

Brown, William Cary
Private
The Calgary Highlanders
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps
K – 2190



William Cary Brown, called "Brownie" by his friends, was born on October 9, 1915 in Vancouver, B.C. He was the son of Clifford Wesley and Josephine Estelle Brown. Clifford was born in San Salvador, Bahamas, and Josephine in Hamilton, Ontario. In about 1920, when William was five, the whole family moved to Oakland in the United States. His parents divorced in 1929. Father Clifford was a traveling salesman and did a moonlight flit after the divorce. William had one brother, Hubert George Wesley, and one sister, Clifford Lois. When William joined the army, Hubert was married and worked in a sawmill in Alaska, United States. His sister worked in the household and also lived in the United States. William never became an American citizen. On June 18, 1940, he married Novella Pearl in Oakland, USA. The family attended the Methodist church.



From left to right:

William Cary, Hubert George Wesley, Josephine Estelle and Clifford Lois

*Date about 1927
Place: unknown*

William was eighteen years old when he graduated from High School in Oakland. His best subjects were French, English and Physiology. He followed a training course for telegraph operator at the Central Trade School in Oakland for a year and a half. His mother taught him to play the piano.

After leaving school, William went to work in and around Oakland. He worked as a waiter and a cook in a restaurant for three years and was an administrative assistant at an insurance office for seven months. He then worked as a warehouse worker for a year at a company that sold dried fruit. He was in possession of a driver's license and could carry out minor repairs on his car himself.

On February 8, 1944, in Seattle, Washington State, USA, William registered for active duty in the Canadian Army.

ITEMS 17, 18 AND 19 WILL NOT BE COMPLETED UNLESS A MAN ENLISTS FOR GENERAL SERVICE ANYWHERE.

17. **DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY MAN ON ATTESTATION**

I, William Cary Brown....., hereby engage to serve in any Active Formation or Unit of the Canadian Army so long as an emergency, i.e., war, invasion, riot or insurrection, real or apprehended, exists, and for the period of demobilization after said emergency ceases to exist, and in any event for a period of not less than one year, provided His Majesty should so require my services.

Date 8th February 1944..... William Cary Brown
(Signature of Recruit)

18. **OATH TO BE TAKEN BY MAN ON ATTESTATION**

I, William Cary Brown....., do sincerely promise and swear (or solemnly declare) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty.

Witness J. M. Muckewig (Name) Sgt (Rank) William Cary Brown (Signature of Recruit)

19. The above named recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me.

at Seattle, Wash this 8th day of February 19 44.

P. R. Foster (Signature of Magistrate, Justice or Attesting Officer.)
(P. R. Foster) Captain (Office or Rank and Unit or appointment)
Canadian Army Representative

N.B.—ATTENTION IS DRAWN TO THE FACT THAT ANY PERSON WILFULLY MAKING A FALSE ANSWER TO ANY OF THE

William was then 28 years old and lived with his wife at 1327 Filbert Street in Oakland, USA. After registering, he was medically examined and interviewed. He was a healthy, glasses-wearing young man with brown eyes and black hair. He was 5 ft. 5 tall and weighed 116 lb. In addition to his job as a warehouse worker, he was a musician on the electronic organ in theaters in his spare time and he liked to visit shows and concerts. William was a member of the musicians' union, part of the American Federation of Labor. After the war he wanted to return to California to work as a musician. He was described as pleasant to deal with, but also aggressive enough to serve in the infantry. He himself indicated that he wanted to be trained as a signaller. His training as a telegraph operator could also come in handy during his training.

From Seattle, William traveled to Vancouver, B.C. He spent a month at District Depot #XI and was transferred to the Infantry Training Center in Wetaskiwin, Alberta in early March. He was transferred again after two months, this time to the basic training center in Calgary, Alberta. Here he was described in his personal documents as an intelligent, musical fellow with great imagination and good hearing, suitable for further infantry training. Again, it was reported that his telegraph training could be of great help. William himself indicated that he still wanted to be trained as a Regimental Signaller. Because the training was full, he was placed on a waiting list. On July 20, 1944, William was found good enough to be deployed overseas in the infantry. From June 30 to July 15, he was given leave to say goodbye to his wife and family. He had not been able to follow a training as a signaller yet.

