

**Walker, Thomas Laurie**  
**Private**  
**The Calgary Highlanders**  
**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**  
**M – 7824**



Thomas Laurie (Laurie) Walker was born on June 5, 1912 in Calgary, Alberta. His parents, Thomas Laurie and Sarah Jane, married on May 16, 1911 in Calgary. They were both of Scottish descent. Father Thomas Laurie was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, and died on December 14, 1928. Laurie was left alone with his mother in Calgary at the age of sixteen. He had no brothers or sisters. His father's parents still lived in Scotland and two uncles in England and China. The family was a member of the Presbyterian Church.

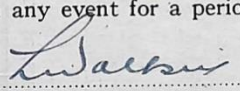
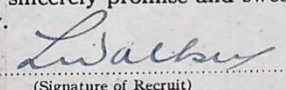
Laurie attended the City High School in Calgary. After Grade 9, he left this school at the age of fifteen and then followed three years of evening classes at a Business College to become an accountant. He also took a typing course.

When Laurie went to night school, he was at work during the day. He started his career as a bicycle courier and shop assistant in a butcher's shop. He also took newspapers from the printer to points of sale. After finishing his evening school, he worked as an administrative assistant at an oil and gas company for five years. He then did the same work at a meat processing company for three years. Before joining he spent the last three years as a streetcar driver with the Calgary Electric Railway.



*Streetcar on 8th Avenue, Calgary, 1912*

On August 20, 1943, Laurie enlisted in the Canadian army for active duty in Calgary. He indicated that he wanted to become a tram driver again after the war and that the company had promised that he was welcome.

DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY MAN ON ATTESTATION	
I, <b>Thomas Laurie WALKER</b> , do solemnly declare that the above particulars are true, and I 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 <b>20th August 1943</b>	 (Signature of recruit)
OATH TO BE TAKEN BY MAN ON ATTESTATION	
I, <b>Thomas Laurie WALKER</b> do sincerely promise and swear (or solemnly declare) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty.	
Witness <b>Josephine Sgt</b> (Name) (Rank)	 (Signature of Recruit)

Laurie was thirty-one years old and single at the time of application. He lived with his mother at 822-Boulevard North in Calgary. He was described as a sturdy young man with a pleasant, cooperative attitude, reliable and with a great sense of responsibility. He was 5 ft. 7 tall and weighed 158 lbs. In his spare time he liked playing basketball, horse riding, hiking or hunting. He collected stamps and pictures of cars. His wish was that he could follow administrative courses during his service and he seemed, with his experience, very suitable for that.

After applying, Laurie began his basic training in Calgary and Grande Prairie, Alberta. After seven weeks of training, it said in his report that he was making progress. He was a mature and wise soldier who could handle responsibilities. In December 1943, after a short leave at Christmas, a subsequent report recommended training him for the intelligence service. He was reliable, efficient and sensible. He had great sense of judgment and had good contact with the other men in the camp. Moreover, he was used to studying hard. But before that, he was first transferred to Woodstock, Ontario, in January 1944, to train as a truck driver and mechanic. When he passed this training, he was transferred to Camp Ipperwash, Ontario, on March 4, 1944, for further infantry training. From May 8 to June 10, he trained as an officer in the intelligence service at the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario. Unfortunately, Laurie could not meet the high standards of the course. The advice in the report was that he could better be deployed as a truck driver with the Canadian infantry overseas.

From June 27 to July 12, Laurie was granted leave to say goodbye to his mother. On August 4, 1944, he boarded a ship that took him to the United Kingdom, where he arrived on August 11. Laurie had a relatively short stay in England. More than two weeks later, on August 30, he came ashore in France. On September 1 he was added to the Calgary Highlanders regiment.

The Calgary Highlanders were located near Dieppe, France at the time.

Dieppe. For many Canadian fighters a black page in history. In August 1942, more than 900 Canadian soldiers were killed here. Landing on the beach at Dieppe was a disaster. Badly prepared and with little air support. The Calgary Highlanders, who boarded but never reached the beach because they were held back as reserve troops, were haunted by the terrible memories of that day for years to come. On September 3, 1944, they held a memorial service at the Canadian cemetery, which was kept by the inhabitants of Dieppe for all these years during the occupation.

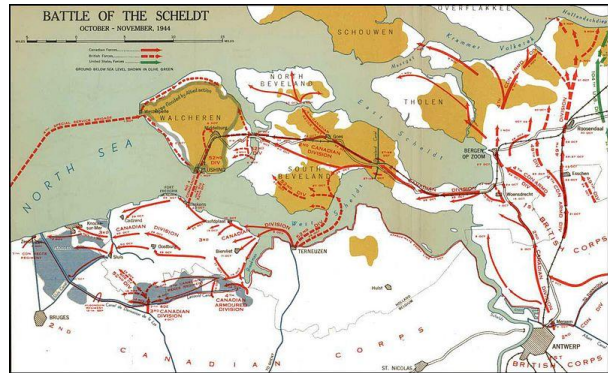
Laurie was part of a large reinforcement unit. It was badly needed. In the weeks before arriving in Dieppe, the Calgary Highlanders suffered enormous losses, including along the River Seine in France.

The rest in Dieppe was short-lived. In the early morning of September 5, in heavy rain and a cold, they were transported by truck to Montreuil, 42 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. Ultimately it was impossible to capture Dunkirk. On September 18 the troops left by truck from Loon-Plage for Antwerp, occupied by the British on September 4, through the fields of Ypres that still clearly bore the traces of the First World War. Dunkirk remained in the hands of the Germans until the end of the war. Laurie and his regiment were on their way to the Battle of the Scheldt.

