

Cpl John Patterson Cleveland (Service # C48810)



John Patterson Cleveland was born September 17, 1926, in Toronto, ON, the son of William Bennett Cleveland and Lillian Maude (Patterson). William worked in the clothing business as a cutter. John was the youngest of three children with a brother William and a sister Marjorie. William Jr. served in the navy and Marjorie with the RCAF women's division in WWII. The family lived at 97 Linsmore Crescent in a quiet neighbourhood in Toronto's east end and attended the Anglican church. At age sixteen, John left school and worked for two years for Sangamo Electric that operated an electric motor business in Leaside. When not working, John liked skating, hockey, baseball, hunting, and reading history. He had a driver's license and liked motorcycles. Records show that John had also gained some military experience with the sea cadets.

In November 1941, John enrolled with the Non-Permanent Active Militia (NPAM). This militia was composed of volunteer soldiers who trained on weeknights, weekends, and at summer camps. They were paid and could be called upon for home defense. A year later it was discovered that John was underage. The military records show several dates of birth and include a note that he was discharged from the militia in December 1942 for being underage. A document signed by his mother states his birthdate as September 17, 1926.

John did not give up. A month later, in January 1943 he traveled to Kingston, ON, and enlisted for active duty wherever he was needed. Again, his birthdate was not correctly stated, his application was accepted, and he was in the army at sixteen years of age.

His aptitude test scores indicated that he had above-average ability, and he was placed with the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA) with the rank of Gunner. Basic training was completed at Camp No.32 in Peterborough, and afterward, he trained with Anti-Aircraft units, primarily near Halifax.

Records show that in February 1944, John was transferred to the Canadian Infantry Corps (CIC) and trained with the Infantry at Cornwall and Ipperwash, ON. The following July he embarked for the United Kingdom and was assigned to the Canadian Infantry Reserve Unit (CIRU). On August 12 John was transferred across the channel to Normandy, France, and three days later was placed with the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment. Arriving when he did, Pte Cleveland would have advanced north with the regiment and crossed the River Seine at the end of August.

Historian C. P. Stacey wrote that on August 26, 1944, General Montgomery assigned the Canadians the task of capturing all ports and removing all German forces along the French coast of the English Channel. These ports were needed to accelerate the movement of men and supplies to the front lines. The Germans were also using the coast to fire shells and launch V1 rockets across the channel into England.

The NS(NB)R was ordered to capture the fortresses at Wimereux, La Trésorerie, Wimille, Sangatte, and Calais, that formed part of the German Atlantic Wall. These objectives were all achieved by September 26, but the cost was twenty-five fatal casualties.

In October John fought in the brutal and deadly Battle of The Scheldt. The Canadians were ordered to clear 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 inland, and the Allies needed it to get supplies to the front. The city had been captured by the British in September but the 50 miles of river access were still controlled by the Germans. Following a month-long fight in the rain, the cold, the mud, and the flooded terrain, Gen. Montgomery nicknamed the Canadians the Water Rats. On November 8, the Scheldt River estuary was cleared and on November 28, 18 ships with 10,000 tons of supplies arrived at Antwerp. The cost was 6,367 Canadian casualties. In January 1945, John was promoted to the rank of Corporal.

On February 8, 1945, the Canadians invaded Germany and on the night of March 24/25, the NS(NB)R crossed the Rhine River into the heart of Germany.

In early April the Canadians turned northwest and crossed the border back into the Netherlands to capture all German-held regions and liberate the Dutch. The NS(NB)R and Le Régiment de la Chaudière were now ordered to capture the Dutch town of Zutphen on the east bank of the IJssel River. Zutphen is a fairly large town, and the river is partially diverted through a series of canals mainly on the south and the east sides of the city. These created natural defense barriers and all bridges over the canals had been destroyed.

There were many young German soldiers here. They were being trained at the nearby school for paratroopers and some were as young as fourteen. They were cornered, fighting with desperation, and were excellent shots as snipers and with machine guns.

The ground was too soft for tanks and so the attack proceeded without their protection. Allied artillery fired 25-pound shells into the town and the Germans responded with their artillery from the west side of the IJssel River.

On Friday, April 6, NS(NB)R and the Chaudières advanced on Zutphen from the east. The Chaudières led the attack into the heart of the town. North Shore B and D Companies advanced on their right flank. A and C Companies followed on the Chaudière's left flank. A blown bridge combined with intense German resistance soon brought the progress of all units to a halt.

On Saturday, April 7, North Shore C Company (with Cpl Cleveland) and Support Company were able to get their men and three carriers with machine guns and flamethrowers across a sunken bridge. After a short reconnaissance tour of the site, the carriers drove at full-speed into the defended streets of Zutphen while their Browning machine guns fired at almost anything that moved. Upon reaching their targets, they blasted full flame onto the enemy positions. The main defense positions were eliminated.

The snipers were still deadly, however. In Will Bird's book, *The North Shore (NB) Regiment*, Maj Oulton (CO of C Company) stated that an enemy sniper killed Cpl J. P. Cleveland, a first-class fighting NCO who had come through many attacks. Cpl John Cleveland was eighteen years of age. The War Diary records that by 1 p.m. on April 8, Zutphen had been cleared right through to the IJssel River.

Fifteen North Shore men were killed at Zutphen (Nine were either born in New Brunswick or lived there) Father Hickey wrote, "most had been picked off by German snipers." The next morning, Mass was held in the remains of the Zutphen schoolhouse. Hickey wrote, "As the men came up to Holy Communion, in each war-weary face I could read my own fondest hope, the hope that the end was near."

For his service to Canada Cpl John Patterson Cleveland was awarded the following medals; the 1939-45 Star, France & Germany Star, War Medal 1939-1945, and Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp. John Patterson Cleveland is buried in the Holten Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands, Plot I. G. 2.

Right: NS(NB)R soldiers cross a canal in Zutphen on April 7, 1945

Below: The Canadians Bridge which crosses De Grote Gracht (canal) commemorates the liberation of Zutphen by the Canadians on April 8, 1945.

