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NEWSLETTER OF THE TANTRAMAR HERITAGE TRUST

The Lost War Letters of Private Leonard Bruce Tower

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Editorial

Dear Friends

Today is October 20th. The month of November is just around the corner; for many, it is an important time of remembrance. By the time you read this issue, Remembrance Day, November 11th, will be days away. In this issue, Colin MacKinnon focuses our attention, not on the many who fought in war for our liberty, but on one special young man from Sackville who heeded the call. Furthermore, you will not only discover the story of Leonard Tower but also read his own words during his preparations for battle and during the conflict, via the letters he sent home to members of his

family. It is a very personal story and many of you will undoubtedly be touched by Leonard Tower's own words and especially his descriptions of the climatic conditions these young men endured in wartime. It is remarkable to read of the difficulties these soldiers experienced in the course of a regular day of service. Like me, you will be appalled to read of the conditions Leonard describes. I would encourage you to re-read Leonard's own words on November 11th. We will remember.

—Peter Hicklin

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ANNOUNCEMENT

A Taste of History

As you were informed in our last newsletter, our fundraising dinner **A Taste of History** will be held at St. Anne's Hall in Westcock on Saturday, November 5th. The theme is Sackville Foundries marking the 170th anniversary of the founding of the Fawcett Foundry and the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Enterprise Foundry.

The evening will include Al Smith's popular trivia contest and scenes from an upcoming play about the foundries written by Susan Amos and presented by Live Bait Theatre.

Tickets are \$50 each, including a \$25 tax receipt. Seating is limited, so get your tickets by contacting Karen at the office at (506) 536-2541 or tantramarheritage@gmail.com or speaking to any THT board member.

The lost war letters of Private Leonard Bruce Tower (1897-1916)

13th Battalion (The Royal Highlanders of Canada)

by **Colin M. MacKinnon**

In the fall of 2021, Ken Tower of Rockport was contacted by Jill Robinson of Halifax regarding a collection of letters that were in her possession. These World War I-era papers were mostly written by Private (Pte.) Leonard Bruce Tower (13 March 1897-5 June 1916) (*Figure 1*) and had been held for many years by Jill's grandfather Lt. Rev. Cuthbert Cooper Robinson (1893-1971) (*Figure 2*). Jill expressed that it was always the hope of her family to return the collection to the relatives of Pte. Tower.



Figure 2. Lt. Rev. Cuthbert Cooper Robinson (1893-1971).



Figure 1. Private Leonard Bruce Tower (1893-1916)

Leonard B. Tower, great uncle to Ken, was the youngest of six children of Captain Leonard C. Tower (1858-1933) and Eliza J. Wilbur (1855-1926) (*Figure 3*).

He spent his earliest childhood years at the family home near Wilbur's Cove in Rockport, New Brunswick, prior to their move to Sackville in 1905 (*Figures 4*).

Leonard was only about 8 years old when his family purchased the Egan house that overlooked the old bow of the Tantramar River which formed the Ram Pasture marsh with a view of Cumberland Basin and Westcock in the distance (*Figure 5*). In the 1911 census, Leonard was 14 years old with no occupation indicating that he likely was still in school. It is interesting to note that his father, a ship's Captain, was absent from home, being listed as "at Sea".

Britain (and thus Canada) entered World War 1 on the 4th August 1914. During the outset of the war, before the horrors of modern war-



Figure 3. Captain Leonard C. Tower (1858-1933) of Rockport, and later Sackville, New Brunswick. (Courtesy Ken Tower collection.)

fare were brought home, there was widespread public support. Leonard Tower, with many others, heeded the call and he enlisted at

Sussex, New Brunswick, on the 18th June 1915, only a few months past his 18th birthday. He was assigned No. 445007 with the 55th Battalion (C Company) of the C. E. F. (Canadian Expeditionary Force). Leonard's attestation papers describe him as being 5 ft. 9¾ in. tall, 159 lbs. and with a girth (when fully expanded) of 38 in. He had a medium complexion, black hair and blue eyes. Religious denomination was listed as Baptist. His "Terms of Service" with the Canadian Military were bluntly described as for the "Duration of War".

