

**Bartlett, John Frederick**  
**Trooper**  
**M/44899**  
**South Alberta Regiment**  
**29<sup>th</sup> Armoured Reconnaissance**  
**Regiment**  
**Royal Canadian Armoured Corps**



SOUTH ALBERTA REGIMENT  
(29th Cdn. Armd. Recon. Regt.)



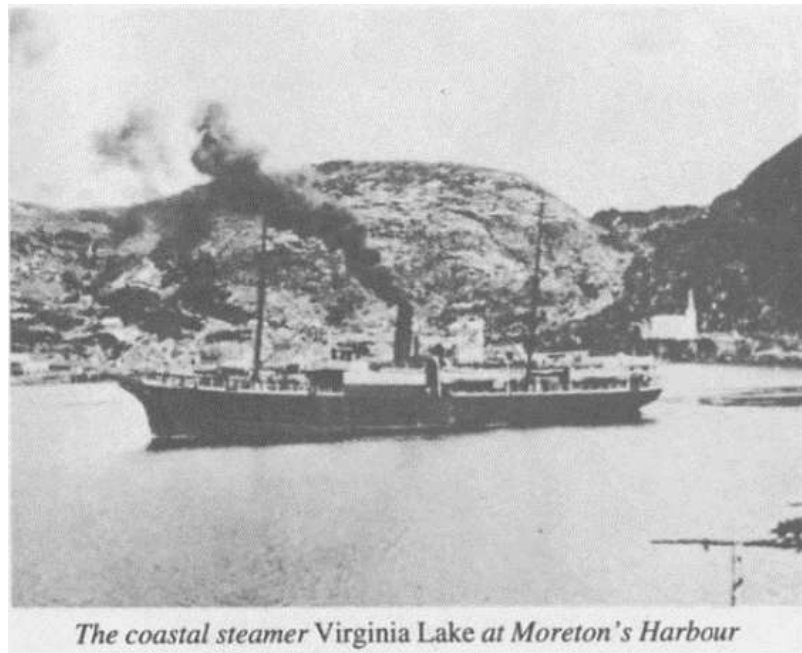
John Frederick Bartlett was born in Moreton's Harbour, Newfoundland 27 January 1898. He was the middle child of three surviving sons to Alfred Bartlett and Jessie Lavinia Taylor. John Frederick was named after his two grandfathers and came from a long line of Newfoundlanders. The Taylors were one of the founding families of Moreton's Harbour in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, originally from England. Some of the Taylors became prominent shipbuilders while the Bartletts, also from the U.K., were primarily cod fishermen of the inshore waters and off the Labrador coast. Moreton's Harbour had a population of about five hundred in 1900, and the east end was known as "Taylor's side".



*An aerial view of Moreton's Harbour*

John's family were Protestants, living in an isolated coastal community that had its share of deadly diseases. His mother Jessie died in 1909, possibly from "the white plague of consumption" (tuberculosis) that took one or two people from nearly every household. John's grandmother Louisa Taylor helped raise the boys while their father worked.

With his mother gone, John was forced to work from the age of ten and had little opportunity to attend school. The Government passenger and mail steamer that periodically visited Moreton's Harbour must have seemed like a way out of the little village and the hard life he was living as a boy. John struck out on his own at age fourteen and began working his way west.



*The coastal steamer Virginia Lake at Moreton's Harbour*

While available details are sparse, one record shows John spent six months in Chicago, Illinois working as a line cook in 1921. He took a correspondence course and attained an electricity diploma. He made his way back north and became a labourer at a grain farm in Southern Saskatchewan. John survived the Great Depression doing a variety of jobs and was working as a farm labourer around Edmonton, Alberta when he decided to join the Army with no prior Militia experience. The prospect of steady employment at higher pay than \$10 per month was compelling.

John attested with the Canadian Active Service Force in Edmonton, Alberta on 8 June 1940 at age 42, twice as old as many of the prairie boys he was joining ranks with. He was one of the originals with the South Alberta Regiment, formed that year by the amalgamation of five different Alberta Militia units as part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division. Fred measured 5' 5" tall and weighed 132 lbs at that time, in good physical condition.



