

E-Biography Assignment
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Alfred E. Killins

Alfred E. Killins was born in 1921 to Earl and Roxey Killins and lived his life in Nolalu, Ontario¹. Alfred enlisted for the war effort sometime in 1940 and served with the Lake Superior Regiment (LSR) during the war². Alfred was not the only Killins to enlist for the war effort, his younger brother Milford was either conscripted or enlisted in 1942 (family history is not clear on this matter) and his cousin Melvin enlisted in 1941³. His cousin Del was also conscripted in late 1944 but never saw active duty overseas⁴.

After Alfred enlisted the best estimates are that he and his regiment trained for about six months before being shipped to Camp Borden for further training in October of 1940⁵. The LSR served as a window of sorts into how ill prepared the Canadian military was for the war as during their initial training the LSR had to train with donated binoculars, target pistols, and running shoes and sports gear donated by the people of Port Arthur (modern day Thunder Bay)⁶.

Alfred and the LSR had to wait until August of 1942 to be deployed to Europe⁷, largely owing to the regiments conversion to a motor battalion in January of 1942⁸ and the subsequent training needed for the new equipment they received, specifically the fleet of Universal Carriers they were now equipped with⁹. In the meantime though, from 1940 until their deployment, Alfred and the LSR spent most of their time at Camp Borden training¹⁰. There were a few brief breaks in this training as in April 1941 the regiment became the first unit ever to mount a ceremonial guard on Parliament Hill as well as

1 Email, Ruth Alexander to Eric McAlister, September 21, 2014

2 Email, Alexander to McAlister

3 Email, Alexander to McAlister

4 Email, Alexander to McAlister

5 Thunder Bay Museum, "The Lake Superior Regiment, A History," *The Lake Superior Regiment, A History*, <http://www.thunderbaymuseum.com/exhibits/virtual-exhibits/lake-superior-regiment/>, September 24, 2014

6 Thunder Bay Museum, "The Lake Superior Regiment, A History."

7 Thunder Bay Museum, "The Lake Superior Regiment, A History."

8 Thunder Bay Museum, "The Lake Superior Regiment, A History."

9 Thunder Bay Museum, "The Lake Superior Regiment, A History."

10 Thunder Bay Museum, "The Lake Superior Regiment, A History."

being tasked with the defence of St. John, New Brunswick for a brief period¹¹. During the regiments time in St. John a special group from within the LSR was trained for an invasion of the French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. This invasion never happened as Charles DeGaulle opposed having Canadian forces on the islands and had his French Free Forces take the islands¹².

Once in Britain, Alfred and the LSR would have spent more time training as they were not sent into action until July 20 of 1944 when the unit landed at Normandy¹³ as part of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division¹⁴, the last Canadian formation to reach France¹⁵. It was at this point Alfred and his regiment became involved in the fighting on the road to Falaise just south of Caen, eventually leading up to Operation Totalize, an operation which sought to break the Canadians through to Falaise, eventually meeting up with American troops in the area, and consequently cutting off German troops¹⁶.

The fight on the road to Falaise was one of the major turning points for the allies after Normandy and it has even been stated that “Once the cork popped from the bitter bottle that was the Falaise Gap, in late August 1944, the campaign in northwest Europe changed irrevocably.”¹⁷

As part of the fighting attempt on the way to Falaise it was decided by General Simonds that the 4th Armoured Division and the LSR would mount a small scale operation to take the village of Tilly-la-Campagne¹⁸. This operation would accomplish two things, the first being it would, in Simonds words, get the unit into “the feel of things” as they were still moving to the front of the line, and the second being that the village stood on a low rise, thus by taking the village the enemy's ability to monitor

11 Thunder Bay Museum, “The Lake Superior Regiment, A History.”

12 Thunder Bay Museum, “The Lake Superior Regiment, A History.”

13 Thunder Bay Museum, “The Lake Superior Regiment, A History.”

14 Canada at War, “The Lake Superior Regiment,” *The Lake Superior Regiment – Canada at War*, <http://www.canadaatwar.ca/regiment/66/the-lake-superior-regiment/>, September 24, 2014

15 Stacy, C.P. *The Canadian Army, 1939-1945 : An Official Historical Summary* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1948), 205

16 Canada at War, “The Falaise Gap,” *WWII: The Falaise Gap – Canada at War*, <http://www.canadaatwar.ca/content-23/world-war-ii/the-falaise-gap/>, September 26, 2014

17 McAndrew, Bill, Bill Rawling, Michael Whitby, *Liberation: The Canadians in Europe*. (Montreal: Editions Art Global, 1995), 13

18 Stacy, C.P. *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol III The Victory Campaign: The Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1960), 204

Canadian troop movements would be minimized¹⁹.

