

Libby, Francis Lewis
Lance Sergeant
Calgary Highlanders
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps
G/19304



Francis Lewis Libby was born on 21 February, 1918 in Milltown, New Brunswick, Canada, the son of Clifford and Mary Christine Libby. His father was an electrician and of Scottish descent; his mother was Irish. His younger brother, Eugene Clifford was in the Canadian Marines (HMCS). Sadly, three other children of the family had died, Grace, Phyllis and one that died at birth.

Francis Lewis married Dorothy Louise Caswell on 10 July, 1944 and a son, Francis Brian was born.

Francis Lewis was a member of the United Church of Canada.

In the local Milltown school, Francis reached grade 10 and left school at the age of 17. During that time he had spent two years in the Canadian Cadet Programme.



He then went to work in a cotton factory; for the first two years he was on the night shift in the weaving mill. After that he had different jobs on the day shift, including control of the cotton and working in the office. At the same time he followed an evening course in commerce for three months.

In April, 1941 he attended an officer's training for thirty days in the Fredericton Training Centre; three months later on 25 July, he joined the Canadian army in Fredericton NB, 23 years old and still single, volunteering for active service overseas.

DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY MAN ON ATTESTATION

I, Francis Lewis Libby.....do solemnly declare that the above particulars are true, and I hereby engage to serve in the Canadian Active Service Force 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.

Witness L B Robertson

Date 25th July, 1941.....
Francis Lewis Libby
(Signature of recruit)

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY MAN ON ATTESTATION

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

.....Francis Lewis Libby.....(Signature of Recruit)

He stated a preference for the infantry and an interest in becoming an instructor. He was a healthy young man, 1.65m tall, weighing 60 kilo, with blue eyes and a light skin; there was a scar on his kneecap and a birthmark on his back. In his free time he liked to go skating, fishing or dancing; he also enjoyed reading detective stories. He said he hoped to work on the railway after the war.

Francis stayed for two years in Fredericton, first in Training Centre #70. He was immediately promoted to Lance Corporal and on 10 September upgraded to Corporal. On 2 October he was given a week's leave in order to get married.

At the end of his time in Fredericton, he was again promoted to the rank of Lance Sergeant. In August 1943 he was temporarily transferred to Long Branch, Ontario for training in the use of small hand weapons, returning to Fredericton on 11 September.

His had finished his basis training, followed a course in leadership and had become an instructor; his superiors found him ready for service overseas.

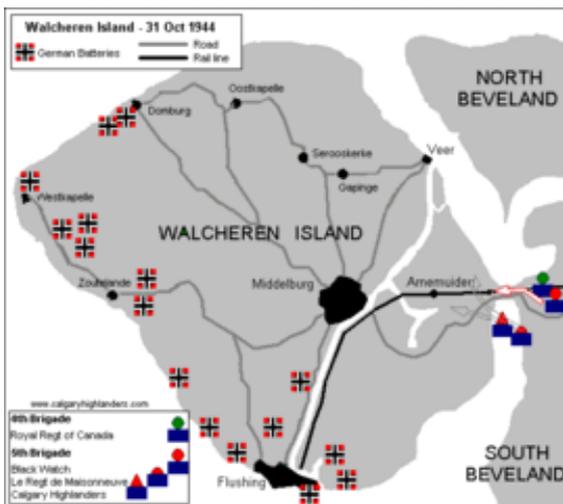
In November, 1943 Francis was transferred to Training Centre A 30, Camp Utopia in Pennfield Ridge, NB.

After five months, he moved again to Camp Debert from where he would board ship for Britain. He arrived there on 7 May, 1944. His wife was expecting their first child in Canada.

After a month in England, he felt he had had enough training and was ready to go into action. Six weeks later, after the birth of his son, he was sent to France arriving 31 August, 1944; four days later he was placed with the Calgary Highlanders.

The Regiment was having a day of rest in Dieppe; Francis was part of a group of reinforcements that had come to replace the enormous number of men killed some weeks before, in the fighting along the Seine river. In the early morning of 5 September, in heavy rain and cold, the troops were transported in trucks to Montreuil, seventy kilometers south of Dunkirk, their destination. The town was heavily defended by the Germans. The Calgary Highlanders, in sight of Dunkirk, fought from farm to farm under constant artillery fire but did not succeed in capturing it. (It would remain in the hands of the Germans until the end of the war). On 18 September, the troops were transported by truck from Loon Plage to Antwerp in Belgium which had been taken by the British on 4 September. They passed through the fields of Ypres, still showing marks of the first world war. Francis was on his way to take part in the Battle of the Schelde, after a three day rest period.

The Battle began near the Albert Canal. The Regiment fought its way to the Turnhout Canal where it stayed until 3 October. They then travelled via Lichtenberg and Braschaat to Hoogerheide and took part in the battle of Woensdrecht in the Netherlands. There was heavy fighting lasting



seventy two hours during which Francis lost thirty of his comrades. Via Ossendrecht, Kruiningen, and Schore, the troops reached the Sloedam on 31 October. This dam connected the islands of South Beveland and Walcheren. The first attack on the dam was made by the Black Watch regiment but they suffered such heavy losses that the next day, the Calgary Highlanders were ordered to take over. Fighting was at such close

quarters that the Germans were able to catch hand grenades and throw them back before they exploded. The next morning, 1 November, the Highlanders secured the west side of the dam but they were only able to reach the bridgehead on Walcheren.

In the end, the British commandos landed on Walcheren and drove the enemy out. In hindsight, the Sloedam battle was unnecessary and it had cost the lives of 107 Calgary Highlanders.



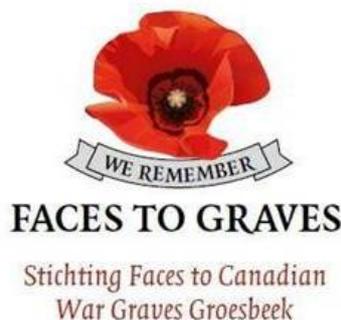
After these terrible battles, Francis with his regiment was taken eastwards to the area around Nijmegen in the Netherlands. The men were lodged in houses along the road between Nijmegen and Malden. They were first ordered to guard the bridges over the river Maas, between Malden and Grave. They were given rest days and in the same period, trained in the use of a new weapon, the WASP flamethrower. Throughout the winter, they also had to patrol the Dutch-German border near Groesbeek for two weeks at a time, with one week off in between.

At Christmas, it began to snow and the Canadians had only their conspicuous dark uniforms. For camouflage during patrols, they wore white underwear over their uniforms and white towels over their helmets. On Christmas Eve, while the Highlanders patrolled the border, they heard the Germans singing carols and responded with gunfire, grenades and mortars. The next night, the Canadians brought two bagpipers to play for the enemy. On New Year's Eve, the Germans began to shoot, precisely at midnight. According to eyewitnesses one could read a newspaper by the light of the gunfire. After five minutes the Germans could be heard shouting: "Happy New Year, Canada". On 10 January, 1945 the regiment was given a week's rest in Nijmegen but Francis Lewis Libby was not there to enjoy it. He was killed on 5 January, along the Dutch-German border. He was 27 years old and had never seen his son, Francis Brian.

He was buried first in Nijmegen and then on 30 July, 1945 in the Canadian Military Cemetery, Groesbeek, grave reference **I .C. 8.**

For the 1370 days that Francis Lewis Libby served in the army, he received the following awards:

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



Life story by: Sigrid Norde – Research Team Faces To Graves

Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

National Library and Archives Canada

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