

**Clark, Fred Watson**  
**Sergeant**  
**South Alberta Regiment**  
**29<sup>th</sup> Armoured Reconnaissance**  
**Regiment**  
**Royal Canadian Armoured Corps**  
**M/45361**



SOUTH ALBERTA REGIMENT  
(29th Cdn Arm'd Recce Regt.)



Fred Watson Clark was born in Stettler, Alberta, 27 April 1909. He was the only child of Fred Clark and Mary Anderson Watson. Fred's parents were both born in Ontario before moving west and marrying in Lacombe, Alberta. Unfortunately Fred's father died young at 35-years-old in 1912, leaving his mother Mary to raise him on her own. She moved back in with her parents Robert and Bessie Watson along with her two sisters in Edmonton, with the family of Scottish heritage. Fred had a Presbyterian upbringing, and later identified with the United Church of Canada.

Fred attended school in Edmonton, Alberta until he was seventeen, and joined the local Militia with which he maintained a long term association.



He began his career with Stinson's Bakery in Edmonton as a routeman in 1932, driving a regular daily route delivering bread and other baked goods. Stinson's became known for their bakery tokens which were redeemable for one loaf of bread.

*Courtesy bankofcanadamuseum.ca*

Fred married Frances Olive Martin, who was from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in Edmonton 10 May 1934. Their son William (Bill) Robert Clark was born 21 May 1935 and Bill's grandmother Mary continued to live close to them in Edmonton. Fred enjoyed some sport and target shooting in his spare time, while continuing to work for Stinson's as a routeman.

He finally got a promotion to salesman in 1939, holding that position until enlisting with the Canadian Army the next year.

Fred attested with the Canadian Active Service Force in Edmonton, Alberta on 19 June 1940 at age 31. 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' 8" tall and weighed 156 lbs at that time, with good development.



The South Alberta Regiment (SAR) assembled in Fred's hometown of 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. Fred was made acting Corporal 11 September 1940.

*Prince of Wales Armouries, Edmonton*

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.

Fred was sent to command training at Camp Borden, Ontario 29 October 1940 and rejoined his Regiment in Nanaimo 10 December, just in time for nineteen days furlough to spend with his family in Edmonton.

The SAR relocated to Niagara, Ontario May 1941, and settled into their new barracks at an empty canning factory. They were primarily assigned guard duties while there to protect critical infrastructure from potential enemy sabotage. Corporal F.W. Clark's rank was confirmed in September 1941 and was qualified as wheeled driver Class III at that time. Fred was then sent to Woodstock for a four week wheeled instructor course in October and was qualified as a Driver Mechanic Class I in December.

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. 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. Fred returned to Camp Borden for a seven week training period January – March 1942 to qualify as an armoured vehicle unit instructor.

Fred had two stays at the Debert Hospital; the first for twelve days in June 1942 with influenza, and the second time for eleven days in August with a sprained neck that was twisted while wrestling.

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. Fred was described as a "steady and capable NCO" on his evaluation.

Fred was made acting Lance Sergeant 15 April 1943 while the Regiment was at one of their camps south of London, England. He was then promoted to full Sergeant in August. Fall 1943 saw the Regiment shift stations north to the Norfolk area for a couple of months, where Sgt. Fred Clark was involved in echelon work as part of the Regimental Headquarter (RHQ) Squadron. He is standing on top of his truck with back turned in this picture, while a Dispatch Rider (DR) poses for the camera.



Echelons at work, Norfolk, 1943. Sergeant Fred Clark resupplies a Ram tank from his 15 cwt lorry while a DR poses for the camera. Statistically, the twelve DRs had the most hazardous job in the unit. More than half were killed or injured in vehicle accidents.

*29<sup>th</sup> Armoured Recce Regt. (SAR) in Norfolk, U.K.*

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. That month Fred had his rank of Sergeant confirmed.

The SAR was ordered to waterproof its vehicles on 20 May 1944 so that they would be able to drive off landing craft through water onto a beach. Sergeant Fred Clark would have been involved with the laborious preparation of the numerous vehicles assigned to his RHQ Squadron.

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.