*Prince of Wales Armouries, Edmonton*

The South Alberta Regiment (SAR) assembled in Edmonton and undertook their 8 weeks of basic training at the Prince of Wales Armouries.

Next came six weeks of field infantry training in Dundurn, Saskatchewan, using WWI era methods and weapons. John was evidently able to keep up with his younger cohorts.

The SAR then moved to a camp near Nanaimo, British Columbia that fall. Camp Wakesiah was still under construction when the Regiment arrived in October and they spent the winter under canvas tents. It was an especially wet west coast winter and the terrain was poorly drained, so the men were flooded out of their tents on a regular basis. Route marches were part of their training.



The SAR relocated to Niagara, Ontario May 1941, and settled into their new barracks at an empty canning factory. They were primarily assigned mundane guard duties while there to protect critical infrastructure from potential enemy sabotage, so not much training was undertaken.

The entire 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division (the last to go overseas) was assembled at a large camp near Debert, Nova Scotia in December 1941. Furlough was granted from 15 December until 2 January 1942 and John may have returned to Newfoundland to see his family during that period. Inter-divisional training exercises were held and the decision was made 2 Feb 1942 to convert the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division into the 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division of the Canadian Armoured Corps. As a result, the SAR was redesignated 29<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment and retained a dual identity throughout the war.

Extensive retraining was required for tank operations. The SAR originally trained on Valentine tanks, then Rams. They had to learn the basics of operating, maintenance, wireless and gunnery. John successfully made the transition and was qualified as a Class I Gunner 7 May 1942.

The Regiment embarked from Halifax to the U.K. in convoy 22 August 1942 and were fortunate to have an uneventful seven day crossing before disembarking in Glasgow, Scotland.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division was the last to arrive in the U.K. so initially had no equipment to train with. Some equipment finally became available October 1942, including carriers and jeeps. Ten weeks after arriving three Ram II tanks with 6 pounder guns were allocated to the 29<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (SAR), one each for the best Troop in each Squadron.

British and Canadian armoured units were reorganized at the end of 1942 with some disbanded. The SAR remained intact and became the 29<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment, South Alberta Regiment. Evaluations were performed around this time and the standard was applied to remove soldiers over the age of 35 from combat duties within the armoured corps. John was 44 when he was evaluated, and while he didn't show his age and was a competent gunner, he was deemed to be too old. A South Alberta Regiment officer must have spoken on Trooper John Bartlett's behalf, because he was retained for service within the Regiment as a batman and servant for the officers.

John received regular leave time while in the U.K., with seven to nine days granted away with pay every few months. The SAR was stationed at various camp locations south of London, England for most of their time there, and John enjoyed both playing and watching football matches. He was awarded a good conduct badge 8 July 1943 and unlike many of the younger men, never fell ill enough for a hospital stay. John also liked to hunt, and probably had the opportunity to do so when the Regiment moved north to the wilder Norfolk countryside for two months fall 1943.



In April 1944 the SAR was placed under command of 10 Brigade, the infantry component of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. Brigadier General Jim Jefferson from Edmonton, Alberta was appointed to command 10 Brigade after a successful Italian campaign. SAR's job would be to support three Ontario infantry battalions of that brigade in the coming campaign: Algonquin Regiment, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Argylls) and Lincoln & Welland (Lincolns). The SAR had been a fully trained infantry unit before being converted to armour so adjusted easily to its new role. With the passing of his grandmother Louisa Taylor, John changed his next of kin to his younger brother William Chesley Bartlett, a fisherman, that month.

The SAR did not participate in the Allied D-Day invasion that June and were left waiting in southern England in reserve. They embarked from London 20 July 1944 but were held up in the Thames estuary to wait out

gale force winds, and finally arrived at Courseulles-sur-mer (Juno Beach) 24 July. It took three days 25-28 July to get all equipment unloaded.