Shortly after enlistment, Leonard would have been sent to the army training camp at Valcartier, Quebec. The first letter in the collection is dated 10 August 1915 (probably shortly after his arrival to camp Valcartier), where he wrote: "I haven't had to go out with the fire fighters though as they have been building a pontoon bridge across the river and I was one of the men that was picked out to do it. There was 30 of us all together. Harry Ison and I are the only ones out of the Sackville crowd in the engineers."



Figure 4. Home of Captain Leonard C. Tower (1858-1953) in Rockport, New Brunswick, prior to his move to Sackville in 1905.



Figure 5. The old Egan place in Sackville, overlooking the Ram Pasture, later the home of Captain Leonard C. Tower (1858-1933). Situated across the street from the Boultenhouse Heritage Centre. (Tantramar Heritage Trust, Mary Day collection, 2006.18.01)

We will finish it tomorrow I think.”
(Pte. Tower to his mother,
Valcartier, Quebec.)

A further three letters he sent from Valcartier highlighted the cold and damp weather, deplorable sleeping conditions as well his initiative to dig a significant drain around his tent. Some excerpts from these letters follow.

21 August 1915 – *“Monday night it floated some of the fellows out and it only rained about half an hour all together. My tent was dry as could be. But it gets awfully damp on cold nights.”* (Pte. Tower to his mother.)

30 September 1915 – *“It has been so cold in the tents that we are glad to get under the blankets as soon as possible after supper. We have had some very cold weather here but warmer today. The days are getting short now. Dark at about half past six. It rained hard all day last Sunday we had quite a hard time to keep the water out of the tent, and we had a little snow the night before. We have heavy frosts nearly every night and the wind has been blowing a gale every day for nearly two weeks.”* (Pte. Tower to his mother, Valcartier Camp.)

19 October 1915 – *“We have had a very wet day here today and it is still looking bad but I hope it will be fine again as it makes the tents damp and the last little rain makes the ground very muddy for two or three days. The water will not soak into the ground at all.” ... “It is warmer tonight than it usually is. The nights have been very cold but warm in the day time. We have lots of blankets but the dampness comes out of the ground just the same. We have four blankets and one rubber sheet apiece. There has been fellows going to the hospital*

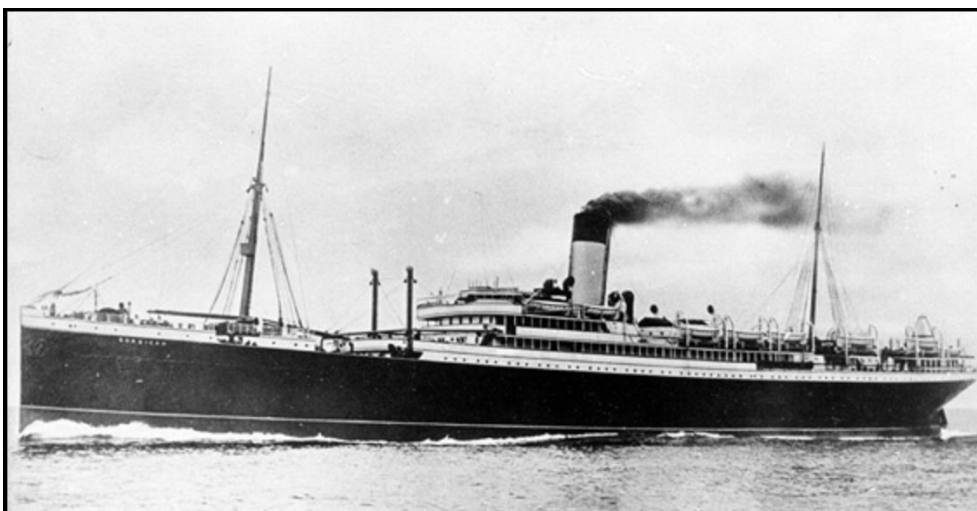


Figure 6. On the 30th October 1915, Pte. L. B. Tower departed Montreal with his unit on board the S. S. Corsican for England. (https://mha.mun.ca/mha/pviewphoto/Record_ID/582)

