

**Brooks, Melvin Ronald**  
**Lance Corporal**  
**Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment**  
**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**  
**H/1260**



Melvin Ronald Brooks was born 24 April 1922 in Boissevain, Manitoba. His parents William Brooks and Mary Young were from Londonderry, Ireland. They had their first son Kennedy there in 1905 and emigrated to Canada the following year, settling in southwestern Manitoba near the USA border. They had four more children and after a gap of several years, came their youngest child Melvin Ronald, who went by his middle name Ron to family and friends.



Public Schools -- Boissevain, Man.

William was eleven years older than his wife Mary and worked at odd jobs as a labourer to support his family. The Brooks attended the Presbyterian Church and Ron got his education in the Boissevain school system. His father William died in June 1940, around the time Ron completed grade 10.

Ron's mother Mary moved to Winnipeg where one of his sisters lived, and he relocated to Pilot Mound, Manitoba where his brother Alexander, closest in age but still nine years senior, managed a Safeway grocery store. Ron worked there as a clerk until enlisting with the Canadian Army at age 20.

Ron's attestation date in Winnipeg was 11 January 1943. His medical examination recorded him at 5'8" tall and 128 lbs. Ron's basic training was done in nearby Fort Garry, then transferred to Camp Shilo for advanced infantry training in April.



Ron was posted to the Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment the next month and qualified as a Driver Class III June 1943. He was transferred to Halifax, Nova Scotia in late August for overseas deployment and disembarked in the U.K. 2 September 1943, where he was assigned to the Canadian Infantry Reserve Unit. Following a few months of training, Ron received a new posting to the Canadian Night Vision & Training Unit 16 January 1944 while in the U.K. He remained there during the D-Day invasion and was attached to the Rocky Mountain Rangers in August for additional courses.

With heavy casualties experienced by Allied forces fighting in Europe, Ron was placed back into the infantry reserve pool October 1944 and shipped across the English Channel, disembarking in Northwest Europe 10 November 1944. He was taken on strength with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR), also known as the Little Black Devils, 12 November 1944, designated Rifleman.

The RWR, 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 the Little Black Devils, 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 clear Channel ports such as Calais before moving on from France to Belgium where they fought in the Battle for the Scheldt. By the time Ron joined the regiment, they were engaged in static operations near Nijmegen, Netherlands and remained in the area for the next three months.

Ron made a favourable impression with the RWR and was promoted to Lance Corporal 14 January 1945. He had less than a month to learn his new role as a junior non-commissioned officer before the Little Black Devils were on the move with their 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division 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 through a combination of a sudden thaw, heavy rains, failed dams and dykes blown by the retreating Germans. This required 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade and other Canadian formations to use tracked amphibious carriers called Buffaloes to advance. Cleve was the first major German city to be taken by the Canadian Army. By the time they got there, Allied aircraft has left it in ruins.

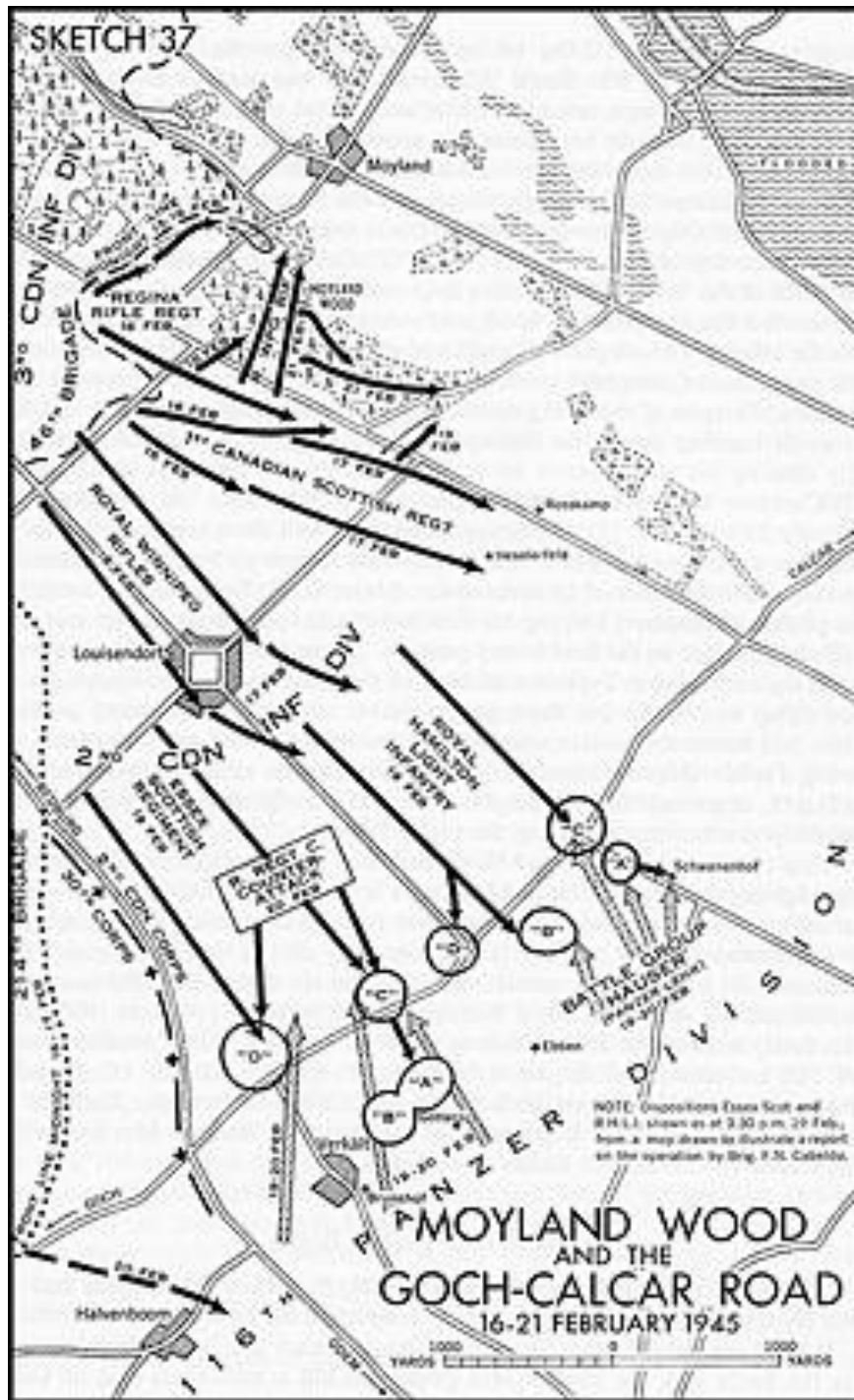
*Winnipeg Rifles advance at Cleve 13 February 1945*