On August 4, 1944, William boarded a ship to arrive in the United Kingdom a week later. He stayed there for over two weeks and was shipped to mainland Europe on August 29. A day later he was assigned to the Calgary Highlanders regiment.

The Calgary Highlanders were located near Dieppe, France at the time.

Dieppe: for many Canadian fighters a black page in history. In August 1942, more than 900 Canadian soldiers were killed there. Landing on the beach at Dieppe was a disaster: badly prepared and with little air support. The Calgary Highlanders, who boarded but never reached the beach because they were held back as reserve troops, were haunted by the terrible memories of that day for years to come. On September 3, 1944, they held a memorial service at the Canadian cemetery, which was kept by the inhabitants of Dieppe for all these years during the occupation.

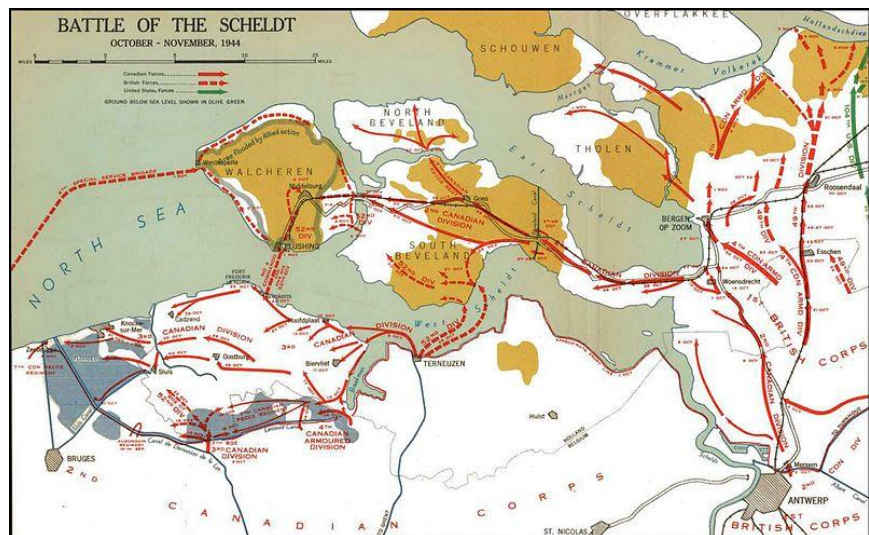
William was part of a large fortification unit. It was badly needed. In the weeks before arriving in Dieppe, the Calgary Highlanders suffered enormous losses, including along the River Seine in France.

The rest in Dieppe was short-lived. In the early morning of 5 September, with heavy rain and a cold, they were transported by truck to Montreuil, seventy kilometers south of Dunkirk. Dunkirk and its surroundings were heavily defended by the Germans. And the Calgary Highlanders, with Dunkirk in sight, fought from farm to farm under constant artillery fire. It was dangerous and depressing. Ultimately it was not possible to capture Dunkirk. On September 18 the troops left by truck from Loon Plage for Antwerp, occupied by the British on September 4, through the fields of Ypres that still clearly bore the traces of the First World War. Dunkirk remained in the hands of the Germans until the end of the war. With his regiment William was on his way to the Battle of the Scheldt.

William got some rest for three days. From Antwerp the Calgary Highlanders fought their way across the Albert Canal, the start of the Battle of the Scheldt, to the Turnhout Canal in the direction of Eindhoven, where they stayed until 3 October 1944. Even now, the peace was short-lived. From October 7, the regiment was to be deployed at the Battle of Hoogerheide.

Seventy-two hours of gruesome fighting followed. The Calgary Highlanders lost 30 men during those days. William and his regiment were rested for four days after October 10. In the afternoon of October 14, they left for Woensdrecht again. They stayed for a number of days at their position, three kilometers southwest of Woensdrecht. In the days that followed, the regiment was on edge, but it remained relatively quiet. Then the Calgary Highlanders rested in Ossendrecht for two days.