The Regiment moved closer to the front line 29 July 44, travelling through bombed out Caen, France. The 29<sup>th</sup> Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (SAR), supporting 10 Brigade, gained invaluable battle experience in the month of August against the depleted German Army and suffered setbacks along the way in Normandy. They established a reputation for toughness and determination at St. Lambert-sur-Dives during the Battle of Falaise Gap, where Major David Currie was awarded the Victoria Cross. It was the only such award to the Canadian Armoured Corps during the war and the only one awarded to the Canadian Army in Normandy.

The SAR was involved in another major action at Moerbrugge, Belgium 8-12 Sep, the opening round in the Battle of the Scheldt. The fighting there cost them eleven men killed, including three officers and 27 wounded.



*SAR occupying Bergen op Zoom October 1944*

The Regiment led a clearing action up to the south coast of the Scheldt and provided ongoing recce patrols with the help of Belgian and Dutch resistance groups. Their next significant engagement was the Battle for Bergen op Zoom 25-27 October. The SAR again experienced substantial losses coming up the dirt road they called 'Hulk

Alley' which was heavily mined. They occupied Bergen op Zoom, Netherlands with the Germans blowing bridges as they withdrew.

The retreating Germans had stripped that part of Holland, leaving the Dutch with little food and no fuel. The winter of 1944-45 became known as the 'Hunger Winter'. SAR soldiers shared their rations with their hosts.

In mid-January 1945 the SAR did some shooting over the Maas River, focusing on the island of Kapelsche Veer near Capelle. The Regiment played a key role in Operation ELEPHANT later that month 26-30 Jan in assaulting a German outpost there, supporting the Lincolns and Argylls. That bitter action cost the SAR another four killed and five wounded.

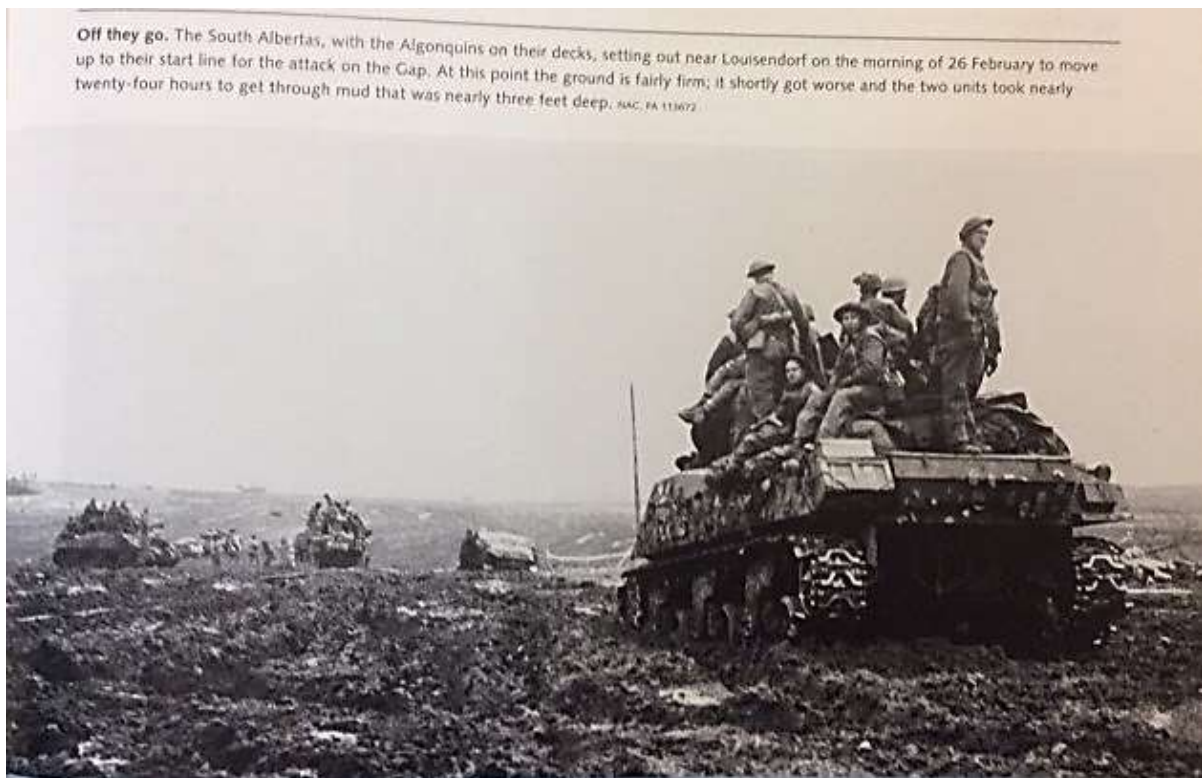
First Canadian Army launched Operation VERITABLE 8 February 1945. By 21 Feb they had closed in on Hochwald Layback and planned a new operation to take it. Operation BLOCKBUSTER was to be carried out by 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, including 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, and was scheduled to commence 26 Feb 1945.

