

Rowley, John William Horsley
Lieutenant Colonel D.S.O
North Shore (New Brunswick)
Regiment
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps



John William Horsley Rowley was born Dec. 2, 1912, in Ottawa, the son of William Horsley Rowley and Elsie Wildman Ritchie. His father W.H. Rowley was president of the E. B. Eddy Company. John attended high school at Ashbury College, Ottawa, and received a BA and LLB from Dalhousie University. Upon graduation, he became a member of the Ontario and Nova Scotia Bar Associations and practised law for two years in Ottawa at Henderson, Herridge & Gowling Coy.

His records show that he spoke both English and French. On March 5, 1940, John married Audrey Nora Marjorie Fellowes B.A., LL.D., and they had two children Jane Rowley and John William Rowley. John had joined the Militia in June 1932, and when war broke out in 1939 he enlisted with the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. He was soon promoted to the rank of Captain. John had a brother Roger Rowley who also served with the Cameron Highlanders, and was later promoted to Lt. Col. of the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders. In the spring of 1940, Iceland, a neutral country, was captured by British troops. The British were worried that Germany would establish a mid-Atlantic naval and air force base. British troops were quickly replaced by Canadians who were put in charge of the occupation. From July 1, 1940 to May 1, 1941 Capt. Rowley served in Iceland with the Cameron Highlanders. Afterwards he became an instructor of the Company Commanders Infantry School and was promoted to Major on Apr. 24, 1942.

On June 6, 1944, Major Rowley landed with the Cameron Highlanders on Juno Beach. as part of the Canadian D-Day assault force. The Camerons provided machine gun and mortar support for the nine Canadian infantry

battalions (regiments). The following October, during the Battle of the Scheldt, Major Rowley and the Cameron Highlanders received special recognition for convincing a German garrison in Groede Netherlands to surrender.

In December, Major Rowley was promoted to Lt. Col. and given command of the North Shore (NB) Regiment. The first North Shore newsletter, called "Stag" was printed in January 1945 and it included a letter written by Lt. Col. Rowley that summarized the many accomplishments of the regiment. In February, 1945 the Canadians crossed the border into Germany. Their objective was to clear the Rhineland (western Germany south of the Rhine River). One of the most intense battles in the Rhineland was fought for the capture of the village of Keppeln. Allied intelligence had reported that there was no significant enemy activity at Keppeln and the assistance of tanks would not be required. On February 26, 1945, Lt. Col. Rowley received orders to advance and sent the North Shore's "B" & "C" Companies across a thousand yards of open farmland to seize Keppeln. Intelligence was wrong. The Germans waited until the North Shores were 150 yards from the German line and then opened fire. Everywhere North Shore men were falling dead or wounded. There was nowhere to hide.

"A" & "D" Companies were at least a mile behind when news of the slaughter arrived. The North Shore would need armoured support and a plan was created by Lt. Col. Rowley and Maj. J.W. Powell of the 1st Hussars Armoured Regiment. "A" Company was to lead a platoon of 42 North Shore soldiers mounted, exposed, on top of a squadron of tanks of the 1st Hussars Regiment. As the tanks approached the village the men were shooting like mad into the enemy trenches. Some of the tanks hit mines and blew up, some were destroyed by artillery and others got stuck in the mud. Only six of the fourteen tanks survived. Despite heavy losses the advance proceeded. Fighting continued house by house and by evening Keppeln belonged to the North Shore.

The cost was 28 dead North Shore soldiers and 56 wounded. Lt. Col. Rowley and Maj. J.W. Powell of the 1st Hussars were both awarded the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) for their actions.

Crossing the Rhine River in Germany was considered by many to be the second D-Day. On the evening of March 24th, 1945, the NSR, under the command of the 9th Brigade, prepared to cross the river near Rees, Germany. The men were loaded into troop carriers and driven to Kalcar, SW of Rees, where they transferred to Buffalos and Duks (all-terrain vehicles). At midnight the Buffalos and Duks headed for the Rhine River about 1 km west of Rees. While an artillery duel between the Germans and the Allies was still active, group after group were transported across the Rhine with little opposition. By 1:30 AM on March 25th the regiment

was across the river and ready to fight, but again there was surprisingly little enemy activity on the opposite bank.

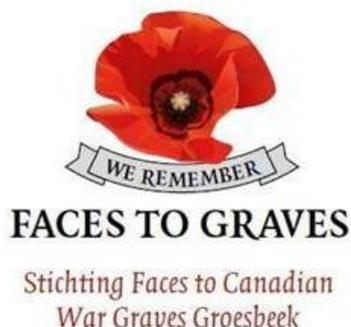
On the morning of March 26th, the NSR was preparing to move north with orders to capture the town of Millingen. The attack was to be launched after the Highland Light Infantry (HLI) had taken control of nearby Bienen, and then secured the start line for the attack on Millingen. The resistance in Bienen, however, was much stronger than expected.