The regiment was given some rest for three days. From Antwerp, the Calgary Highlanders fought their way across the Albert Canal, the start of the Battle of the Scheldt, to the Turnhout Canal in the direction of Eindhoven, where they stayed until October 3, 1944. Even then, the peace was short-lived. From October 7, the regiment was deployed at the Battle of Hoogerheide.

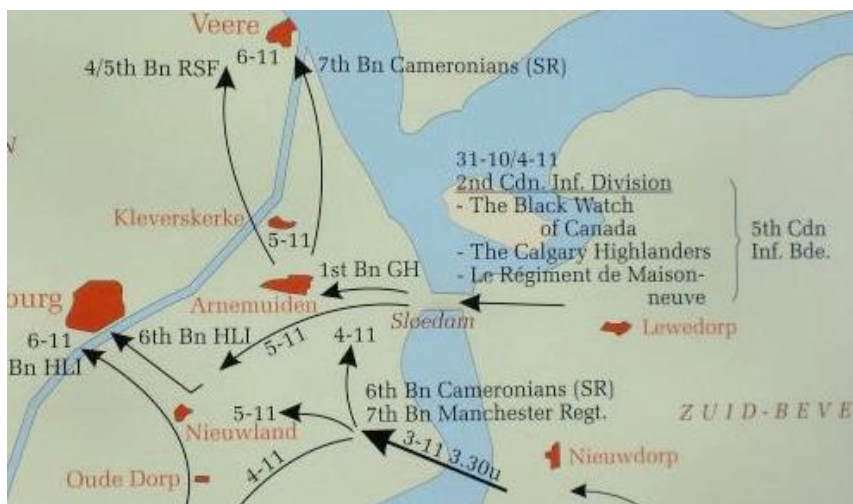
Seventy-two hours of gruesome fighting followed. The Calgary Highlanders lost 30 men those days. Laurie and his regiment were given four days of rest after October 10. In the afternoon of October 14, they left for Woensdrecht again. They stayed at their position for a number of days, two miles southwest of Woensdrecht. In the days that followed, the regiment was on edge, but it remained relatively quiet. The Calgary Highlanders then rested in Ossendrecht for two days.

And while an enormous force was leaving for Bergen op Zoom on October 23, the Calgary Highlanders were the regiment leading the way in the battle towards the Oosterschelde. Their task was to conquer from Woensdrecht the terrain that was bordered by the Oosterschelde and the railway line towards Walcheren. Much of the land had been submerged or was extremely wet. On the map it was shaped like a coffin and the battle was later renamed the "Coffin Show".



In the days that followed it was cold and wet. Laurie and his regiment fought their way along the railway line towards Kruijningen. On October 29 they crossed the Channel through South Beveland. The Battle of the Sloedam started two days later.

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 next day the Calgary Highlanders were deployed. They also did not get further than halfway the dam. Fighting was so close to each other that hand grenades could be thrown back before they exploded.



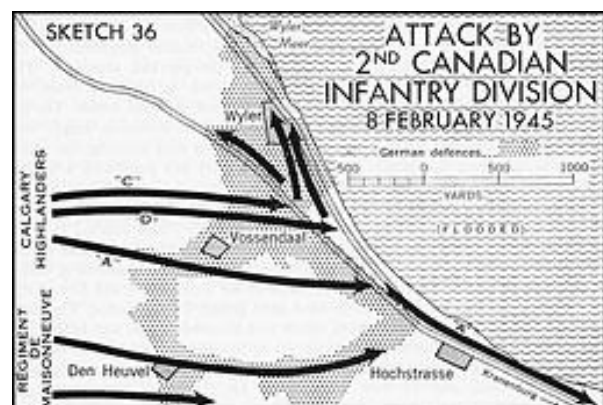
In the morning of November 1, the Highlanders managed to secure the west side of the dam, but on November 2 they were unable to get beyond the bridgehead on Walcheren. Eventually British commandos landed on Walcheren and drove out the Germans. This made the Battle of the Sloedam unnecessary with hindsight. It took the lives of 107 Calgary Highlanders.

After this terrible battle, Laurie ended up in the Nijmegen area. Initially, the Calgary Highlanders were stationed in houses along the road between Nijmegen and Malden. They were used to guard bridges at Malden and Grave. There were rest days and there was a training with a new weapon, the WASP flamethrower. Throughout the entire winter, the regiment was deployed to guard the border at Groesbeek. Two weeks on, one week off.

On December 6, Laurie was hospitalized. He reported he had (chronic) bronchitis. But there was more to it. Since The Battle of the Scheldt, Laurie had suffered from fears and extreme exhaustion (battle exhaustion). In the trenches around Groesbeek he was afraid of noises and then he had no control over his body and so he had to hand in his Bren gun. After more than a week, Laurie was released from hospital and returned to his regiment.

As Christmas approached it started to snow. The men did not have a winter uniform and because their dark uniforms contrasted with 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 serenaded across the street. 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 twelve midnight. Eyewitnesses said you could read a newspaper by the light of so much shooting. 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, preparations for Operation Veritable started for Laurie and his regiment. From Berg en Dal they left for the border and stayed in the woods about three miles from Wyler, Germany, waiting for things to come. On February 8, at 5 a.m., the attack on Wyler began.



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



Wyler

One of the thirteen Calgary Highlanders killed in Wyler was Thomas Laurie Walker, thirty-two years old. He was temporarily buried in the Canadian Military Cemetery in Nijmegen.

On July 27, 1945, he was reburied at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **V. A. 10.**

The text on his gravestone reads:

THE LORD GAVE  
THE LORD TAKETH AWAY  
BLESSED  
BE THE NAME OF THE LORD

*Groesbeek - 18 February 2021*



Laurie received the following awards:

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