

**Rowe, Wilbert Berton**  
**Lance Corporal**  
**The Calgary Highlanders**  
**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**  
**B – 119864**



Wilbert Berton Rowe was born on April 24, 1925 in Little Current on Manitoulin Island, Ontario. He was the third child of Henry Edgar (Ted) Rowe and Lily Adaline McVey. Wilbert had two older brothers, Elmer and Clarence, and one brother, Harold Edgar (also serving overseas in the Canadian Army) and one sister, Edna Adeline. The family attended the United Church of Canada.

Wilbert went to school until Grade 8, when he was 15 years old. He then went to work on the family farm.

On December 2, 1943, Wilbert enlisted in Toronto, Ontario, for active duty in the Canadian Army. He was then 18 years old, single and still living with his parents.

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

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

I, Wilbert Berton Rowe, 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 2nd December 1943 Wilbert Berton Rowe  
 (Signature of Recruit)

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

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

Witness Harold Edg Wilbert Berton Rowe  
 (Name) (Rank) (Signature of Recruit)

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

at Ontario, Canada this 2nd day of December 1943

[Signature] (Signature of Magistrate, Justice or Attesting Officer)  
[Signature] (Office or Rank and Unit or appointment)

N.B.—ATTENTION IS DRAWN TO THE FACT THAT ANY PERSON WILFULLY MAKING A FALSE ANSWER TO ANY OF THE ABOVE QUESTIONS IS LIABLE TO A PENALTY OF SIX MONTHS' IMPRISONMENT.

**O. H. F. COMPLETED** **FINGERPRINTED** **DEC 9 1943** **M.D. 2 NOM. ROLL** **2**

**THIS SOLDIER WILL NOT BE 19 YEARS OF AGE WITHIN 1944**

After his registration, Wilbert was medically examined. This inspection showed that he was a healthy young man with blue eyes and dark brown hair. He was 6ft. tall and weighed 172bn. He had a mole under his right collarbone.

Wilbert began his military career as a gunner at the gunnery training centre in Petawawa, Ontario. On May 14, 1944, he was transferred to Camp Debert, Nova Scotia. On June 25, Wilbert boarded a ship that would take him to the United Kingdom. There he was assigned to The Winnipeg Grenadiers as a Private. Wilbert spent a relatively short time in England. On August 31, 1944, he made the crossing to mainland Europe and arrived in France a day later. On September 4, he was assigned to the Calgary Highlanders regiment.

The Calgary Highlanders, active at the front in France since July 6, 1944, were in Dieppe at that time.

For many Canadian fighters Dieppe still is a black page in history. In August 1942, more than 900 Canadian soldiers were killed there during Operation Jubilee. On September 3, 1944, the Calgary Highlanders held a memorial service at the Canadian cemetery, which had been maintained by the residents of Dieppe all the years during the occupation.

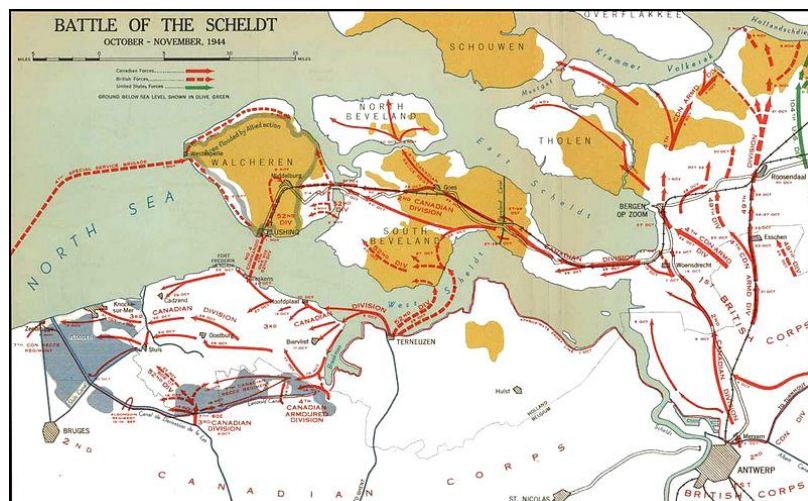
Wilbert was part of a large reinforcement unit that was desperately needed. In the weeks leading up to their arrival in Dieppe, the Calgary Highlanders suffered huge losses, including along the River Seine in France.

The peace in Dieppe was short-lived. In the early morning of September 5, when it was pouring rain and it was cold, they were transported by truck to Montreuil, 44 miles 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. In the end, they failed to take Dunkirk. On September 18, the troops left Loon Plage by truck for Antwerp, taken by the British on September 4, through the fields of Ypres, which clearly bore the traces of the First World War. Dunkirk would remain in the hands of the Germans until the end of the war. Wilbert was on his way to the Battle of the Scheldt with his regiment.