And while a huge force was leaving for Bergen op Zoom on 23 October, the Calgary Highlanders were the regiment leading the way in the battle towards the Oosterschelde. Their task was to conquer the terrain



from Woensdrecht that was bordered by the Oosterschelde and the railway line towards Walcheren. Much of the land had been flooded or was extremely wet. On the map it had the shape of a coffin and the battle was later renamed the "Coffin Show".

At 08.00 am, it was foggy and cold, the regiment left Woensdrecht. At 11.30 am the "A", "B", "C" and "D" companies had reached the starting line. William was assigned to the "D" company as an orderly (courier) to Captain Pearson. While the "B" company was being held in reserve, the other companies started the attack at 3:00 pm. The "D" company attacked from the right flank in a westerly direction, crossing the railway line. And although the other companies were making reasonable progress, the "D" company already met strong German resistance after no more than 250 yards. When the leading platoon was stopped, William went forward to see what was going on and discovered that the platoon commander and the group commanders had been eliminated.

He took command and crawled to the edge of a ditch to gain more insight in the German positions. In this way he could direct the fire of the brengunners (BrenGUN: light machine gun) of the platoon. Now the "D" company could move forward again. But Captain Pearson and another platoon commander got injured. In the meantime, the "B" company was ordered to take over the attack from the "D" company. Sergeant Major Robinson of the "B" company took command and sent William to the rear to get ammunition. While William ran to get the ammunition, he was under heavy fire. On the way back, with the ammunition, he saw the tanks to support the Calgary Highlanders in battle approaching. Without thinking about the danger he was in, he deviated from his route towards the tanks. After all, he knew where the enemy positions were and directed the fire from the tanks. Then he returned to his company with the ammunition.

For the extreme courage that William showed this day in keeping a cool head, taking command of the platoon and directing the fire of the tanks, on November 7, he was nominated for the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM), a high and rare award, by Lieutenant-Colonel Ellis, Major-General Matthews and Lieutenant-General Simonds. The application was signed by General Crerar and Commander in Chief Montgomery.

ORIGINATED 7 NOVEMBER 1944 C.P.A. 1
40/P & S/1420 (3080)

Date recommendation passed forward
 Received Passed

S. Cdn. Inf. Brigade .. 2. Cdn. Inf. Division .. 3. Cdn. Corps
 CIG (The Calgary Highlanders)

Schedule No. (to be left blank) Unit .. Highlanders

Army No. and Rank .. K2190 Private

Name .. BROWN, William Garth
 (Christian names must be stated)

Action for which commended (Date and place of action must be stated)	Recommended by	Honour or Reward	(To be left blank)
<p>On 23 October 1944 "D" Company of the Calgary Highlanders CA(O) was ordered to attack a strongly held German position on a Holland dyke near OSENDRECHT.</p> <p>At approximately 1600 hours, 16 platoon which was the lead Platoon of the Company came under very heavy enemy machine gun and rifle fire and was pinned down. Private Brown, the Company Runner, went forward on his own to ascertain the difficulty and found that the Platoon Commander and all the NCOs were out of action, so he took over the Platoon and by crawling up to the top of a ditch he directed the fire of 16 Platoon's Bren Guns onto the enemy. At this time the Company Commander and 18 Platoon Commander were both wounded and the Company Sergeant Major took over and sent Private Brown back for more ammunition. He had to go back under heavy fire. On his return with the ammunition</p>	<p><i>R. L. Ellis</i> Lt-Col. O. C. Calg Highrs</p> <p><i>W. Matthews</i> Comd 2 Cdn Inf Div</p> <p><i>G. G. Simonds</i> (G. G. Simonds) Lt-Gen Comd 2 Cdn Corps</p>	<p>1 Lt-Col. (IMMEDIATE) DCM Highrs</p> <p>18. Nov 44</p>	<p>NOV 12 1944 NOV 15 1944 NOV 19 1944 21 NOV 1944</p>

he saw our tank support moving into position and regardless of personal danger he went over to them and personally directed their fire on the enemy positions which he had located previously. He then returned to the forward Platoon with the ammunition.

