

Spencer, Clyde Alexander
Private
The Calgary Highlanders, R.C.I.C.
G – 1890



Clyde Alexander Spencer was born on 5 May, 1924 in Parker's Ridge, New Brunswick, Canada. Both his parents were of Scottish descent. His father, Harvey Tennyson Spencer was a First World War veteran and served in the Veterans Guards of Canada. When Clyde Alexander was just five years old, his mother Mary Elizabeth died in December, 1929. Together with his brother Leon George, he was brought up by his father and grandmother. In 1943, his father married again but Clyde Alexander preferred to stay with his grandmother. He was of the Baptist faith.

It went well at school and for ten years from the age of 6 to 16 he attended a school in Parker's Ridge. Although he liked school, he left during grade 8 in order to go to work and earn his keep. In the summer he worked on farms and in the winter as a lumberjack. In his free time he liked to play softball and used to fish, hunt and ski; he enjoyed reading books of fiction and newspapers. He did not drink. During the last five months before he joined the army he worked for Arthur Burnett in Springhill, NB and said he would like to go back to this employer after the war.

From Springhill, he reported for active service in the Canadian Army on 23 August, 1943 in Fredericton NB. Clyde Alexander was then nineteen years old and a single man.

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

17.

DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY MAN ON ATTESTATION

I, Clyde Alexander SPENCER, 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 23 August 1943

Clyde Spencer
(Signature of Recruit)

IN THE MILITARY

In the first interview, the duty captain wrote of Clyde Alexander that he found him a healthy young man, trustworthy, friendly, good humoured, cooperative and combative. He had never been seriously ill or admitted to hospital. He was 1.72m tall, weighed 62 kilos with grey eyes and light brown hair. He said he would like to train as a motorcyclist and mechanic and this was the recommendation he received from the officer.

His training began in Listowel, Ontario in centre A13 where he stayed for two months. He seemed suitable for a mechanic's training.

In November he was transferred to Camp Borden also in Ontario to continue his training and during the almost five months stay there he qualified as a class 3 driver and finished off his training as a mechanic; he was now considered suitable for service overseas. He was given a short Christmas leave.



Camp Borden, 1940

On 30 March, 1944, Clyde Alexander left transit camp Windsor and boarded the ship that would take him to England where he arrived on 8 April. His rank changed from Trooper to Private and he was placed with the Canadian Base Reinforcement Group. After three more months training, he was sent to France and arrived there on Friday, 14 July, the national day when France remembers the Revolution of 1789. For four years from 1940 on this day had passed in silence but on 14 July, 1944 it was again modestly celebrated in the liberated areas of Normandy.

A week after his arrival, Clyde Alexander was attached to the Calgary Highlanders who at that time were taking part in Operation Atlantic to the south of Caen in Normandy. After the fall of Caen, the Germans had retreated to the hills of Verrières and from there could observe all the allied troop movements. Also at Hill 67. Although since 1939 the Scottish kilt was no longer worn on the battlefield, the bagpipes sounded for the first and last time in this war on 19 July, accompanying the advance of the Calgary Highlanders up the hill. Thirty minutes after they had taken it, the Germans retaliated; a three day battle ensued and thirty one Canadian soldiers died on Hill 67. The Calgary Highlanders moved further south in the direction of Claire Tyson.

Claire Tyson is a village with stone farmhouses, lying in a valley with the de Laise river running through it. On 12 August, in very warm weather, the Highlanders walked all day and into the night without sleep; at 1.45 on a dark, misty night an attack was launched and Le Mesnil, a village to the north of Claire Tyson, was taken. The next day, at 14.00 the battle continued with the Canadians subjected to heavy fire from German units, but by evening the bridge over the river de Laise was reached and the village of Claire Tyson freed; the Highlanders were at last able to enjoy a well earned rest.

After that, in September the regiment was involved in the battles round Dunkirk and Ostend on the Belgian coast. From Bruges it moved by the outskirts of Antwerp in the direction of Hoogerheide where the battle of the Schelde was taking place; it was to last five weeks. Clyde Alexander had now been a month in Western Europe and was to take part in one of the most difficult battles of the whole war. The Canadians finally succeeded, together with the Poles and the British in opening the mouth of the Schelde river, thus allowing ships again to transport goods to the port of Antwerp. After this battle in which the Calgary Highlanders suffered heavy losses., they prepared themselves for a long winter in the Netherlands in the area round Nijmegen.

From 8 February, 1945, the Highlanders were part of Operation Veritable in the German Reichswald (forest). By the end of March after heavy fighting, it was finally possible to cross the Rhine and an enormous army could begin to liberate the eastern and northern part of the Netherlands. The Canadians moved via Ulft, Terborg and Gaanderen in the direction of Doetinchem.

On Easter Sunday, 1 April they reached the city via the Terborgseweg and were met on the eastern outskirts by members of the resistance. After a short consultation, a big force surrounded the town and the Canadians continued to the centre. They met with considerable resistance and the Germans had blocked the roads with trams, filled with concrete. The Canadians used flamethrowers and other weapons to try and disable the enemy. Dozens of Germans were killed and many buildings were burned out. Nine Canadian lives were lost. Not until the following afternoon, 2 April, was Doetinchem liberated.



Canadian troops at the Terborgseweg,
1 April 1945 (Photo: Hans Hendriksen ©)

One of the nine Canadians killed was the twenty year old, Clyde Alexander Spencer. He was so seriously wounded on Sunday, 1 April, on the streets of Doetinchem, that he was taken to the regiment's medical post, where he died the next day, 2 April. He was temporarily buried in Bedburg Hau in Germany. His father Harvey received a letter on 13 August, 1946 saying that his son had been reburied in the Canadian Military Cemetery in Groesbeek, in the Netherlands. Plot **XIV. A. 11**.

After 589 days active service, Clyde Alexander Spencer received the following awards:

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



Monument at the Mark Tennant Plantsoen, Doetinchem

BLESSED
ARE THE PURE IN HEART
FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD



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

Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

National Library and Archives Canada

<http://www.calgaryhighlanders.com/>

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