



John Robert Harrison—known as John—is born in London, Ontario, on May 25, 1922.

Initially, John states his birth date as May 25, 1920, in order to qualify for his initial enlistment as a reservist.

When his birth certificate is produced a few years later, the official date in his file is corrected.

In fact, John had already become active as a reservist in 1937.

On May 10 of that year—not yet fifteen years old—he enlists with the 1st Battalion S.A.R.

CANADIAN FIELD FORCE		FINGERPRINTED
ATTESTATION PAPER		WSG COMPLETED
1. Surname	Harrison	
2. Christian Names	John Robert	
3. Present address	137 9 Ave Medicine Hat Alberta Canada	
4. Date of birth	May 25-1920 CHANGED to 25 May 1922 Birth Certificate	
5. Place of birth	Canada Ontario London	
6. Religion (state denomination)	Christian Science	
7. Trade or Calling	clerk	

S.A.R. stands for Search and Rescue.

In the 1930s, there was no official, standardized military or civilian search and rescue (SAR) program in Canada. That decade was marked by drastic cuts to defense budgets resulting from the Great Depression.

Records indicate that his parents are 'living apart together'; his father, William Harrison, is a conductor for the Canadian Pacific Railway. John's mother, Anna W. Harrison, German by birth. Together, John's parents have six sons and one daughter. John grows up in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

English is spoken at home, and his religious affiliation is recorded as 'Christian Science'.

*Christian Science is a faith based on the book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. Published in 1875, this book—along with the Bible—contains the movement's fundamental principles.*

After primary school, John attends high school for three years. In his spare time, he works as a salesman at a clothing store.

At high school, he takes various courses—including Latin—and delves deeper into the Christian Science faith. Softball and Lacrosse are the sports that interest him.

John has no other hobbies. In a later interview, he states that after the war, he would like to become a journalist or perhaps remain in the army.

He does not complete high school, as he signs up for active duty on January 26, 1940, and is assigned to the Calgary Highlanders (CH).

By then, he has already attained the rank of sergeant in the S.A.R.

His medical examination records a height of 6'2", weighed 185 lbs.

A small mole on his right cheek is noted as a distinguishing mark.

(Such a physical characteristic is recorded for potential identification)

After enlisting in Medicine Hat, John is transferred a week later to Calgary, Alberta, where the Calgary Highlanders' depot is located. There, he is hospitalized with a severe case of the flu. Thanks to the training he has already completed, John is rapidly promoted: Corporal in late January and Sergeant in April 1940.

John's file is rather disorganized. It is clear that he boards a troopship in Halifax in late August 1940 and sets foot on land in Gourock, United Kingdom, on September 4, 1940.

After a week's leave, John is having health problems. He is admitted to the Canadian Medical Centre at Camp Bordon in Hampshire. The training, the Canadians underwent in the UK, was intensive and varied. Following a brief leave just after New Year's Day 1941, John is hospitalized again and, in late January, is transferred to a sanatorium in Brighton, UK. His file does not contain a separate medical record card.

John is discharged in Brighton in mid-February 1941 and, a few weeks later, he is transferred to Richmond.

His file indicates that he receives comprehensive training.

He qualifies as a regimental signaller, as a driver of mechanized vehicles, as a motorcycle dispatch rider, and as a battle drill instructor.

In addition, John completes a course with an anti-tank artillery unit and a special course in Scotland in operating L.C.T 's.



(The Landing Craft Tank (LCT) was a revolutionary amphibious landing craft developed in mid-1940 at the direct insistence of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to enable the delivery of heavy tanks directly onto enemy beaches.)

In the summer of 1943, John returns to Canada. His file states that he is back in Calgary, Alberta, by the end of August 1943.

This time as an instructor at the infantry training center.

John is granted a few weeks of leave before being transferred to the infantry school in Vernon, British Columbia, effective from 1944.

Meanwhile, since late 1943, negotiations have been taking place at the government level to allow Canadian officers to serve in the British Army.

John had reported early on that he was willing to serve as an officer in a British regiment.

He is selected and his CANLOAN number is: CDN/80.

CANLOAN officers

In the autumn of 1943, the British Army faced a severe shortage of lieutenants and captains in the infantry.

Ranks associated with positions such as platoon or company commander. These infantry officers can be found in the front lines during actions.

The British Army had by then already been fighting on multiple fronts for several years, and losses in the aforementioned positions were heavy. With the planned invasion looming, this would pose a major problem.

In Canada, there was a surplus of these young officers, motivated and willing to participate in the fight.

After much British-Canadian consultation, the green light was given in February 1944 for the following setup:

- A maximum of 1,450 infantry and 50 logistics officers could be loaned out.
- Participation exclusively on a voluntary basis.
- Payment by Canada according to Canadian standards.
- Age limits: 33 years for lieutenants, 37 years for captains.
- British rules for promotion will be applied.
- If necessary, the officers can be recalled by Canada.
- The entire operation is given the code name CANLOAN.

A large number of applications was expected in Canada because many officers believed they could achieve faster promotion by participating in the fight. Others were so focused on deployment that they had themselves demoted in rank to be considered.

Nevertheless, the pre-estimated number of applications was not reached.

Ultimately, 623 infantry officers and 50 logistics officers were selected.

They were given a registration number starting with CDN and a sequential number based on their application.

The dedication and performance of the CANLOAN officers were beyond all doubt.

The list of decorations and promotions is long.

Their dedication and courage also had a dark side.

The balance: 128 killed in action; 310 wounded, 27 prisoners of war, and one missing.

