



**SUPPLY  
LINE**

## Alexander Railton “Alex” Campbell

Canadian Army

Alex was 30 years old when he joined the military. He followed in his father’s footsteps as an army officer. He fought bravely, but was killed in Italy in 1943.



Studio portrait of Alexander Railton Campbell in uniform. George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 20100088-010

### A Military Family

Born in Halifax in 1910, Alex was the third of five children. He was seven when his father, Captain Harry Davies Campbell, was killed during the First World War.

Alex’s father had been a professional soldier, serving in both British and Canadian regiments for 16 years before going overseas with the **Canadian Expeditionary Force** in 1915. Alex also felt the call of military service, joining Canada’s **militia** at the age of 18.

## The Italian Campaign

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Alex was working as a sign painter. In 1940, he enlisted in the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, and was soon shipped overseas.

For Alex, the war was personal – he blamed the Germans for his father’s death in 1917, and wanted to live up to his father’s example. Alex’s time in the militia had given him an advantage, and officers gave glowing assessments of his abilities.

As the Canadian army remained in England and out of the fight, however, he grew frustrated. Finally, in late 1942, he was given an opportunity to come face to face with the enemy.

In order to provide some Canadian soldiers combat experience, a select number were chosen to serve with British units in North Africa. Alex was attached to the Coldstream Guards, who were fighting in Tunisia. His battle experience with the Guards further cemented his reputation as an excellent officer, and satisfied his desire to engage the Germans.

In July 1943, Alex took part in Operation Husky, the **Allied** invasion of Sicily. He was given command of a company (a military unit of about 80 - 100) and was shot through the arm as he and his men stormed ashore.

He fought through July and August, but he became sick in September, spending several months in a hospital. When he recovered, he rejoined his company in Italy on December 24, 1943.

The next day – December 25 – he was killed in action, at age 33. He was posthumously **Mentioned in Despatches** for his service in Italy.

## Remembrance and Recognition

An officer who served under Alex Campbell was Farley Mowat, who went on to become a prominent Canadian literary figure, and who would immortalize Alex in the book, *And No Birds Sang*.

Alex himself left behind a poem, written shortly before his death, called “Prayer Before Battle.”

## Vocabulary

### Allies

The countries, including Canada, that joined together in opposing the Axis powers during the Second World War. The largest Allied nations were the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union and China.

### Canadian Expeditionary Force

The entire overseas force fielded by Canada during the First World War. Of the 630,000 Canadians who enlisted for military service, 424,000 went overseas as part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

### Mentioned in Despatches

A member of the military is “Mentioned in Despatches” when their name appears in an official report sent to high command which describes an action worthy of note. Sometimes this would be in combat against the enemy, but it could also be for other notable activities or services.

### Militia

A term often used to refer to army units of volunteers recruited from local communities. In 1939 Canada, the term officially referred to what would soon be formally renamed the Canadian Army. The Permanent Active Militia was made up of a small number of full-time military personnel. The larger Non-Permanent Active Militia was made up of part-time volunteers.