every day with la-grippe or rheumatism.” ... “It has started to rain again. But I guess it will only be a shower. There isn’t very much danger of my tent flooding as I dug the trench around it about three feet deep. Down where the sand is softer so the water will soak through.” (Pte. Tower to his mother, Valcartier Camp).

On the 30th October 1915, Pte. L. B. Tower departed Montreal with his unit on board the S. S. Corsican for England (Figure 6) and was stationed at Westenhamer, south-east of London. Five additional letters were sent from this training camp in England. They largely focused on camp activities with an interesting note of thanks (written 21 February, 1916) to his mother for supplying a box of treats (cake, doughnuts, chocolate and ginger snaps). Private Tower was transferred to the 13th Battalion Canadian Infantry on the 12th April, 1916, and he embarked for France three days later. The 13th Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) was part of the 3rd Infantry Brigade of the 1st Canadian Division of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

His final letter from England (dated 12 April, 1916) was to advise his family that he was about to leave for France and that he and 24 others were drawn for the 13th Battalion presently serving in France. Some salient topics of interest from these letters follow.

14 November 1915 – *“Arrived here safely last Tuesday night. Had a good trip and like this place fine. I should have written sooner but I have been so busy since we landed that I could hardly find time to do anything. When we move around there is a lot of baggage to look after. We are not all squared away yet but I think we are going to drill tomorrow.*

We had fine weather all the way across and just as smooth as a lake. We had two destroyers with us the last two days. We were landed at Plymouth and took about six hours to come here by train. We are only about 40 miles from London and there are a few little towns near the camp. We were nine days coming across. One of the Allan Line boats called the Corsican. Good accommodations and good feed. There was about 250 men aboard from the 9th Battalion New Foundland and a medical

Corps.” (Pte. Tower to his mother, “United Army Board Camp Home, Bramshott, Hants.” [Hampshire, England])

17 November 1915 – “We are being fed fine here better than at any camp in Canada. I was weighed last night and weighed (168 lbs.) so I don’t think I am loosing very much. I have gained eight pounds since I left home.

We haven’t been paid since we left Canada. There is one month and a half pay coming to us. They are going to give us all a pass for six days so that we can see the place. They are keeping our pay back so we can see as much as possible. A soldier can travel much cheaper over here than a civilian. We only pay one fair where they would pay two.” (Pte. Tower to his mother, Bramshott Camps, England.)

4 February 1916 – “Well as there isn’t very much to do tonight I will try and write you a few lines to let you know I am still in good health. Hoping this will find you all the same.

They have moved us out into the country and deeper into the mud. We cannot step off the side of the road at all or we will sink to our knees in mud and it is so dark at night that you can hardly see your hand in front of your face. They keep the windows all covered up on account of the Zeppelins (sic). There was bombs dropped near here not long ago. They blew big holes in the ground but I guess there wasn’t any body hurt.” (Pte. Tower to his mother, Westenhanger, Kent [England].)

21 February 1916 – “Rec’d your most welcome letter last Friday night and the box arrived yesterday afternoon, but I was out town, and didn’t get in until about nine o’clock. I was delighted to find it was alright. The

cake and doughnuts were certainly a treat. The chocolate were good and the ginger snaps were broken too. The “snaps” were broken up a little but all the rest was as good as ever. The frosting stayed on the cake alright. I was out trench digging all day today and it was just like a picnic to me. I had cake, doughnuts and chocolates for dinner.” (Pte. Tower to his mother, Westenhanger, Kent [England].)

