

Caldwell, James Gerald
Private
South Saskatchewan Regiment
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps
L/154510



James Gerald ("Gerald") Caldwell was born 14 August 1919 at Davidson, Saskatchewan. His father Christopher Harvey ("Harvey") Caldwell was from Quebec of Irish ancestry. He married Minnie Evelyn McDaniel at Parry Sound Ontario in 1911 and the couple moved west to Saskatchewan in 1916 to farm. Gerald was their only child and was raised around Carruthers after they relocated there, where the Caldwells identified with the United Church.



Gerald's father Harvey Caldwell

Gerald stayed in school until age fifteen, completing grade 9. He worked on his father's mixed farm for the next six years, earning some of his pay in livestock as the Caldwells struggled through years of drought during the Great Depression. Gerald's mother Minnie died in 1939 and his father came to rely on him to provide much of the labour and handle business transactions for their farm. Gerald's ambition was to become a carpenter.



Gerald was called up for home defence under the National Resources Mobilization Act, enrolling at Regina 17 April 1941. He completed his basic training there and was sent to the Royal Canadian Artillery Training Centre at Brandon, Manitoba in June where he became a Gunner.

By fall 1941 his father Harvey, then age 59, was struggling to keep the farm going without Gerald's help and couldn't afford to hire anyone after experiencing multiple crop failures. He had three quarter sections of land on long term lease with 330 acres cultivated, 26 cattle and 35 pigs. A formal request was made to the Department of National Defence to have Gerald excused from training to help with the harvest, and after their circumstances were investigated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, it was granted.

Gerald was posted to Red Deer, Alberta upon return to duty and spent a month at the military hospital there after contracting a severe case of scarlet fever in spring 1942. He decided to enlist for active service that fall, attesting 9 September 1942 at Red Deer, age 23. Gerald was then 5'7" tall and 158 lbs. He was reallocated to the Canadian Army Service Corps in Red Deer where he met his future wife Kathleen Isobel ("Kay") Murray, who was a Private with the Canadian Women's Army Corps, Administration section.



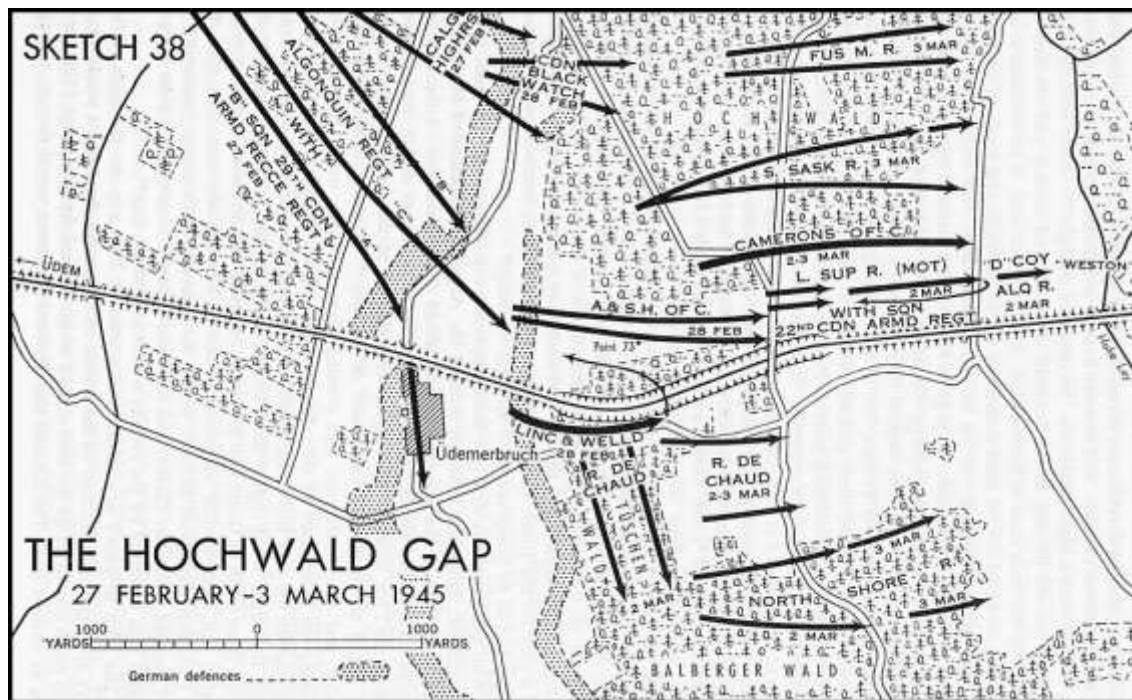
Canadian Women's Army Corps, Red Deer, Alberta 1942

Gerald qualified as a Driver Class III (Wheeled) September 1943 and after completing a Non-Commissioned Officer course that December, was made Lance Corporal for work as an Assistant Instructor. Gerald was hospitalized twice for several days each time in the winter of 1944 and reverted rank to Private 30 April. He was granted permission to marry Kay Murray that spring plus given two months leave for May and June. The couple wed at Drumheller, Alberta 12 June and had the summer together before Gerald entrained to Debert, Nova Scotia in the fall for overseas deployment.

