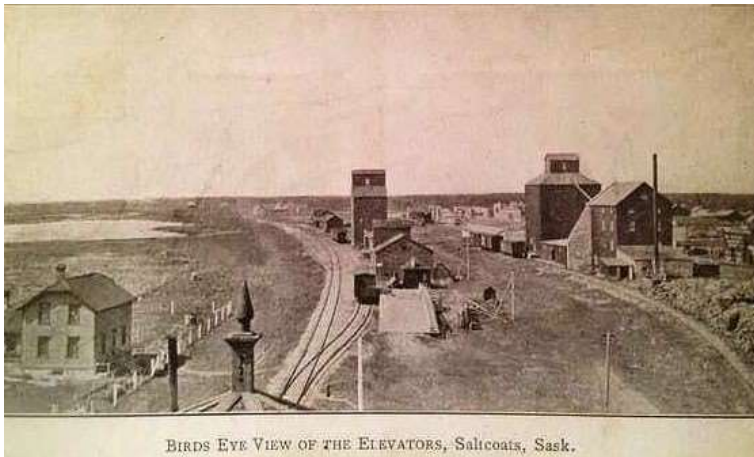


Caldwell, Alexander Parke
Rifleman
Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps
H/22702



Alexander Parke Caldwell was born 8 May 1925 at Russell, Manitoba. His father James Caldwell, from Belfast, Ireland, married his Scottish mother Agnes Lowell at Glasgow, Scotland in 1920. The Presbyterian couple emigrated to Canada the next year, landing in Halifax and made their way west. Alexander followed first born Robert, and the family moved from Russell to a farm around the Scottish settled village of Saltcoats near Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Two more children arrived there, Eleanor and Jimmy.

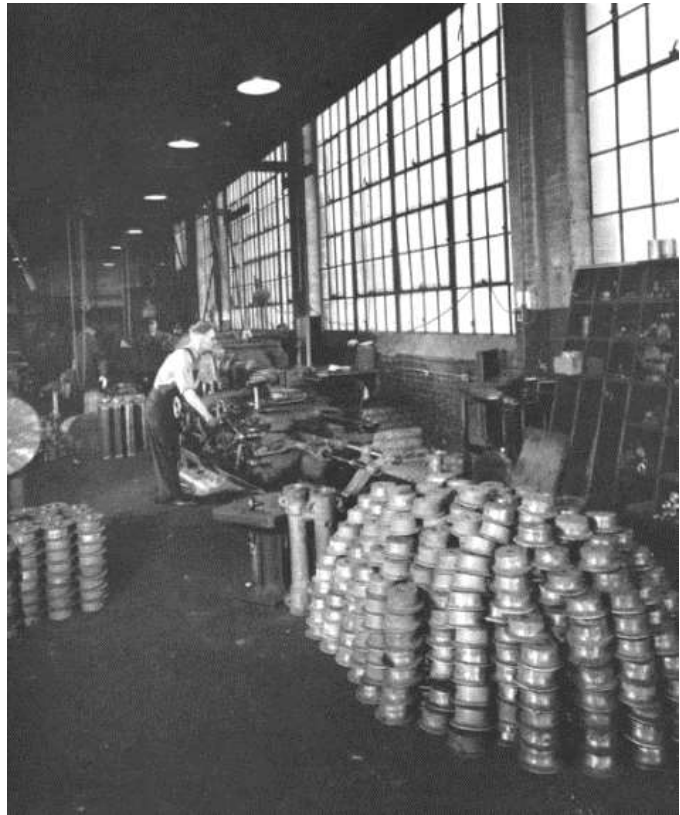


Alexander completed three years of High School at Saltcoats and moved to Toronto, Ontario at age 17 to work as a machinist. He was accepted by the United Church as a student to enter the ministry while working there. Alexander had been employed with Dominion Wheel and Foundry Company

for a year as a lathe operator when he decided to follow his brother Robert in joining the army.

*Dominion Wheel and Foundry Company
Machine Shop, Toronto, Ontario 1940s*

Alexander returned home to Saltcoats for a few months before attesting at Winnipeg, Manitoba 26 April 1944, age 18. His medical examination noted that he had a surgical scar from when his appendix ruptured as a child. He was described as being fair haired, blue eyed, 5'10" tall and 136 lbs. Alexander was sent to Fort Garry for basic training, with his officer reporting: "This man has proven himself to be quite capable in his training. Has a good attitude toward army life. With further training, he should be a first class soldier".