New equipment and tactics were employed in 1945. For the first time in the war the Little Black Devils attacked mounted in Kangaroo armoured personnel carriers, supported by 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment. On 16 February at 0730 hours, the RWR were picked up in their concentration area near Cleve by the Kangaroos and moved several miles forward to the forming up place for their part in the pending attack.



7<sup>th</sup> Brigade's orders were to move eastward from Cleve to Uedem, 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. Each troop of Kangaroos carrying a company of Little Black Devils motored up to its objective, where the infantry leaped over the sides of the carriers and dashed into the village.

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.



Lance Corporal Melvin Ronald Brooks was killed in that action 16 February 1945. Details of his death later emerged from correspondence by another RWR soldier who fought by Ron's side that day.

Ron's brother Alex received the following letter dated 31 March 1945 from one of his friends, Corporal Frank Boyle:

*Dear Alex: I received your most welcome letter last night but had a counter attack and I was busy; I haven't had my boots off for 96 hours, but I had better answer your letter now before I go to sleep. On the day Ron was killed, our platoon had its orders to go and take out a group of farm buildings; but our section was the only one to get action, and we took the house out and 86 prisoners and we sure dug into it. About 15 minutes later, they started to mortar fire and a mortar landed on the edge of Ron's trench. He never knew what hit him Alex; he died instantly. But he had a flesh wound in the leg before and I bandaged it and ordered him to go back, but he wouldn't go as there was only four of us left out of ten. Ron wasn't cut or bruised by the mortar, Alex and I will say he had guts and I shall never forget him. Together we had one of the best sections in the Company and now I am again with only three men and myself left. So Alex, we buried Ron in Germany; but he was to be lifted and taken back to Holland and I think by this time he has been. Well Alex, I come from Orillia, Ontario, but I hope to travel out west when I get home and if I do, I will drop in and see you, as I would like to meet you. Ron used to tell me all the time about your Discharge and managing the store. I will close for now, hoping to hear from you soon. Frank*

Lance Corporal M.R. Brooks was temporarily buried near Calcar, Germany and later relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery near Njimegen, Netherlands, grave reference **XI. G. 8.**



*Photo courtesy [lestweforget1945.org](http://lestweforget1945.org)*



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

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Moyland Wood map

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

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



**L.-CPL. MELVIN R. BROOKS**

was killed in action in Holland, Feb. 16, according to word received by his mother, Mrs. Mary Brooks, 631 Spruce street. Born and educated at Boissevain, L.-Cpl. Brooks enlisted in January, 1943. After training at Fort Garry and Camp Shilo, he went overseas in August, 1943. Prior to enlistment he was employed by the Safeway company. Besides his mother, he is survived by two sisters, Mrs. W. Comish, Winnipeg, Mrs. J. Marshall, Pilot Mound, and three brothers, Kennedy, of Roland, Man., Alex, of Pilot Mound, and Jack, of Winnipeg.

*Winnipeg Free Press March 1945*

Brooks Rapids in the Caribou River was named after Melvin Ronald Brooks by the Manitoba Government in 1995.