The regiment got some rest during three days. From Antwerp, Belgium, the Calgary Highlanders crossed the Albert Canal fighting, the start of the Battle of the Scheldt, to the Turnhout Canal towards Eindhoven, the Netherlands, where they stayed until October 3, 1944. Even now, the peace was short-lived. From 7 October the regiment was deployed at the Battle of Hoogerheide.

Seventy-two hours of gruesome fighting followed. The Calgary Highlanders lost 30 men that day. After October 10 Wilbert and his regiment got four days of rest. Wilbert was promoted to Lance Corporal on October 11. In the afternoon of October 14 they left again for Woensdrecht. They stayed at their position for a few days, 2 miles southwest of Woensdrecht. In the days that followed the regiment was on alert, but the situation remained relatively quiet. On the last day in the field, Wilbert carelessly used his Bren gun, rendering it useless. The next day, ten days after his promotion, he was reset in rank. But apparently this decision was made too soon. On October 22, Wilbert was promoted to Lance Corporal again. The Calgary Highlanders then got two days of rest in Ossendrecht.

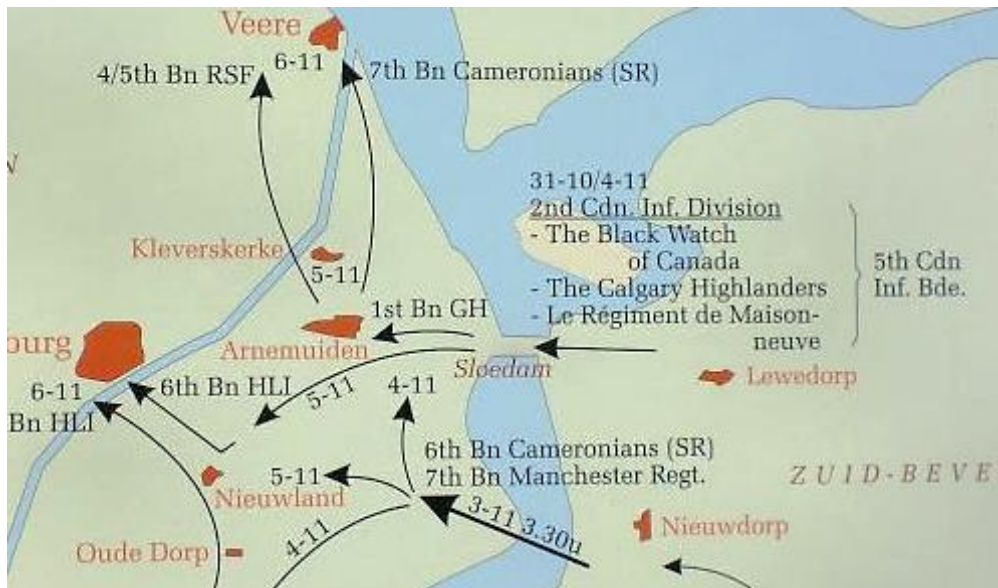
And while a huge force was leaving for Bergen op Zoom on October 23, the Calgary Highlanders were the regiment that led the battle towards the Oosterschelde. Their assignment was to conquer the terrain from



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

In the days that followed it was cold and wet. Wilbert and his regiment fought their way along the track towards Kruiningen. On October 29 they crossed the Canal through Zuid-Beveland.

The Battle of the Sloedam started on October 31.



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

On the morning of November 1, the Highlanders managed to secure the west side of the dam, but on November 2 they failed to advance beyond the beachhead at Walcheren. Finally British commandos landed on Walcheren and they expelled the Germans. With hindsight this made the Battle of the Sloedam unnecessary. It cost the lives of 107 Calgary Highlanders.

For a few days of rest, they were stationed in Lierre, southeast of Antwerp, Belgium from November 4. That afternoon, much to the amusement of the men and the local population, a group of bagpipers played in the market square. In the evening there was time for further relaxation with music and a drink. In the night of November 10 to 11, the entire regiment left for Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

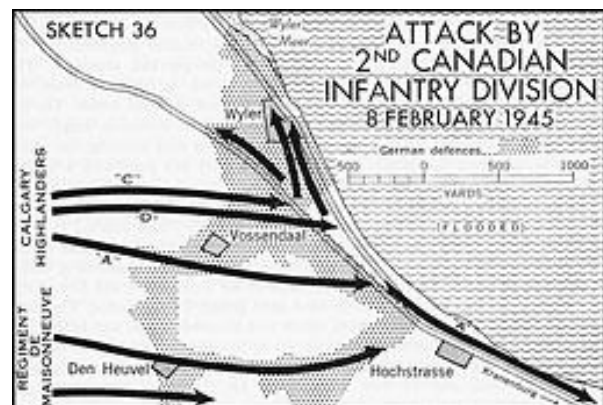
Initially, the Calgary Highlanders were stationed in houses along the Rijksweg in Malden. They were used to guard bridges over the river Maas at Malden and Grave. There were rest days and there was training with a new weapon, the WASP flamethrower. Apparently there was also time now to investigate what had happened to Wilbert's Brengun on 21 October. There was a disciplinary penalty. He had to give up ten days' pay.