Alexander was next assigned to the Canadian Infantry Training Centre at Camp Shilo, Manitoba July 1944. While he met all the training requirements, his officer remarked: "Very quiet and backwards. Would be a good soldier if he could overcome nervousness". Alexander received 14 days embarkation leave that October before being transferred to Camp Debert, Nova Scotia in November. He was shipped overseas during the Christmas period, disembarking in the U.K. 31 December 1944 and posted to the Canadian Infantry Training Regiment.

After a few weeks training in the U.K., Alexander was flown to Northwest Europe and taken on strength by the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR) 24 February 1945.

The RWR, also known as the Little Black Devils, along with the other 7th Brigade battalions (Regina Rifles and Canadian Scottish) of 3rd 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 with reinforcements, the RWR battled their way through Normandy and helped liberate Channel ports.

The Little Black Devils had participated in the Battle for the Scheldt and spent most of the winter in static operations near Nijmegen, Netherlands before moving out with their 7th Brigade and 3rd Infantry Division in February 1945 as part of the First Canadian Army under Operation VERITABLE. They had just finished clearing Moyland Wood and were conducting training exercises around the ruins of the German city of Cleve when Alexander joined them as a replacement Rifleman.



The RWR and 7th Brigade remained reserve during the next phase of the Rhine offensive, Operation BLOCKBUSTER. The Allies had decided to seize two crossings over the Rhine River with the main effort in the north in the Emmerich-Wesel sector. The Little Black Devils were finally advancing the evening of 27 March, crossing the Rhine by means of a pontoon bridge that the engineers had constructed. Once across they were ordered to capture the village of Netterdan, as a precursor to a larger operation designed to seize the town of Emmerich the following day.