Brown's coolness and quick thinking in taking control of the forward platoon and later assisting them by directing the tank fire on the enemy undoubtedly saved the Company from very heavy casualties and made it possible for them to carry on and take their objective. At all times throughout the action Private Brown's extreme courage, coolness and complete disregard for his personal safety were an inspiration to all those with him.

N. D. G. Creer
 N. D. G. Creer, Gen.
 G.O.C.-in-C.
 First Canadian Army

A. H. Non

If a casualty as under, fill in date.

Nature of Casualty	Date
Killed in action	
Died of Wounds	
Died	
Missing	
Prisoner of War	

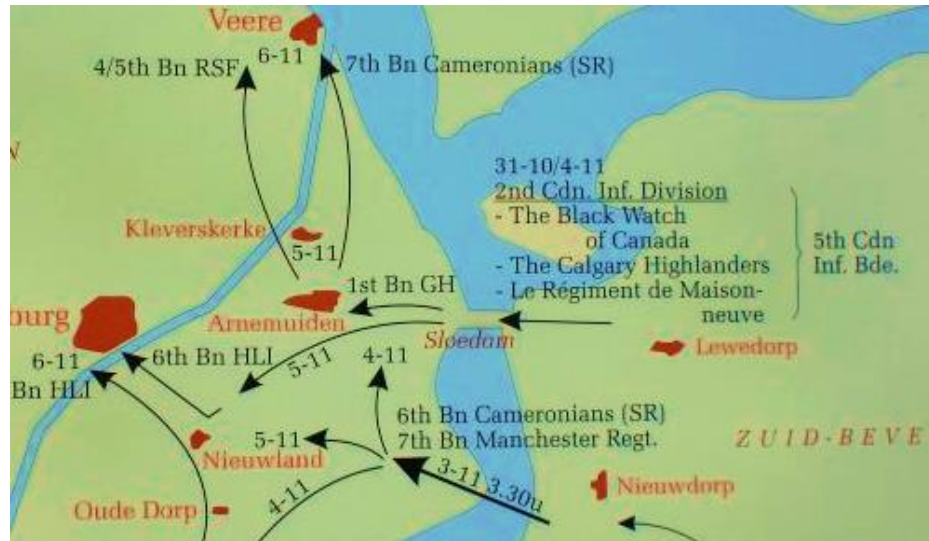
Major McKenzie writes later about William:

Brownie, DCM: A man's man ... used to be my runner and went through everything they could throw at him. A Real Pal".

*Brownie D.C.M.
 A Man's Man
 Accidentally killed
 1st Part of Dec. 44.
 Buried in Edo County
 Michigan Holland.
 used to be my runner
 went through everything
 they could throw at
 him.
 A Real Pal.*

In the days that followed it was cold and wet. William and his regiment fought their way along the railway track towards Kruiningen. On October 29 they crossed the canal through South Beveland. The Battle of the Sloedam started two days later on October 31.

The Black Watch regiment was the first to attack the dam. They suffered such heavy losses that the next day the Calgary Highlanders were deployed. They did not get further than halfway the dam either. Fighting was so close at hand that hand grenades could be thrown back even before they exploded.



In the morning of November 1, the Highlanders managed to secure the west side of the dam, but on November 2 they were unable to get beyond the bridgehead at Walcheren. Eventually British commandos landed on Walcheren and drove out the Germans. This made the Battle of the Sloedam unnecessary afterwards. It took the lives of 107 Calgary Highlanders.



William (in the back row, fifth from the right, with helmet) and the D Company - one day after the Battle of the Sloedam - November 1944

After this terrible battle, William ended up in the Nijmegen area. Initially, the Calgary Highlanders were stationed in houses along the road between Nijmegen and Malden. They were used to guard bridges at Malden and Grave. There were days of rest and there was training with a new weapon, the WASP flamethrower. Throughout the entire winter, the regiment was deployed to guard the border at Groesbeek. Two weeks on, one week off.