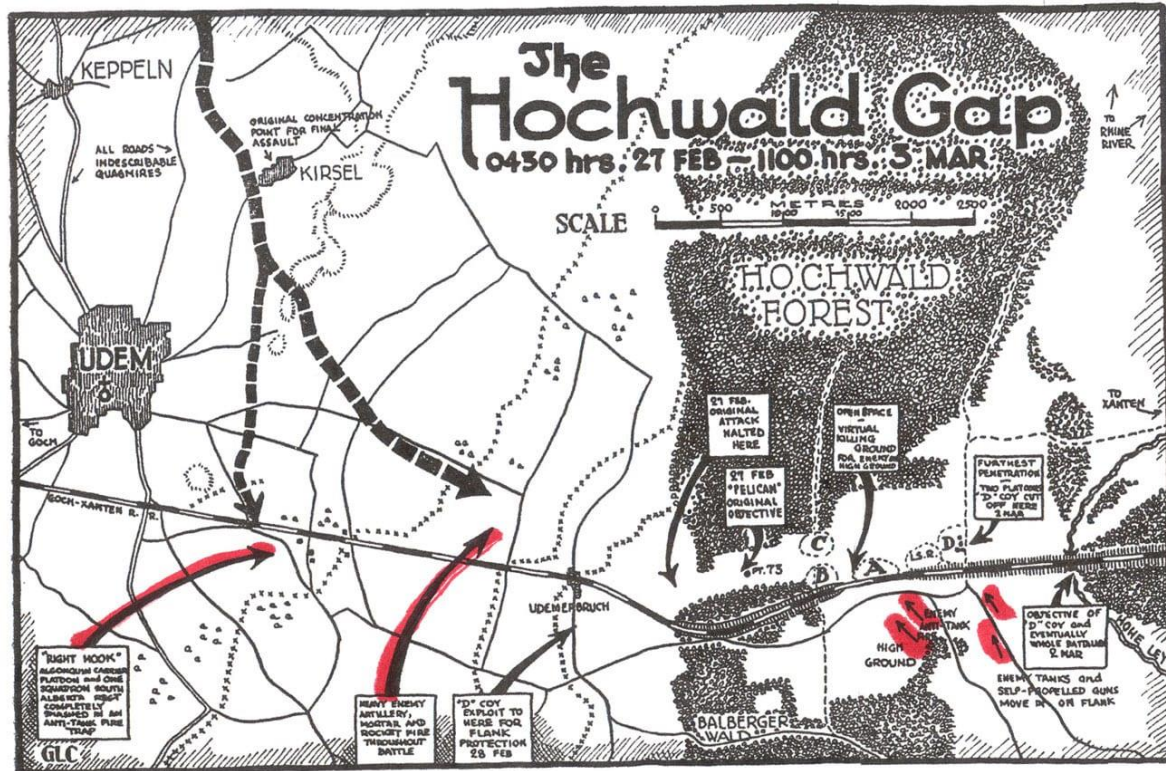
BLOCKBUSTER kicked off 0430 hours, 26 Feb 1945. The first two phases of the attack were completed by 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Divisions plus 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, including the capture of the high ground above Uedem in the face of stubborn German opposition. The way was 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 Trooper hooking cable to tow a Sherman 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

Shelling continued from both sides and the echelons, including Fred's HQ Troop, had to resupply forward units. In his diary for 27-28 February 1945, Trooper George Gallimore of Recce Troop described what it was like for the men engaged in this work: "Desperately muddy. We were used as carriers of ammunition. We left at first light for about five hours, the odd shell coming in... We are in a field with RHQ and are being shelled constantly... Went up all night and stayed all night with B Squadron (sic). Stayed all night and mortared and snipers. Pulled out in the morning."

On 1 March 1945, the German artillery continued without pause and the Regiment lost several more casualties. Sergeant Fred "Beans" Clark of HQ Troop, C Squadron, a prewar member of the Edmonton Fusiliers who had been with the South Albertas since the beginning, was killed when he was caught by shell fragments outside his tank. He left behind a wife and son.

Sergeant F.W. Clark was temporarily buried near Udem, Germany, then relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery near Nijmegen, Netherlands, grave reference **XXI. B. 4**.



*Courtesy Clark Family Tree, Ancestry Public Profile*



## **FACES TO GRAVES**

Stichting Faces to Canadian  
War Graves Groesbeek

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

Stinson's Bakery token

<https://www.bankofcanadamuseum.ca/collection/artefact/view/1965.0216.00030.000/canada-stinsons-bakery-1-loaf-bread-december-1-1967>

Graves, Donald E. 1998. South Albertas – A Canadian Regiment At War

Civilian Military Intelligence Group – Hochwald Gap map

<https://civilianmilitaryintelligencegroup.com/10742/the-battle-of-hochwald-gap-one-of-the-largest-armor-engagements-you-probably-have-never-heard-of>

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

Sgt. F.W. Clark pictured with his medals, including 1939-1945 Star, France-Germany Star, Volunteer Service Medal, Defence Medal and War Medal.



*Courtesy Clark Family Tree, Ancestry Public Profile*