The SAR mobilized 22 February from Nijmegen, Holland to Germany, travelling through two inches of mud along the road. At an Orders Group

meeting, Major Bert Coffin, in temporary command, learned that his Armoured Regiment along with the Algonquin Infantry Battalion were assigned to seize Hochwald Gap. They would have to fight through successive German defence lines and cross a valley floor that was almost impassable for tanks, while exposed to enemy artillery.

BLOCKBUSTER kicked off 0430 hours, 26 Feb 1945. The first two phases of the attack were completed by 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Divisions plus 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, including the capture of the high ground above Uedem in the face of stubborn German opposition. The way was clear for the third phase of the operation – the attack on the Gap by the SAR and Algonquins, and the ridge to the south by 11<sup>th</sup> British Armoured Division.

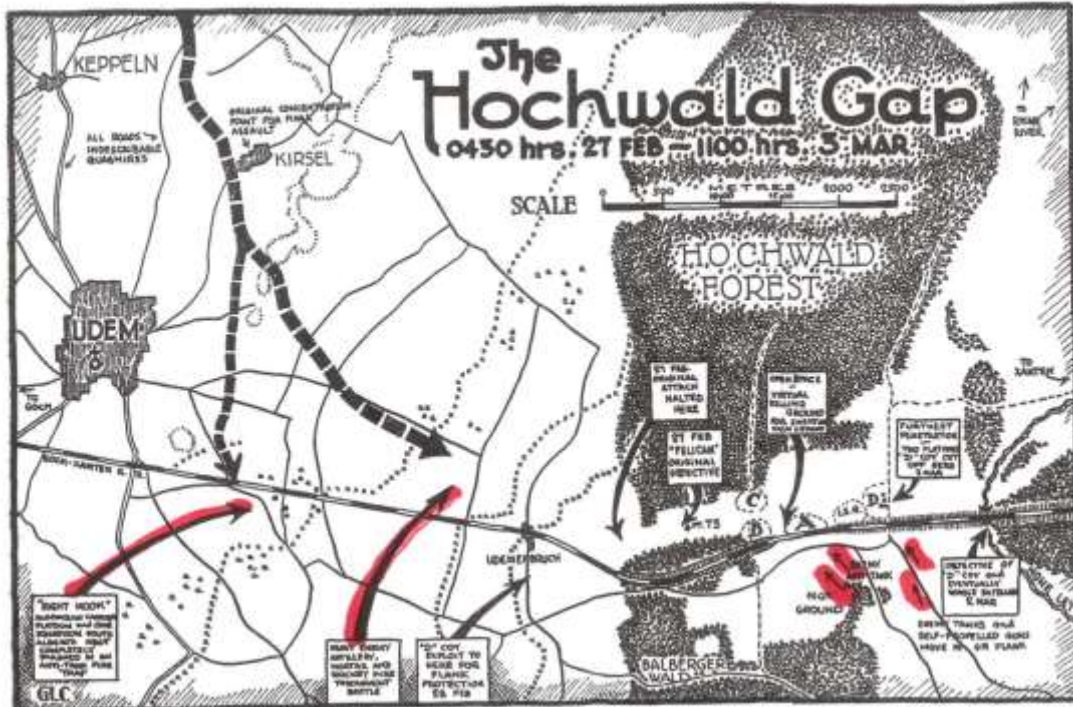
With the Algonquins on their back decks, the South Albertas moved out of Hau at 0800 hours 26 Feb to be in position for the attack scheduled for that night. Recce parties had marked the route but progress became difficult as the tanks and wheeled vehicles tried to get through thick mud with the consistency of prairie gumbo. It was churned up to a depth three feet by the traffic of three divisions.



