Pte Robert Simon Odjick **03 C 02**

Robert was working in Port Colborne, Ontario when he volunteered for military service overseas. He had Indian Roots and he is from the First Nation Algonquin-tribe of the the Kitigan Zibi. Robert took the train to Kingston, Ontario where he enlisted on August 31, 1943. He wrote his will two days later, leaving all of his earthly possessions to his wife Jeanne in Maniwaki. They had three children, Betsy, 4 years, Simon, 2 years, and Freeda, three weeks old. Robert took his basic training at Kingston where he qualified as a radio operator. He was fluent in three languages: Algonquin, French and English. But Robert did not want to be a radioman. He wanted to be a machine gunner and he requested his commanding officer that he be given an opportunity at gunnery. Robert passed the gunnery course and became a qualified machine gunner. His commanding officer noted that Robert was cheerful, intelligent and always neat and groomed, as his portrait shows. Robert sailed from Halifax on June 25, 1944 and landed at Liverpool GB on July 3, 1944. He was sent to a training battalion where he remained until November 10, 1944 when he received orders to sail to France. On November 14 Robert was sent to join the Royal Regiment of Canada holding the Nijmegen Salient in Holland. Robert wrote home regularly to his wife Jeanne and to his mother Katineen Riel. His letters were always cheery and thoughtful, never letting on at the cold and misery he and his comrades wee enduring at the Nijmegen Salient over the winter of 19944/45. The Germans were defending the north bank of the Rhine River and some nights they paddled over on rubber rafts to raid the Royal's positions. When the Royals suspected the Germans were grouping to raid their lined, the Vickers machine gunners, Robert included, pointed their weapons and let loose one thousand rounds over the river that arced and came down on the German-held bank. But Robert never wrote about any of this to Jeanne. Instead he asked about the kids and then went on to talk about the weather. In February 1945 Robert's letters to Jeanne stopped when the Royals went into action at the Reichswald Forest on the Dutch-German border. The Germans put up a bitter fight. The fighting lasted the whole month of February and into early March. Robert's letters to Jeanne resumed and he apologized for not had written for so long but admitted that they had been through a 'tough time'. That was all. He then told Jeanne about his leave in Brussels and joked that the beer in Belgium is "not as good as our stuff back in Canada."

The Royal Regiment of Canada was one of the infantry regiments of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division assigned to liberate the medieval Dutch city of Groningen (North-Holland). The assault was set for April 14, 1945.

The Royals were moving forward to their jump-off positions at a little hamlet called Peelo on the outskirts of Assen. It was April 13, 1945. Most of the men were marching, except for the machine gunners. Because they were weighted down with their heavy Vickers machine guns and boxes of ammunition belts, they hitched rides atop the Sherman tanks. Robert was one of the machine gunners seated atop a tank. It was evening when the Royals pulled into Peelo. A German patrol suddenly ran into a Canadian patrol. Both sides opened up. The Royals walked into crossfire. A burst of machinegun fire hit Robert in the stomach and groin. He was evacuated to a Canadian Field Hospital where he died four days later at 4.20 in the afternoon on April 17, 1945. He was 27 years old. His personal effects were sorted through and sent home, a wristwatch, bracelet, fountain pen, souvenir coins, coin purse, his marriage certificate to Jeanne and the three baptismal certificates of his children. His commanding officer noted that Robert was one of the best soldiers in his company, a conscientious man who did his job well. He was temporarily buried in Lochem.