



John Howard Wilson, nicknamed Jack, was born on June 22, 1925, on a farm in the village of Benalto in central Alberta, halfway between the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. His father, Andrew Wilson (1897–1967), was born in Scotland and had emigrated to Canada with his parents in 1910. His mother, Edith Ellen Whitworth (1901–1992), was born in England; she emigrated in 1919. His parents married in Calgary in 1920 and had four children: Donald Andrew, Rita Florence, John Howard and Jean Louise.

It appears that the Wilson family moved several times in the 1920s. When John joined the army, he listed Benalto, west of Red Deer, as his place of birth. In 1945, his father stated that John's place of birth was Donald, east of Red Deer. The 1926 census shows Calgary as their place of residence, but the 1931 census lists the Red Deer district. Eventually, the family settled permanently in Calgary; by then, John's father was no longer a farmer but a labourer.

John attended King Edward School in Calgary, about one kilometer from home; he left school at age 16 after completing eighth grade. He then worked as a store clerk: for one year at the MacMillan drugstore and for eleven months at the T. Eaton Co. department store in Calgary.



*The Calgary branch of T. Eaton Co.*

*Photo: Calgary Photo Supply Co (1942).*

On December 7, 1943, John enlisted as a volunteer in the Canadian Army in Calgary. A medical examination revealed that he had mild hemorrhoids; otherwise, he was healthy and fit for service overseas. At that time, his brother Donald was already stationed in Europe with a *Mobile Laundry & Bath Unit* of the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps — he would survive the war.

During the first two months of 1944, John underwent basic training in Orillia, Ontario. He was then transferred to Camp Borden, Ontario, where he trained with the Canadian Armoured Corps (CAC). There, he also qualified as *Driver in Charge, Class III Wheeled*.

On August 3, 1944, John embarked for England, where he arrived a week later. He was initially assigned to 2CACRU, a reinforcement unit of the Armoured Corps, but on September 2 he was transferred to the Rocky Mountain Rangers regiment, where he underwent 21 days of infantry conversion training. The transfer of soldiers to the infantry occurred on a large scale in the second half of 1944. In the period following D-Day on June 6, the infantry suffered unexpectedly heavy losses, and it was no longer possible to fill the ranks with the available reinforcement units.

On October 16, John left for mainland Europe. On October 27, he arrived at his unit, the *Royal Regiment of Canada*, part of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. The 2nd Infantry Division fought in South Beveland during the Battle of the Scheldt — the offensive to capture the banks of the Scheldt from the Germans so that the port of Antwerp could be used to supply the army. On October 27, the Royals were withdrawn to the rear for a few days, where they could rest and integrate reinforcements.

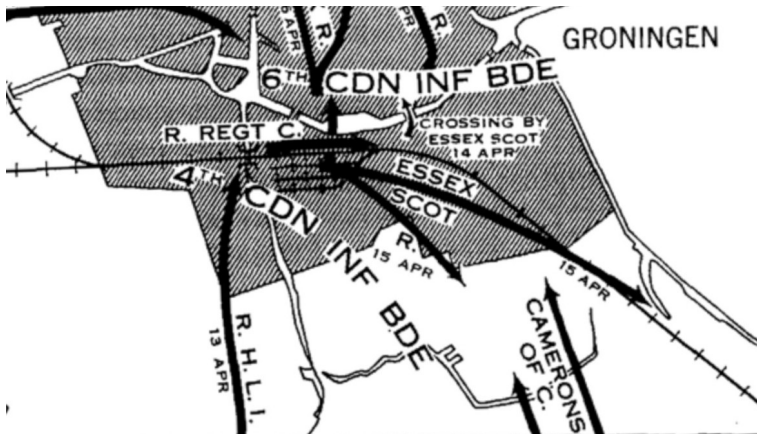
The Royals' final fight in the Battle of the Scheldt was the capture, on October 31, of the entrance to the Sloedam — the connection between Zuid-Beveland and Walcheren. The Battle of the Scheldt ended on November 8.

From November 1944 to January 1945, the 2nd Infantry Division was deployed near Nijmegen. Following operation Market Garden, a static front had formed there with a bulge into German territory, the *Nijmegen salient*.

The Rhineland Offensive began in February 1945; its aim was to capture the west bank of the Rhine north of the Ruhr from the Germans. On February 17, the Royals were deployed for the first time. The Allied troops suffered heavy losses during the offensive. For the Royals, March 3 was one of the hardest days. On that day, in the northwestern part of the Hochwald forest, one officer was wounded, and the *other ranks* — soldiers and noncommissioned officers — suffered 42 casualties: 12 killed, 29 wounded, and one soldier missing. After Xanten was captured on March 11, the 2nd Infantry Division was withdrawn to the Reichswald forest near Kleve. A period of rest followed until the Rhine could be crossed.

John was not active throughout the entire period of the Rhineland Offensive. On March 6, he was listed among the sick and wounded. Two days later, he was admitted to the *No. 8 Canadian General Hospital* in Antwerp, and the following day to the *96th British General Hospital* in Tournai, Belgium. There, he was treated for hemorrhoids, the condition he had already been suffering from at the time of his medical examination in 1943. He was discharged from hospital on 15 March and rejoined the Royals on 30 March, just in time for the crossing of the Rhine and the advance into the northern Netherlands.

On April 13, 1945, after Assen had been liberated, the 2nd Infantry Division advanced toward Groningen. The lead troops consisted of a column of tanks from the *Fort Garry Horse*, followed by 'Kangaroos' — tanks without turrets — with soldiers from the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, the *Rileys*. At the city limits, they came under fire from *Flak* anti-aircraft guns and machine guns. This marked the beginning of the Battle of Groningen, which would last until April 16.



*Attack on the southern part of Groningen by the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division.*

*Source: C.P. Stacey, The Victory Campaign (1960).*

The *Rileys* managed to break the resistance in the City Park and around the Paterswoldseweg, south of the Parkweg. They also tried, but failed, to capture the strategically important Parkbrug bridge over the Noord-Willemskanaal.

On April 14, the entire 4th Infantry Brigade was deployed in the southwest of Groningen. The *Rileys* fought on the north side of Paterswoldseweg. Between 4:00 and 4:30 a.m., two companies of the *Royals* managed to cross the canal south of the Parkbrug by boat, thereby opening a second front. By 7:00 a.m., they had secured the Parkbrug.

For the rest of the day, the *Royals* were clearing the area east of the Noord-Willemskanaal and south of the Verbindingskanaal and the nearby railroad tracks. Late in the morning, the Essex Scottish were deployed to support the *Royals*.

The Canadians fought fierce house-to-house battles to drive out the defenders — Germans and Dutch SS troops. The defenders had entrenched themselves on the top floors of the apartment buildings. The Canadians also faced heavy fire from strategically placed *Flak* anti-aircraft guns, which the Germans used to shell the Parkweg and the Parkbrug from the Hereweg. Only after several tanks from the *Fort Garry Horse* had neutralized the German guns were the Canadians able to advance and achieve their objective for the day.

Eight soldiers from the Royal Regiment of Canada were killed in the fighting in Groningen on April 14; one of them was John Wilson.

John was buried on April 15 at the Zuiderbegraafplaats in the Asserbos in Assen. In 1946, he was reburied at the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, where he now rests in grave 10.E.07. The inscription on his headstone reads:

NOT JUST TODAY  
BUT EVERY DAY  
IN SILENCE WE REMEMBER

After his death, John Howard Wilson was awarded the following Canadian military decorations: the *1939–1945 Star*, the *France and Germany Star*, the *War Medal 1939–1945*, and the *Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp*.



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