

Elchuk, Alex

Private

The Calgary Highlanders, R.C.I.C.

M – 39751



Alex Elchuk was born 16 July, 1916 in Desjarlais, Alberta, Canada, the son of Theodore and Dora Elchuk, both born in Austria. He had three older brothers, William, George and John, a younger brother Metro and two older sisters, Jennie and Mary with a younger sister, Annie. He also had an older step brother, Mike. His mother died in the autumn of 1935 when Alex was seventeen years old.

He was Roman Catholic but did not go to church until he went into the army.

After 8 years at school, he left at the age of fourteen in order to work on the family farm. He himself owned 160 hectares of land in Wandering River, Alberta and planned to settle there after the war. In his free time he liked to play basketball, read and write, smoke a cigarette, with a drink sometimes.

In 1940 Canada introduced the National Resources Mobilization Act; available men were asked to register for military service, where in the first instance, recruits would be used to defend the homeland. Later, these men were sent to serve overseas. One of them was Alex Elchuk. On 17 April, 1941, Alex, then twenty two years old, reported for service in Calgary, Alberta and was given the army number: M600521. At that time he had been living in Desjarlais and working on his father's farm as a single man. He was described in the records as 1.76m tall, weighing 73 kilos, with blue eyes, dark hair and a light skin colour; he had a scar on his upper lip. He expressed no preference for any particular army unit.

It is interesting that in his application form he indicated that he spoke Ukrainian but that he could not read it. Although his parents were born in Austria, the family name occurs frequently in Ukraine and very possibly the language was spoken at home.

His first 60 day training took place in the Camrose Training Centre no. 131, Alberta.



Alex continued with a more advanced training at A-18 ATC (Advanced Training Centre) in Dundurn. During his stay there, he twice received an AWOL note (absent without leave) and once lost three days pay. On 26 August, 1941 he was placed with the Rocky Mountain Rangers, a reserve infantry regiment and stationed in Kamloops, Nanaimo and Westminster. In October and November he went on paid leave for fourteen days. In November he was again a day late returning to barracks and lost a day's pay. On 6 December he was taken to the camp hospital with severe flu. In April, 1942, Alex was stationed in Colwood Camp, British Columbia. He obtained his truck driving license in March 1943.

In July the same year, Alex was sent on special service to the island of Kiska in Alaska, USA which at that moment was occupied by the Japanese army. He was part of an enormous American-Canadian force that was sent by boat from Nanaimo to Adak, Alaska. The Canadian force was made up of the Winnipeg Grenadiers, the Rocky Mountain Rangers and the Canadian Fusiliers, known as the Greenlight Force. On 16 August, Kiska was captured and the Japanese fled.



Embarkation to Kiska

The Greenlight Force stayed on in Kiska to construct roads amongst other tasks. Alex returned to Canada on 25 January, 1944 and was given thirty days paid leave. His service as a Rifleman with the Kings Own Rifles ended in April 1944.



Kiska patch

On 19 July, 1944 Alex returned to active service and had to fill in a supplementary form, this time in Torino; he was again medically examined and given a new service number: M39751.

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, Alex Elchuk, 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 19 July 1944 A. Elchuk
(Signature of Recruit)

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

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

Witness A. Brown PT A. Elchuk
(Name) (Rank) (Signature of Recruit)

As a Rifleman in the Kings Own Rifles, he embarked 23 December, 1944 on the ship that would bring him to Great Britain; he arrived on New Year's Eve. He stayed there just two months as a Private in a training camp before travelling to the European mainland. On 13 March 1945 he is placed with the Calgary Highlanders regiment, which at that time was involved in Operation Veritable and fighting around the Reichswald region of Germany.

After a period of very heavy fighting, it was finally possible to cross the Rhine at the end of March and a huge force could begin with the liberation of the eastern and northern parts of the Netherlands. The Canadians moved via Uft, Terborg and Gaanderen in the direction of Doetinchem.

On Easter Sunday, 1 April, 1945, the Canadians reached Doetinchem via the Terborgseweg and were awaited on the eastern side of the town by members of the resistance. After a short discussion, forces surrounded the town and a group of Canadians moved towards the centre. They were immediately met with considerable resistance. The Germans had blocked the roads with trams, filled with concrete. The Canadians used flamethrowers among other weapons in order to repulse the enemy. Dozens of Germans were killed and many buildings burned down. Nine Canadians also died. It took until the following midday, Monday 2 April, before Doetinchem was freed.



Canadian forces arriving at Terborgseweg, 1 april 1945 (Photo: Hans Hendriksen ©)

One of the nine Canadians killed was Alex Elchuk. On 2 April he died in the streets of Doetinchem and was temporarily buried there next to school "Oosseld" on the Dennenweg.



About a year later his father, Theodore, received the news that his son had been reburied in the Canadian Military Cemetery, Groesbeek, plot **XIX. C. 16.**

Alex Elchuk was awarded the following medals:

- 1939 – 45 Star
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp
- France & Germany Star
- War Medal



Monument in the city of Doetinchem

IN EVERLASTING MEMORY OF OUR BELOVED BROTHER



FACES TO GRAVES

Stichting Faces to Canadian
War Graves Groesbeek

Life story by Sigrid Norde, Research Team Faces To Graves

Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

National Library and Archives Canada

<http://www.calgaryhighlanders.com/history/highlanders/1939-45/dcompany.htm>

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<http://www.hanshendriksen.net/>