

**Derrick, Claude Wilbur**

**Private**

**North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment**

**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**

**G50171**



Claude Wilbur Derrick was born Feb. 7, 1924, near Canterbury, York County, NB. the son of Richard Derrick and May Isabel Shannon. Claude's parents were farmers of English and Irish descent. Richard was one of over 100,000 orphaned or abandoned children sent from the UK to Canada between 1869 and 1932 under the Home Children program intended to boost the population in the colonies. Claude had two siblings, Robert Earl Derrick and Margaret Pearl (Irvine). Derrick's family attended the United Church. After completing grade eight at age sixteen, Claude went to work on his father's farm as was common for boys at that time. Claude's niece Norma Crandlemere (born Derrick) was ten years younger but clearly remembers her uncle and that he liked to play the guitar and sing.



*Claude Derrick at Camp Utopia near Pennfield New Brunswick.*

On June 10, 1942, Claude enlisted in the Canadian Army at the No. 7 District Depot in St. John and three days later was sent to the Canadian Army Basic Training Centre, CA(B)TC in Fredericton. In August he was transferred to Camp A-30 in Utopia for advanced training. Instruction included the use of Sten Guns, PIATS, machine guns, rifles, mortars and driving a variety of tracked and wheeled vehicles.

In the army, Claude was making \$1.30/day. He had set up a joint RBC bank account with his mother and was now sending her \$20 each month. Claude also purchased Victory Bonds and a \$1000 life insurance policy.

In March 1944 Claude was transferred to a training camp in Debert NS and then on May 1st was sent overseas. Upon leaving home he said to his father "Dad, whatever you do, look after my horse." He landed in the UK six days later and was placed with the Canadian Infantry Reserve Unit (CIRU). In late June he was transferred across the channel to France and on August 27th, placed with the North Shore (NB) Regiment.

Arriving when he did, Claude would have been with the NSR as they pushed the Germans out of Normandy. Historian C. P. Stacey wrote that on August 26th, Field Marshal Montgomery assigned the Canadians the responsibility of capturing all ports and destroying all German forces along the English Channel between Le Havre and Bruges. These ports had to be captured to open up more supply lines to the advancing Allied troops. This included eliminating the new German V1 and V2 rocket bases that were now firing daily into southern England. On August 31st the NSR crossed the River Seine and advanced north back towards the English Channel. Two of their targets in northern France were Boulogne and Calais which were extremely well-fortified ports that formed part of the German Atlantic Wall. Boulogne fell after a week-long battle and Calais was captured on Sept. 26th.

In October 1944, the Canadians were given the task of clearing the north and south shores of the Scheldt River that flows along the Dutch/Belgium border and into the North Sea. Antwerp was a major shipping port 50 miles upriver and the Allies needed it to support the invasion of Germany. The city had been captured by the Allies in September but the 50 miles of river access were still controlled by the Germans. After a month of brutal, deadly fighting in mud and the rain, the Scheldt River delta was cleared and on November 28th, 18 ships with 10,000 tons of supplies arrived at Antwerp. The first ship into the port was the Canadian ship Fort Catarauqui. Wikipedia records 12,873 Allied casualties (killed, wounded or missing) in the battle of the Scheldt; 6,367 were Canadian.

In November the NSR moved northeast to the Nijmegen area of the Netherlands to prepare for the assault on Germany. It was wildly busy and

resembled England before D-Day with the buildup of thousands of troops and tons of supplies. On Feb. 8th, 1945, as part of Operation Veritable, the Canadians pushed across the border into Germany and were now taking control of the Rhineland (western Germany south of the Rhine River). Claude would have participated in these attacks and three weeks later would likely have fought in Operation Blockbuster that included the deadly battle at Keppeln, Germany on Feb. 26th.

By February 28th the NSR as part of the Canadian 3rd Division had moved southeast from Keppeln and was advancing towards their next objective the Balbergerwald.

The Balbergerwald was the southern portion of the Hochwald, a thickly forested ridge that became a defense barrier preventing access to the Rhine River six miles to the north. The forest was surrounded by a heavy concrete barrier. The attack would begin on March 1st and in preparation, the regiment moved to an assembly area located along the rail line that separated the Hochwald from the Balbergerwald. (See Will Bird Map #10). Pte. Claude Derrick would have been part of this attack.

In the early morning of March 1st, the NSR entered the forest and immediately met strong resistance. The Germans had dropped paratroopers, snipers with automatic rifles, throughout the woods. These snipers were now everywhere. In addition, the Germans used airburst shells that would explode in the treetops sending a blast of shrapnel and wood fragments down onto the troops. Normally the men dug slit trenches (foxholes shaped like shallow graves) as shelters during artillery battles but the continuous shell bursts from above made the slit trenches almost useless. The forest was so dense that many soldiers, as well as whole platoons, would get lost for hours at a time and needed their compasses to find their units again. Every clearing was mined.

Despite resistance, loss of communication, confusion, and casualties the regiment drove the Germans out of the northwest section of the forest. On March 2nd they pushed further east and to the south.

It was still winter and at times the men would fall asleep at night from exhaustion and would be woken by the cold and find themselves covered in snow. According to regulations, soldiers were to be issued long underwear and gloves for winter combat but the Canadian 3rd division had been out of stock. The only soldiers with warm clothes were those who had received shipments from home. All others froze.

On March 3rd the NSR advanced further south and east and by 7 PM all companies had reached their objectives on the eastern edge of the forest. After several days of hard fighting, the German troops either surrendered or retreated.

Pte. Claude Wilber Derrick was killed in action during the fighting on March 2, 1945. It is believed that at the time he was driving a Bren Gun Carrier and hit a mine. He was 21 years of age. He was buried in Bedburg at the Temporary Burial Ground in Germany.

Claude's death was reported in the local York Co. newspapers and seventy years later Canterbury still remembers. Personal memories still surface and are now shared on Facebook.

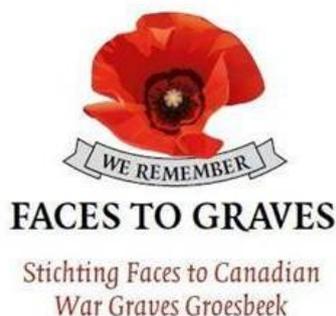
Gerald recalls: "I watched as he walked by our house on his way to the train to go overseas, never realizing we would never see him again. This would have been a 6.5 Km walk to the train station in Canterbury"

Faye stated, "I remember how sad the community was when we heard that Claude was killed in action. I was twelve years old"

For his service to Canada, Pte. Claude Wilber Derrick was awarded the following medals; the 1939-45 Star, France & Germany Star, War Medal 1939-45 and CVSM with Clasp.

Later Claude Wilber Derrick was reburied in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands, Plot **VII. H. 7.**

Biography by Bruce Morton, [brucehmorton@gmail.com](mailto:brucehmorton@gmail.com)



Biography made available for Faces To Graves, with courtesy of Bruce Morton.





*Nephew Thomas Rousell from Edmundston, New Brunswick and cousin Claude visited his grave in 2017.*