The Germans had launched a counterattack assisted by 600 paratroopers and heavy artillery, and forced the NSR to delay their advance. Finally, at 12 noon the North Shore attack was launched. They were assisted by the Allied artillery who laid a constantly advancing barrage 200 yards ahead of the advancing troops. Because of the heavy German shelling Lt. Col. Rowley now decided to relocate regiment HQ. To notify brigade HQ of the move he decided to climb onto a nearby tank to use its radio. NSR radio operator Have Chiasson, who was standing nearby, stated "While on the tank a shell exploded and a fragment pierced the Colonel's heart. Lt. Col. Rowley was killed instantly". He was 32 years of age.

For his service to Canada, Lt. Col. John William Horsley Rowley was awarded the following additional medals; the 1939-45 Star, France & Germany Star, Defense medal, War Medal 1939-45 and CVSM with Clasp. Lt. Col. J.W.H.Rowley is buried in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, Netherlands, Plot **XVII. E.15.**

John's brother Roger Rowley continued to follow a military career after the war. He was promoted to Major General and was Commander of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade Group in Germany. He was also Director of Military Operations and Plans, Director of Infantry and Director of Military Training. In addition, Roger served as Commandant of the Canadian Army Staff College.

Biography by Bruce Morton, brucehmorton@gmail.com



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

Major John Rowley Convinces Nazis To Retire From Village in Holland

How a major of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, accompanied by a number of other Ottawa soldiers, convinced a company of Germans to give up a village in Holland is related in a despatch to the Toronto Daily Star by Frederick Griffin.

The major was John W. H. Rowley, son of Mrs. Rowley and the late W. H. Rowley, of Ottawa. He was accompanied on his mission by L.-Cpl. Eddie Sontag, nephew of Lt.-Col. E. R. MacNeill; Cpl. Tripp, of Ottawa, and a private named Rhimer, whose home address is not known, together with another man whose name was not mentioned.

The object of Major Rowley's visit to the Germans was to evacuate a number of wounded Canadian prisoners, and some German and Dutch civilian wounded. The village was the German-held community of Groede, and the incident occurred on Oct. 25.

Suspected Request.

In reply to a request from the Germans for a 24-hour truce to evacuate Dutch civilians through the Canadian lines, Major Rowley suggested the enemy withdraw from the village so that he could send in ambulances to get the wounded. He suspected the Germans' request was a stall to delay the evacuation of the Schelde. If the Germans got out, said Major Rowley, he would treat the village as an open town and would not fire on it.

Major Rowley was then detailed to find out if the Germans had carried out their agreement.

Telling his story of the venture to Mr. Griffin, Major Rowley said he started out with Cpl. Tripp, Cpl. Sontag, Pte. Rhimer and the other soldier, moved along a dike 1,500 yards and came under heavy shell fire. They worked back and tried another route. Hoisting a white flag, the little party of Canadian soldiers walked into a German platoon and got into Groede.

He outlined his request to a German medical officer, who could not act without the authority of the commanding officer. It turned out, however, the commander had been captured by a flanking move of the Canadians, and there was no one in authority.

Very Friendly Discussions.

"The whole thing was very friendly," said Major Rowley, "and



Major John W. H. Rowley

"we discussed matters in French, and they gave us supper."

The German medical officer finally came to agreement, lifted the mines from the road, and ambulances were sent in.

"I visited our wounded," the major said, "including a number of Ontario men, and found them fairly cheerful." He was led back to his own lines in the dark, the Germans taking his hand to guide him.

Major Rowley could not help taking a dig at the German medical officer when word was brought in the commander had been captured.

"I cheered them up by sayin 'Yes, we have the town surrounded now.'" The Germans shrugged hopelessly, and replied, "That settles it." Major Rowley said he added, "Yes, your goose is cooked."

Major Rowley also told Mr. Griffin of the good jobs being done by his carrier driver, Pte. William Hutchinson of Toronto, and his despatch rider, Pte. Roy Shea, son of J. E. Shea, 571 Wellington street, and the late Mrs. Shea. "They are both fine lads who are of great value to me," he said.

Pte. Shea was recently in the news as one of the first Canadian soldiers overseas to subscribe to the Seventh Victory Loan.

Brothers-in-Arms



—Photo by Minty Taschereau.

Lieut Roger Rowley, left, and his brother, Captain John Rowley, photographed at Lansdowne Park last night immediately before parading with their unit, the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.).