Simonds may have also seen this operation as desirable as the order for a break-through operation on Falaise had not come yet but he knew it may not be far off as the Americans were having great success on their front and the strategic position of the village²⁰ could have aided such a break-through operation. Simonds also realized though that in the case of such an operation being called there would be “no holding back” and every reserve would be exhausted if necessary²¹. As such, he knew some casualties would be necessary in order to avoid a war of attrition²². Simonds decided the best way to minimize this risk would be to use the armoured divisions at night²³.

Further to the goal of taking Tilly-la-Campagne, it was also decided that some units in the 4th Armoured would also attempt to take the village of La Hogue²⁴, one unit of which was the LSR. Thus, on August 5th, patrols from the 4th Armoured attempted to enter Tilly while the LSR, supported by artillery fire and a squadron from the 22nd Armoured Regiment, attempted to take La Hogue²⁵. In the end, although some prisoners were taken from the 1st S. S. Panzer Division, the attacks met heavy opposition, failed their objectives, and did nothing more than prove that Germany still had strength in the area²⁶.

Alfred was killed in this fighting on August 5th along with five others from the LSR²⁷. Initially

19 Stacy, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol III The Victory Campaign: The Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*, 204

20 Stacy, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol III The Victory Campaign: The Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*, 204

21 Stacy, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol III The Victory Campaign: The Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*, 204

22 Stacy, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol III The Victory Campaign: The Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*, 205

23 Stacy, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol III The Victory Campaign: The Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*, 205

24 Stacy, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol III The Victory Campaign: The Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*, 207

25 Stacy, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol III The Victory Campaign: The Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*, 207

26 Stacy, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol III The Victory Campaign: The Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*, 207

27 Canada at War, “The Lake Superior Regiment.”

he was reported as missing in action and it is said that it took some time to find his body²⁸, perhaps owing to the fact the operation would have been overnight as mentioned earlier. The clearest indication of this, aside from family testimony, may be the fact that the telegram from the Minister of National Defence informing Alfred's parents of his death is dated September 2, 1944²⁹, almost a full month after he would have been reported missing. For his service Alfred received the following citations³⁰:

- The 1939-45 Star, given to soldiers who served for six months anytime between the start and finish of the war³¹
- The France and Germany Star, given to any soldier who performed a day of service in France, Belgium, Holland, or Germany between D-Day and the end of the war³²
- The Defence Medal, which could be given for a variety of reasons, in Alfred's case it was awarded because he had done six months of service in Britain between the start and end of the war³³
- The Canadian Volunteer Medal as well as a silver clasp for the medal, the medal being given to any soldier who honourably served for 18 months voluntarily and the clasp being added for anyone who served 60 days overseas³⁴
- The War Medal 1939-1945, given to all full time personnel who served 28 days between the start at end of the war.³⁵

Alfred is also memorialized at the Thunder Bay War Memorial which is dedicated to the Lake Superior

28 Email, Alexander to McAlister

29 Veterans Affairs Canada, "Alfred Earl Killins," *Alfred Earl Killins – The Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Veterans Affairs Canada*, <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/2333610>, October 12, 2014

30 Veterans Affairs Canada, "Alfred Earl Killins."

31 Veterans Affairs Canada, "Campaign Stars and Medals (1939-1954)," *Campaign Stars and Medals (1939-1954)*, <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/medals-decorations/campaign-stars-medals-1939-1954>, October 23, 2014

32 Veterans Affairs Canada, "Campaign Stars and Medals (1939-1954)."

33 Veterans Affairs Canada, "Campaign Stars and Medals (1939-1954)."

34 Veterans Affairs Canada, "Campaign Stars and Medals (1939-1954)."

35 Veterans Affairs Canada, "Campaign Stars and Medals (1939-1954)."

Regiment³⁶. In addition, it was a common practice for many Northern Ontario townships to take on the names of soldiers who died in battle during the second world war as a means to honour them³⁷. One such township bears Alfred's last name and thus he is remembered Killins Township near Marathon, Ontario³⁸³⁹. Today, those wishing to pay their respects to Alfred can do so at the Bretteville-Sur-Laize Canadian War Cemetery in Calvados, France, just south of Caen⁴⁰.

36 Veterans Affairs Canada, "Alfred Earl Killins."

37 Email, Alexander to McAlister

38 Veterans Affairs Canada, "Alfred Earl Killins."

39 Email, Alexander to McAlister

40 Commonwealth War Graves Commission, "Killins, Alfred E.," *CWGC – Casualty Details*, <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2333610/KILLINS,%20ALFRED%20E>, September 24, 2014

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