*SAR Sherman tanks with Algonquin infantrymen on their decks 26 Feb 1945*

The Regiment spent nearly an entire day trying to move a distance of less than five miles. It took almost 12 hours to get within a mile of the start line. The SAR tank crews were exhausted by then and falling asleep on duty, but orders were orders so the attack had to go in as directed.

27 February 1945 was a fateful day for the SAR, with their A Squadron decimated by the well placed German defences, losing two tank troops totalling 8 Shermans, four killed plus others wounded and captured by the enemy. With their attack broken, air strikes were called in the next day.



Map courtesy Civilian Military Intelligence Group

Trooper Glenn Burgess of C Squadron, 4 Troop, was Left Out of Battle (LOB) that day. It was a regular practice of the SAR to keep one Troop from each of its three fighting Squadrons LOB in the event of disaster, preserving a cadre of experienced personnel to rebuild with. Those who were LOB were assigned other duties, and Glenn was tasked with assisting the Regiment's ambulance service in recovering their casualties from the field. However, Trooper Burgess had a bad case of strep throat so was excused from that duty, and John Bartlett went in his place.

Trooper Eric Nichols had been a member of a tank crew in B Squadron but



in December 1944 switched over to driving the squadron ambulance vehicle. Nichols lost one of his helpers on 27 February 45 when fragments from a German mortar bomb which landed near his halftrack killed Trooper John Bartlett, who was riding with him.

Courtesy olive-drab.com

"This was a particularly tragic loss because Bartlett, a farm labourer from Edmonton, was, at 47 years of age, too old for combat and had only been retained in the Regiment because he served as a batman to the officers and a waiter in their mess. John Bartlett had nothing else to do that day so he volunteered to go out in the ambulance." While a sad ending for John Bartlett, who was a life-long bachelor, this turn of events spared Glenn Burgess. Glenn survived the war and brought his young bride from the U.K. home to Canada to raise a family and live a full life.

Trooper J.F. Bartlett was temporarily buried near Uedem, Germany, then relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery near Nijmegen, Netherlands, grave reference **XXI. G. 2.**

*Photo Credit Alice van Bekkum, Faces to Graves*



*Trooper John Fredrick Bartlett, courtesy Bartlett family*





Biography by Jim Little, Research Team Faces to Graves.

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Pieter and Dari Valkenburg, John Barlett photo courtesy Gerald Bartlett

Newfoundland Map <https://lazydaysnl.com/2013/07/21/fogo-twillingate-moretons-harbour-all-around-the-circle/>

I's the B'y folk song lyrics [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%27s\\_the\\_B%27y](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%27s_the_B%27y)

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

## Epitaph

There is an old folk song featuring John Frederick Bartlett's hometown of Moreton's Harbour, Newfoundland. Remember him whenever you hear it.



I's the b'y that builds the boat  
And I's the b'y that sails her  
I's the b'y that catches the fish<sup>[1]</sup>  
And brings them home to Liza. (or Lizer)

*Chorus:* Hip yer partner, Sally Thibault  
Hip yer partner, Sally Brown  
Fogo, Twillingate, Moreton's Harbour  
All around the circle!