

## York, Mervin Henry Rifleman

2-A-14



Mervin Henry York is born on September 29, 1917, in Meaford, Ontario, he is the son of Harmon and Maud Louisa York, née Wilson.

He is the youngest in the family. One younger brother died very young, but when Mervin is born, he has three brothers and three sisters.

The family is Presbyterian, and the language is English.

Mervin has completed six years of school when he starts working.

After several jobs, including as a driver, he starts working at John Inglis Company, a company closely involved in the war industry.

On July 19, 1941, he marries; his bride is named Shirley Ann Pigeon.



When Mervin enlists for active duty in the Canadian Army on August 20, 1943, in Toronto, he has by then established himself as a skilled craftsman at John Inglis Company.

He is classified as a precision cutter/grinder.

Not mentioned in his military file: he performs occasionally as a 'sword swallower' at exhibitions in Toronto. His wife also performs on those occasions as a 'high wire walker'.

Such a special note cannot be missing from a biography.

Mervin gets his first introduction to military life at the district depot in Toronto. He is soon transferred to the basic training center in Orillia, Ontario.

It is recorded in his file that he donated blood at the Red Cross clinic in Orillia.

Before 1943 is over, Mervin is transferred to his next destination; in November, he is taken on strength at Camp Borden, Ontario, by the Canadian Armoured Corps Training Regiment.

Here, he gets his driver training.

With the experience already gained, he quickly qualifies; in mid-December, his file notes that he has passed as a driver for wheeled motor vehicles.

Mervin spends Christmas '43 and the turn of the year '43/'44 in the barracks.



At the end of January '44, he is granted personal leave followed by a few days of embarkation leave.

In February 1944, Mervin takes some time off on his own initiative. It costs him a few days' pay, and he is 'Confined to Barracks' (CB) for several days.

At the end of March 1944, he embarks a troop ship that takes him, and many others, to the United Kingdom (UK).

On April 3, '44 he reports for duty and is assigned to a reinforcement battalion. A few weeks later, he is taken on strength by the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada (QOR).

On June 9, 1944, Mervin sets foot on land at Juno Beach in Normandy. According to his file, he is assigned to the QOR by the end of June 1944.

He is withdrawn from the QOR on July 5, 1944, and, via the Field Ambulance, he is week later, in the 18<sup>th</sup> Canadian General Hospital in the UK. The cause of admission: thrombosed hemorrhoids.

At the end of July '44, Mervin is discharged from the hospital and, again, assigned to a reinforcement battalion. He grants himself a short leave and is reported 'Absent without Leave' (AWL). The price: several days' pay.

On September 4, 1944, Mervin returns to the Western European Front and is taken on strength again by the QOR at the end of September. Mervin's file then makes large jumps in the timeline.

No particulars can be found in Mervin's file until April 10, 1945. 'Killed in Action' is the final entry.

The QOR's War Diary offers some information regarding Mervin's experiences in the meantime.

The regiment fights its way north from Normandy, through Northern France to Belgium and the Netherlands.

On October 4, 1944, the Belgian/Dutch border is crossed.

The regiment then prepares for actions to liberate the port of Antwerp, 'Operation Switchback'.

This was an order from General Eisenhower to Field Marshal Montgomery following the partial failure of Operation Market-Garden.

*Operation Switchback (October 6 – November 3, 1944) was a crucial part of the Battle of the Scheldt in World War II, carried out by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division. The objective was to drive German troops out of the "Breskens Pocket" in West Zeelandic Flanders to liberate the Western Scheldt. The operation was part of the broader Allied strategy to open the port of Antwerp to supplies, as the supply lines from Normandy had become too long. The fighting was extremely heavy due to the flooded land (polders), mud, and fierce resistance from German troops, who had established the area as 'Fortress South'.*

On October 10, 1944, the QOR regiment is on the move.  
It starts an advance towards Sluiskil in Zeelandic Flanders.

Mervin's file still contains no notes regarding the actions so far.  
In the Southwest Netherlands, the QOR pays a heavy toll.

On November 3, 1944, Westkapelle is reached and the QOR gets a brief rest; they proceed to Ledeborg, a district of the city of Ghent in Belgium.  
They remain there until November 8, 1944.

The QOR then prepare for a long nighttime translocation: via Lokeren, St. Nicholas, and Antwerp in Belgium, they move further into the Netherlands via Tilburg and Den Bosch towards Nijmegen.  
The troops cover the final stretch to Berg en Dal, near Groesbeek, on foot.



The diaries begin almost every day with:  
cloudy-cold-foggy-night frost.

The winter months are often described as relatively quiet; the Canadians guard the so-called Maas Front on the Dutch side.  
Nevertheless, patrols are conducted daily and there is fire contact with the enemy.  
Between mid-November '44 and February '45 (the start of the Rhineland Offensive), the Canadians lose more than 50 men.



Properly dressed for the occasion, the Queen's Own Rifles move out on patrol from the Nijmegen salient, January 22, 1945. (B.J. Gloster, National Archives of Canada, PA-114073)

*Following the partial failure of Operation Market Garden, a massive Canadian/British force was assembled in the Nijmegen region during the winter of 1944/1945. Approximately 400,000 men and nearly 35,000 vehicles. A similar American force gathered near Roermond. The objective was to push the German units back behind the Rhine.*

*On February 8, 1945, the Canadians and British launch their attack with 'Operation Veritable'. They encounter fierce resistance in the Reichswald. It will be the bloodiest battle ever fought on German soil. By March 10, the western bank of the Rhine has been virtually cleared of German troops.*

After the start of 'Operation Veritable', the QOR takes up defensive positions in and around Millingen aan de Rijn on February 9, 1945.  
They remain there until the end of March, when the crossing of the Rhine by the Allies has been achieved.

Mervin Henry York must have endured these actions without major difficulties.  
Not a single entry can be found in his file during this period.

Until that final mention for him: 'Killed in Action' April 10, 1945.



[www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org); [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com); [www.canada.ca/library-archives](http://www.canada.ca/library-archives); wikipedia, project '44,  
War Diary Queen's Own Rifles of Canada