Gerald disembarked in the U.K. 20 October 1944 where he joined the Canadian Army Service Corps Reinforcement Unit. He was re-mustered to the Canadian Infantry Corps 10 November given heavy casualties suffered by the Allies in the summer and fall of 1944. He trained with the Rocky Mountain Rangers, landed in Northwest Europe 31 December and was taken on strength by the South Saskatchewan Regiment (SSR) 10 February 1945.

The SSR fell under 2nd Canadian Infantry Division and had participated in the disastrous Dieppe raid in 1942. They landed in France 8 July 1944 as part of 6th Brigade, which included the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada and Les Fusiliers Mont Royal battalions. After helping the Allies force the Germans to retreat from Normandy, the SSR worked to clear Channel ports, including liberating Dieppe. They distinguished themselves at the Battle for the Scheldt in October and were assigned to static operations around Nijmegen, Netherlands in November 1944.

Gerald joined the SSR as a replacement soldier just as the Allies were breaking out from their Nijmegen winter positions with the Operation VERITABLE offensive, which involved the use of Kangaroos (RAM tanks) to transport infantry troops. The SSR travelled through battered Cleve, Germany which had been heavily shelled and bombed. Once the Reichswald had been taken they were staged around Bedburg, Germany for the next phase, Operation BLOCKBUSTER. 6th Brigade was ordered to take the high ground just south of Calcar and crossed the starting line at 04:00 hours 26 February 1945. Ground conditions were very muddy with intense rain while the enemy provided heavy mortar and small arms fire. Some of the Kangaroos bogged down in the mud and the troops had to transfer to other vehicles. All of 6th Brigade's objectives were quickly taken with 68 prisoners and approximately 100 enemy dead.



The SSR and 6th Brigade's next major attack as part of BLOCKBUSTER was at the Hochwald Gap 3 March 1945. 6th Brigade were to clear the woods to the east side, with the Camerons first attempt to get into the Forest meeting with heavy fire and opposition, forcing them back. The SSR began the second attack on the stronghold supported by a squadron of Sherbrooke Fusiliers tanks and were able to secure their objectives while sustaining a number of casualties. A total of 24 prisoners of war and 18 enemy dead were counted.



The Fusiliers Mont Royal passed through the SSR to secure the eastern edges of the Forest, and were later supported by the Camerons in a mop up operation. The SSR advanced until forced to settle down in a group of farm buildings near the outskirts of Xanten. Gerald Caldwell was among the SSR casualties that day, receiving rifle bullet wounds to his abdomen and buttock. He died from his wounds four days later on 7 March 1945, age 25.

H.Q. 405-C-18,737
D.R. 2 (B)

23 March 1945.

Mrs. Kathleen I. Caldwell,
Box 659,
Drumheller, Alberta.

Dear Mrs. Caldwell:

Further to this Headquarters' telegram of the 13th instant informing you of the regretted death of your husband, L.154510 Private James Gerald Caldwell, in keeping with the policy of the Canadian Army of informing the next-of-kin of all details of battle casualties, the following paragraph informs you of the wounds sustained by Private Caldwell.

According to information obtained by this Headquarters from Canadian Army Medical Authorities your late husband died as a result of bullet wounds to the abdomen and left buttock.

Please accept my sincere and heartfelt sympathy for the irreparable loss you have suffered.

Yours sincerely,

RP
R.T.E. Hickle-Lyne
(R.T.E. Hickle-Lyne) Colonel,
Acting Director of Records,
for Adjutant-General.

ND/JA

Private J.G. Caldwell was temporarily buried at Bedburg, Germany and later relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery near Nijmegen, Netherlands, grave reference **VII. D. 14.**



Photo courtesy Alice van Bekkum

Gerald Caldwell's campaign medals:

- 1939-45 Star
- France-Germany Star
- War Medal
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal/Clasp

Caldwell Lake, Saskatchewan was named after Gerald as a geo-memorial site. His name is included on the Carruthers, Saskatchewan Honour Roll.



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

Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial <https://svwm.ca/casualty-display/?ID=A000007025>

Town of Davidson, Saskatchewan picture 1923 <http://www.prairie-towns.com/davidson-images.html>

Canadian Women's Army Corps, Red Deer, Alberta 1942 picture <https://www.reddeer.ca/about-red-deer/history/history-of-red-deer/centennials-and-anniversaries/red-deer-during-the-wars/>

South Saskatchewan Regiment cap badge, war diary, images and information <http://www.saskatchewanmilitarymuseum.ca/SSR/>

Buchanan, G.B. (1957). The March of the Prairie Men. Digital version: <http://www.saskatchewanmilitarymuseum.ca/SSR/history/mpm.html>

The Rhineland Operation Blockbuster map and information <https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/Victory/Victory-19.html>

"Bomb" Sherman Tank, Sherbrooke Fusiliers picture <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/war-articles/canadia-sherman-tank.html>

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