On December 8, the "D" company, led by Major Robertson, had an assignment to be carried out in the Grave area. Before they left, William asked for permission to travel on to Oss when they had finished the assignment, a bike ride of about an hour. William had been billeted in Oss before and wanted to pick up some personal items from him and a comrade. Major Robertson gave permission for this. It was about eight in the evening and already dark when William got on his bike. The bike had no lighting, just a reflector on the rear mudguard. William had been on the road for almost 45 minutes when an army truck approached him. A truck was also approaching from behind.

The latter, driven by a Corporal of a Canadian Supply Regiment, dimmed its lights. When he passed the oncoming truck he unexpectedly felt a blow. He stopped and saw that he had hit a soldier. He tried to put William in his truck, but he couldn't do it on his own. He stopped a passing vehicle and two soldiers helped him. He also took William's bike with him. He asked them where the nearest hospital was, but the two soldiers had no idea. The Corporal drove to the intersection at Heesch. There he asked a citizen, who turned out to be a doctor, the way to a hospital. The doctor enlisted the help of a British officer and together they examined William. They found that William, aged twenty-nine, had died. Together with the British officer the Corporal drove to a mobile command post in Oss.

At the first aid station there, William's death was officially confirmed by the attending physician. On December 9, Captain Dore of the Calgary Highlanders had the arduous task of identifying William. He also took William's bike with him. It was heavily damaged at the back.

After a military lawsuit, on behalf of Lieutenant-Colonel Ellis, on January 4, 1945, the verdict followed that it was a fatal accident, for which no one was to blame.

On December 18, William, one of the regiment's most popular men, was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

"And to one of the most popular men in the Bn was awarded the DCM posthumously - Pte Brown, W.C."

(Source: War Diary - Calgary Highlanders - December 1944)

Novella Pearl, still living in Oakland, did not see her husband return home. Mother Josephine, meanwhile, had moved to her place of birth Hamilton, Ontario, and was notified at 167 Niagara Street North that her son had passed away. They would never play the piano together again.



The Distinguished Conduct Medal. Second only to the Victoria Cross in World War II, was awarded to Private Brown for his gallant and heroic actions while acting as a company runner on the field of battle October 23, 1944. Image: Veteran Affairs Canada.

William was buried in the Jonkerbosch Military War Cemetery in Nijmegen.



On July 31, 1945, he was reburied at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **V. C. 13**.

William received the following awards:

- Distinguished Conduct Medal
- 1939 - 1945 Star
- France & Germany Star
- War Medal, 1939 - 1945
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp

Groesbeek - November 25, 2020

On his gravestone is the following text:

THROUGH THE SHADOW
OF THE VALLEY I MUST GO
I FEAR NO EVIL
WHILE MY SAVIOUR IS SO NEAR



Life Story: Sigrid Norde - Research Team Faces to Graves.

Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- Library and Archives Canada
- David J. Bercuson, Battalion of Heroes – The Calgary Highlanders in World War II, The Calgary Highlanders Regimental Foundation, 1994
- Journal of Military and Strategic Studies - Mark Zuehlke – The 2015 Ross Ellis Memorial Lecture - A Perfectly Engineered Killing Ground: Calgary Highlanders and the Walcheren Causeway Battle – Volume 16, Issue 3 (2015)
- War diaries of The Calgary Highlanders – October 1944
- War diaries of The Calgary Highlanders – December 1944
- <https://calgaryhighlanders.com/about-the-regiment/detailed-history/medals-decorations-and-orders/>
- http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/cao-aco/doc/D1_BOI-BYE_064.pdf
- <https://www.zeeuwseankers.nl/verhaal/zeeland-herdenkt-de-slag-om-de-schelde-in-1944>
- <http://woensdrecht.serc.nl/nostalgie/slag-om-woensdrecht>/https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slag_om_de_Sloedam
- <https://www.oorlogzeeland.nl/index.php/slag-om-de-schelde/scheldeslag-sloedam/bevrijding-sloedam>