

*This story was written by Daria Valkenburg for the research project 'On the war memorial trail', see: [The WWII Soldier Born In Zbaraz Who Lost His Life During The Battle Of The Küsten Canal | On The War Memorial Trail Research Project..... with Pieter and Daria Valkenburg](#)*



Andrew Kerelchuk was born December 17, 1923 in Zbaraz, Manitoba, the son of Michael (Mike) and Tina (nee Stonoga) Kerelchuk. The only son in the family, Andrew had five sisters: Linda, Olga, Helen, Steffie, and Rosie. It was Olga's daughter, Barbara (Barb) Dobbie, who contributed a photo of her uncle.

Andrew grew up speaking English and Ukrainian. At the time of his enlistment with the #2 District Depot in Hamilton, Ontario on April 6, 1943, he was a factory worker at Electric Motors Company in Welland, Ontario.

On April 29, 1943 he was transferred to #26 Canadian Army Basic Training Centre (CABTC) in Orillia, Ontario. After completing his basic training, Andrew was transferred to Camp Borden in Ontario. Camp Borden was a Service Flying Training School, as well as the home of the Canadian Armoured Fighting Vehicle School. As Andrew was not in the Royal Canadian Air Force, he was there for tank training.

On August 23, 1943 he was transferred to #4 Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit (CIRU) and a few days later, on August 25, he was on his way overseas, arriving in the United Kingdom on September 1, 1943. On October 1, 1943 Andrew was transferred to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise's), which had become part of the 10th Brigade of the 4th Canadian (Armoured) Division. On 26 July 1944, the Regiment landed in France and fought in Operation Totalize, a battle to capture Caen and clear the way to Falaise. This was followed by Operation Tractable, to capture Falaise and smaller towns in the area.

On August 17, 1944, during Operation Tractable, Andrew received a gunshot wound in his right hand. According to the War Diary of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada for August 17, 1944, *"...In the morning, the Battalion attacked and cleared Domblainville.... All the time that we were here, we were subjected to very heavy mortaring and shelling from enemy mortars on a hill to the south of Domblainville..."* He

didn't rejoin the unit again until November 1944, where he was attached to Company 'B'. By then the Regiment had moved through Belgium and was in The Netherlands. Andrew joined them when they were in the vicinity of Heusden.

In the early hours of February 22, 1945 the Regiment left The Netherlands for the upcoming battles in Germany, all part of Operation Blockbuster. The War Diary of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada for February 22, 1945 noted that *"...shortly after turning onto Ruby Route near Nijmegen we began to encounter signs that we were 'approaching enemy territory', and at 0243 hours the C.O. led the Battalion into Germany....By 0615 the Battalion was concentrated around Hau..."*

On March 13, 1945 the Regiment returned to The Netherlands for training and a much needed rest. However, on Good Friday, March 30, 1945, the Regiment returned to Germany, arriving in Cleve, just on the other side of the Dutch border. On April 2, 1945, they re-entered The Netherlands. According to that day's War Diary of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, they *"...began their push towards Lochem and the Twenthe Canal..."* With Lochem liberated and a bridgehead established over the Twenthe Canal, the Regiment was ordered back into Germany, *"...into the plains of Northern Germany..."* They arrived in Meppen, Germany on April 6, 1945. On April 7, 1945, the War Diary of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada noted that *"...the task of establishing a bridgehead over the Ems and capturing Meppen fell to the Argylls..."* This was accomplished the next day.



Photo: Lance-Corporal A. Kerelchuk and Private H.M. Sigurdson, both of The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, guarding the northern approach to a bridge across the Hase River, Meppen, Germany, 8 April 1945.  
Photographer: Alexander Mackenzie Stirton. (Source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of National Defence fonds/a145725)

According to the War Diary for April 11, 1945, "... The entire Battalion left Meppen at 1145 hours, travelling on kangaroos..." Kangaroos are turret-less tanks with a platform for carrying troops. "...We travelled fairly slowly, passed Sögel in the early afternoon, and headed east towards Werlte..." On April 14, 1945 the Regiment moved to Friesoythe and after clearing the town, the War Diary of April 15, 1945 noted that "... 'C' Company and the carrier platoons left Friesoythe... Their task was to go as far as possible towards the Küsten Canal bridge, which was known to have been blown by the retreating enemy... 'A' Company left Friesoythe shortly after 'C' had reached its position. This Company was to advance on the road west of 'C' Company..."

On April 17, 1945, the fight to capture the Küsten Canal began, with several Regiments involved. The role of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada was to reinforce the bridgehead and help drive off counterattacks. The War Diary of April 19, 1945 reported that "...it was planned that during the night 'B' Company, supported by tanks, would recce north.... The tanks found it very difficult to maneuver on the soft roads, which had been torn and cratered by three days of continuous shelling. The engineers were called in to work on the road...Several times during the night, fanatical enemy infantry counter-attacked our well dug-in forces.... with some losses among our own troops..."

Among those who lost their lives that night of April 19, 1945 was Andrew Kerelchuk. He was initially buried in Friesoythe, Germany. In 1946, Andrew was reburied in the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, The Netherlands.

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See also:

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada \(Princess Louise%27s\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Argyll_and_Sutherland_Highlanders_of_Canada_(Princess_Louise%27s))
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation Totalize](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Totalize)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation Tractable](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Tractable)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation Blockbuster](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Blockbuster)
- <https://www.canadiansoldiers.com/history/battlehonours/northwesteurope/kustencanal.htm>