germany according to word received by his wife, Margaret street, North Sydney. He is a son of Mr. and Mrs. John Ashford.

Phyllis later remarried and had two more children, who James's son grew up with.

Phyllis passed away on January 13, 2001 In Ramea, Newfoundland.

**OXFORD, Phyllis Samantha - 78**  
Sydney

**Phyllis Oxford**, 78, of Grandview Street, Sydney, passed away at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital, Sydney, on **Saturday, Jan. 13, 2001**. Born in **Ramea, Newfoundland**, she was a daughter of the late Charles and Selina (Sibley) Hatcher. She was a member of the World Wide Church of God. She was an avid bowler and dart player with the Whitney Pier Seniors Club. She is survived by a daughter, Jocelyn Dorko, Sydney; two sons, James Ashford, Halifax, and Denis Oxford, Ohio; a sister, Annie Bradbury, North Sydney; step-sister, Winnie Lee, Newfoundland; brother, John Hatcher, Stephenville; nine grandchildren; a great-grandchild. Phyllis was predeceased by her first husband, James Ashford; and second husband, Abraham Oxford. There will be no visitation. A funeral service will be held in Sydney Memorial Chapel today (Monday) at 2 p.m. with Pastor Willis officiating. Interment in Resurrection Cemetery, Sydney Forks. Memorial donations may be made to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of N.S.



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

Rose Blanche, Newfoundland picture [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose\\_Blanche-Harbour\\_le\\_Cou](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose_Blanche-Harbour_le_Cou)

Yarmouth, Nova Scotia army training camp picture  
<http://www.wartimeheritage.com/storyarchive2/storycamp60.htm>

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>

Reid, Brian (2010). *Named by the Enemy – A History of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles*

Legion Magazine November 2002  
<https://legionmagazine.com/en/2002/11/clearing-moyland-wood/>

Battle of the Rhineland map  
<https://www.canadiansoldiers.com/history/campaigns/northwesteurope/rhineland.htm>

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