Eleven of the fallen are buried in Holten.

Their gravestones can be recognized by the maple leaf on the stone, the registration number beginning with CDN, the designation 'Royal Canadian Infantry Corps', and the British regiment to which they were assigned.

On April 3, 1944, John and a number of other CANLOAN officers board the 'Louis Pasteur' in Halifax.

This ship takes them to Liverpool, where they arrive on April 10, 1944.

John is assigned to the 7th Battalion Argyl & Sutherland Highlanders. (A&SH)
With this unit, he lands in Normandy on June 9, 1944.

He is appointed commander of the carrier platoon and will remain so until his death on April 17, 1945.

The standard structure of a carrier platoon:

Personnel: approximately 40 men. Vehicles: 13 Universal Carriers.

The command group with 1 or 2 vehicles and 4 sections with 3 vehicles each.

Each section equipped with Bren guns, a 2-inch mortar, and an anti-tank weapon.



Then, John's file takes big steps on the timeline. To get an idea of what John experienced, we must follow the 51st Highland Division, specifically the 154th Brigade.

As part of the 1st Army Corps, they land on D-Day + 3 (June 9, 1944).

They are involved in many battles in Normandy. They take part in the crossing of the River Orne and battles at Bréville-les-Monts (June 11-12) and Colombelles (July 11). They also see action during the breakthrough to Falaise in August 1944 and the Battle of Le Havre.

In October 1944, they are deployed in the Battle of the Scheldt. In November 1944, they take part in Operation Guy Fawkes.

On the night of November 4 to 5, 1944, the operation was carried out by the British 51st (Highland) Infantry Division to drive the German troops out of 'The Island'. This is a swampy area between the Drongelen Canal and the Bergsche Maas, on the west side of 's-Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands.

John's file does not mention any of these actions. He must have endured them without much difficulty.

They are also deployed during the Battle of the Bulge.

The War Diary reads:

The 7th Argylls Battalion advanced along the road from Hives to Beaulieu and encountered strong and well-prepared resistance in Lavaux.

The village Lavaux was not captured by the Argylls until 7:00 PM. The advance continued on foot, and Beaulieu was reached at 1:00 AM on January 13. From Hives to Beaulieu, the battalion suffered 38 casualties, nine of whom were killed.

John Harrison's file provides a little more clarity of this action

Noted is on January 12, 1945: *transferred to the 175th Field Ambulance*.

It is clear that he has sustained injuries, a separate note regarding this cannot be found. On January 16, he reports back with the unit.

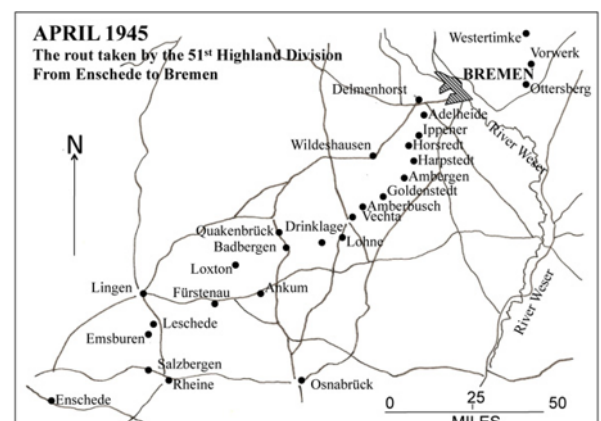
On February 10 and 11, the A&SH are deployed during the Rhineland Offensive. This operation intends to push the German troops back to the east side of the Rhine. On the southwest side of the Reichswald, they see action in the attack on the village of Hekkens.

Hekkens is a Dutch hamlet in the municipality of Gennepe and borders directly on the Reichswald, a large German state forest. The location is historically and strategically known primarily for the fierce fighting that took place there in February 1945 during the Second World War.

On February 12, 1945, John was officially promoted to 'Captain'.

The fatal day for Captain John Robert Harrison was April 17, 1945.

The troop movements of the 154th Brigade provide some information.



After the crossing of the Rhine the troop is allowed a short rest in Isselburg, Germany.

The division receives orders on April 3 '45 to assemble in the Enschede region. (NL) The planned advance of the division in Germany is as follows: Salzbergen, Lingen, Quakenbruck, Vechta, Wildeshausen, Delmenhorst, Bremen, and finally Bremerhaven.

The advance toward Delmenhorst is led by the 154th Brigade.

On April 17, 1945, the southern border of that place is reached from the direction of Harpstedt and Ippener.

Fierce fighting takes place here. Immediately north of Harpstedt lays the Luftwaffe Main Ammunition Depot (a gigantic ammunition depot in the woods).

The Germans try to hold their ground here. The Argylls has to fight fierce battles against German rearguards in this wooded area to secure the flanks of the advance.

Captain John Robert Harrison is 'Killed in Action' here. He is the last CANLOAN officer to be killed, a few weeks before the end of the war in Western Europe.

He is given a temporary grave at Harpstedt (D).

On August 23, 1946, he is reburied at the CWGC Canadian War Cemetery in Holten in plot 4; row H; grave 9.

He is awarded:

The 1939-1945 Star; the France-Germany Star; the Defence Medal; the War Medal 1939-1945; and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp.

His headstone reads:
**They challenged dead
And found eternal life.**



Sources:

www.cwgc.org; www.ancestry.com; www.canada.ca/library-archives; wikipedia, wartimesproject.com; codeword CANLOAN ISBN 1-55002-167-2