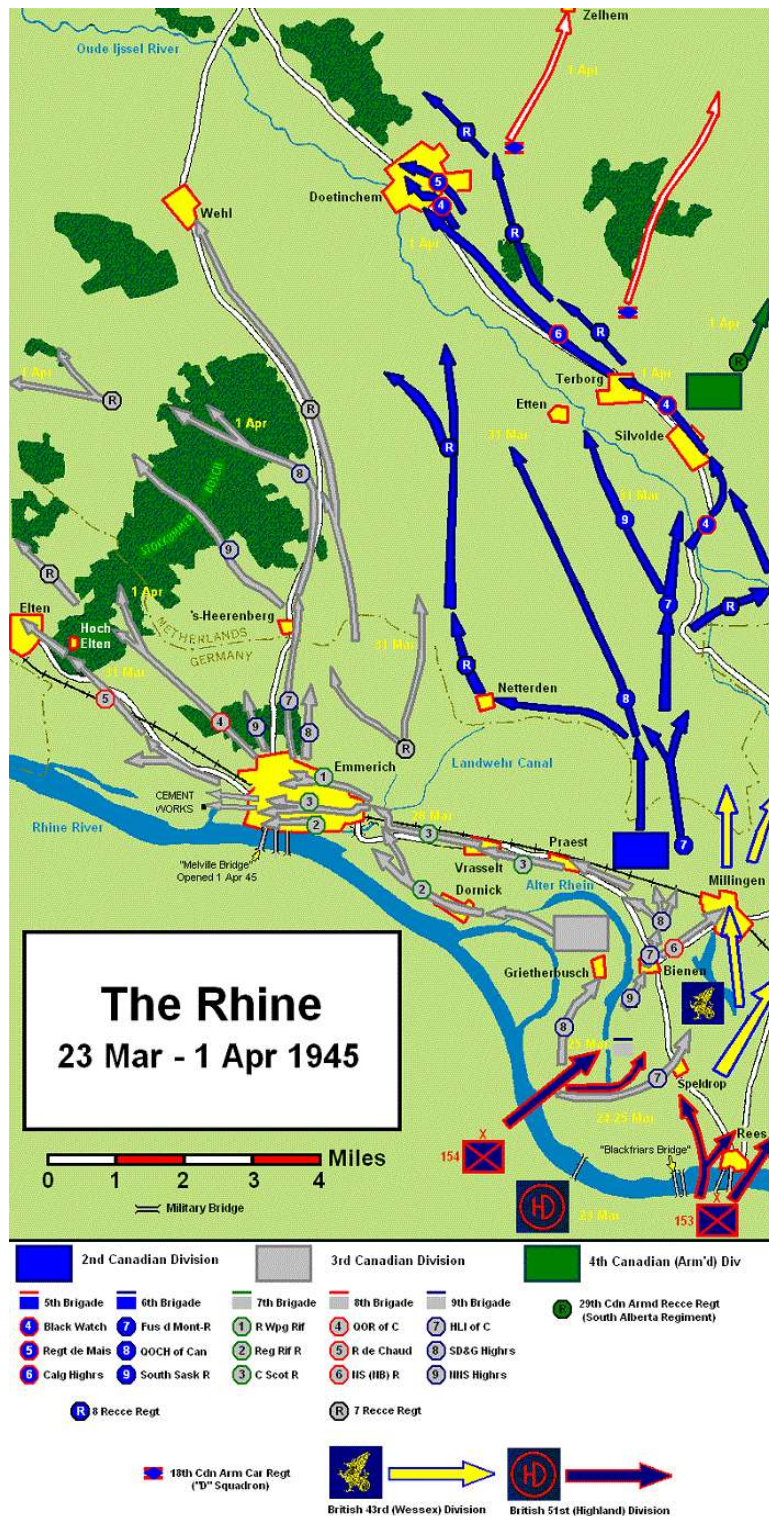
Rhine River pontoon bridge 1945

The RWR made a two-phase attack on the night of 28 March, securing their objectives and capturing numerous German prisoners. The three 7th Brigade battalions attacked Emmerich late in the afternoon on 29 March, with three battalions up, the RWR on the right, fighting through the north part of the small city (population 16,000). They fought against fairly heavy resistance before settling in for the night.

In the early hours of 30 March two RWR Companies were counter-attacked.

The Germans were not prepared to abandon their efforts, and throughout the day both RWR Companies were engaged in fierce fire fights. They were also on the receiving end of some self-propelled assault guns. Alexander Caldwell was among the casualties that day, killed at age 19.

After receiving news of her son's death, his mother Agnes was inconsolable. She had exchanged letters with Alexander when he was overseas and felt he had been pushed into the infantry instead of attending college and studying to be a minister as she had wanted. Requests for details as to how he died were not answered, but she did receive a personal letter from a Private Smith who had spent some time with Alexander in the U.K., offering his condolences and fellowship.



Rifleman A.P. Caldwell was temporarily buried at Vrsasselt Cemetery near Emmerich, Germany and later relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery near Nijmegen, Netherlands, grave reference **XX. G. 13.**



Alexander Caldwell's campaign medals:

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

Photo credit www.lestweforget1945.org

Church candidate killed in action

SALTCOATS, Sask., April 9 (Special).—Word has been received by Mr. and Mrs. James Caldwell, Saltcoats, that their son, Rfn. Alexander Parke Caldwell, has been killed in action in Germany.

Born at Russell, Man., May 3, 1925, he received his education in Saltcoats and before enlistment with the Winnipeg Rifles in Winnipeg in April, 1944, was working as a machinist in Toronto. Last March he was accepted by the United church as a student for the ministry.

Surviving are his parents, two brothers, Pte. Robert, and James, Eleanor, at home.

Regina Leader Post, April 1945

Memorial at Saltcoats

SALTCOATS. — A memorial service was held at the United church for Rfn. Alexander Caldwell, killed overseas while serving with the Winnipeg Rifles. Rev. J. W. A. Henderson conducted the service. Members of the Canadian Legion and cadet corps were in attendance, and during the service filed past the flag draped communion table placing poppies thereon.

Regina Leader Post, May 1945



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

Newspapers.com

Photo Alexander Caldwell with courtesy of the Caldwell family

Saltcoats, Saskatchewan historical picture

<https://yourrailwaypictures.com/GrainElevators/sask.html>

Dominion Wheel and Foundry, Toronto, Ontario machine shop picture

<https://www.friendsofthefoundry.com/historic>

Royal Winnipeg Rifles <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-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*

Rhine River pontoon bridge 1945 picture

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pontoon_bridge_Rhine_River_1945.jpg

The Rhine Battle Map 23 March – 1 April 1945

<https://www.canadiansoldiers.com/history/battlehonours/northwesteurope/rhine.htm>

* Do you have a photo of this soldier or additional information please contact info@facestograves.nl