Throughout the winter, the regiment was deployed to guard the border at Groesbeek. Two weeks on, one week off. As Christmas approached, it began to snow. The men had no winter uniform and because their dark uniforms stood out against the white landscape, they wore their underwear over their uniforms and white towels over their helmets during patrols. On Christmas Eve, when the Calgary Highlanders were on patrol along the front at Groesbeek, the German soldiers across the street started a serenade.

The Canadians answered this by firing back with rifles, grenades and mortars. The next day, the Canadians brought two bagpipers to play for the Germans. On New Year's Eve, the Germans started shooting at exactly noon. According to eyewitnesses, you could read a newspaper by the light of all that artillery. After 5 minutes the Germans shouted: "Happy New Year, Canada". On January 10, the Calgary Highlanders left the front line for a week of rest in Nijmegen.

From February 1, Wilbert and his regiment started preparing for Operation Veritable. From the village of Berg en Dal they left for the border and stayed in the woods about three miles from Wyler, Germany, waiting for what was to come. On February 8 at 5 am the attack on Wyler was launched.



The Battle of Wyler turned out to be more difficult than expected and lasted eight hours, fifteen Calgary Highlanders were killed. The Highlanders stayed in the ruins of Wyler for two more days and then returned to Berg en Dal and Nijmegen.

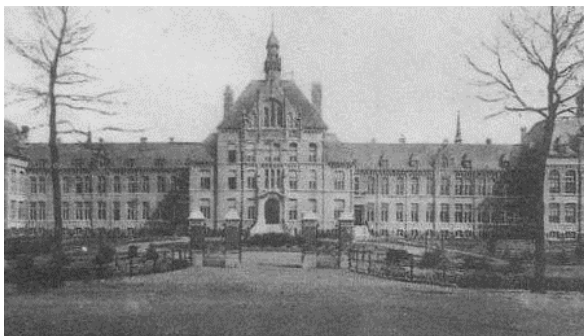
On February 18, the regiment left for the Moyland forest. In the middle of the night they took up their positions and for the next 48 hours they patrolled, there was some skirmishing with German soldiers and they shelled Moyland Castle.



*Moyland Castle, December 6, 2020*

After Moyland the Hochwald followed. A dense forest, with sometimes only a few yards of visibility, so there was a good chance of being ambushed. This was where Operation Blockbuster started. The goal of the Calgary Highlanders was to take the western edge of the northern fringe of the forest. Just after midnight, on February 27, the regiment set off. It was cloudy and there was no moonlight to shine the men by, the farms they passed in the open countryside seemed deserted. Only in the morning light did they encounter resistance from German soldiers, but they managed to reach their goal, struggling through mud and snow, and at ten thirty in the evening, after twenty-four hours, a hot meal could finally be eaten. 200 German soldiers were captured, twelve Calgary Highlanders were killed in the Hochwald that day.

Wilbert was seriously injured that day in the Hochwald. With a gunshot wound to the head, unconscious and with minimal heart rate, he was initially treated at the No 10 Field Ambulance and the No 18 Canadian Field Ambulance Advanced Dressing Station. But the doctors there could not do enough for him. The next day Wilbert was transferred to the No 6 Canadian General Hospital in Sint-Michielsgestel, located in the Institute for the Deaf. Doctors who specialized in neurosurgery were present here.



*The Institute for the Deaf in Sint-Michielsgestel in 1910*



*The temporary military cemetery in Sint-Michielsgestel*

But the brain surgeons could not heal the gunshot wound in Wilbert's head. Wilbert Berton Rowe died on March 5, 1945. He was nineteen years old. He was temporarily buried in Sint-Michielsgestel.

His brother Harold Edgar returned home safely after the war.

On October 23, 1945 Wilbert was reburied at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **XVI. G. 4.**

The following text is on his headstone:

HE GAVE HIS LIFE FREELY  
THAT WE MIGHT LIVE IN PEACE.  
WE LOVED HIM DEARLY



Wilbert received the following awards:

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



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

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

Sources:

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