20 March 1916 – “There was an air raid on Dover and Fokestone (sic) last night but very few persons killed. It was sea-planes this time they came in quite early flying very low. The people thought nothing of it as aero planes are so common there but they know as soon as the bombs began to drop. They shot one down. One bomb hit a motor-car only one man in it.” (Pte. Tower to his mother, Westenhanger.)

12 April 1916 – “Just a few lines to let you know that I am about to leave for France. Myself and 24 others in a draft for the 13th Battalion now in France.” (Pte. Tower to his mother, Westenhanger.)

While in France, Pte. Tower posted two letters home (one to his mother and another to his sister Ada). As the 13th Battalion (The Royal Highlanders of Canada) was a “kilted” regiment, the wearing of Highland regalia must have been a new experience to him. Of interest, he mentions the men getting a sunburn on their knees: **30 April 1916** – France – “Don’t laugh now, I am wearing a kilt. It was quite hard to get used to it, but it is fine now. Some of the boys have blistered knees from the heat of the sun but mine are all right so far.” (Pte. Tower to his mother, Y.M.C.A. – with the British Expeditionary Force.)

Leonard’s last letter was addressed to his sister Ada who was two years his senior. On the 12th December 1917, Ada was to marry Otto Albert Hatfield (1893-1987). As we shall see, this union may have significance to the whereabouts of the missing letters for over one hundred years. Leonard wrote: **27 May 1916** – “Dear sister:—Well so there is nothing to do this afternoon, guess I will try to write you a few lines to let you know I am in the best of health. Hopefully this few lines find you all the same at home. I got a letter from mother yesterday, the first I have got for about six weeks. I also received a letter from Edd he is also in Moncton now, and Avaird [Tower] is in Fredericton in a Siege Battery.” (Pte. Tower to his sister Ada, Westenhanger).

In this letter, Pte. Tower confirms his most recent military deployment with: “15th Plat. 4 Coy. 13th Batt., Royal Highlanders of Canada, 3rd Brigade 1st Division, France.”

On the 7th May 1916, Leonard “Proceeded to join Unit [in] The Field”. This was confirmed on the 12th May. Less than a month later, on the 5th June 1916, Pte. Leonard Bruce Tower was mortally wounded and transported by the No. 10 Field Ambulance, presumably to an aid station or field hospital. Sadly, that same day he was reported to have “Died of wounds received in action”. On his casualty form, he was reported to have been “Buried at Menin Rd. Cemetery I 9d 2 ½ -2 Street 28”. At this point, it is hard to determine through the “fog of war” exactly what happened to Pte. Tower (see *Fetherstonhaugh*, 1925). Beginning on the 2nd June,

1916, the 13 Battalion was engaged in a broader conflict generally referred to as the “Battle of Mount Sorrel and Hill 62” (Figure 7). The Battalion’s War Diary describes the following conditions and respective Company placements, just east of Zillebeke, Belgium, on the 5th June (the day Leonard was killed):

“June 5th. Weather still wet. Cloudy and disagreeable. The dug-outs and trenches in a fearful state of mud. In the early morning the enemy started up a violent bombardment which lasted for about half an hour, nearly preventing a working party of No. 3 Coy from getting back from the front line to its own position.

Several bursts were also fired by the enemy apparently from a very rapid firing Machine-gun only one man was slightly wounded however.

During the day the Germans were very active all along the front line, apparently trying to pierce it. Several large shells were landed by the enemy, very close to the trench occupied by No. 3 Coy, one of which knocked in a fairly appreciable portion of one of the dug-outs, burying two or three men, except for slight wounds however they were not too much the worse.

During all the artillery fire from the enemy, the 13th Battalion were standing to, ready to counter attack at a moments notice.

A conference was held at Battalion H.Q.s making all the necessary arrangement for an attack on the enemy’s position, the attack eventually being arranged to take place at 1.00 a.m. on Thursday the 8th June 1916.” (War Diary of the 13th Battalion, June [1916] pages 5 and 6, Archives Canada.)

There were 30 casualties listed in the War Diary for the 5th of June:

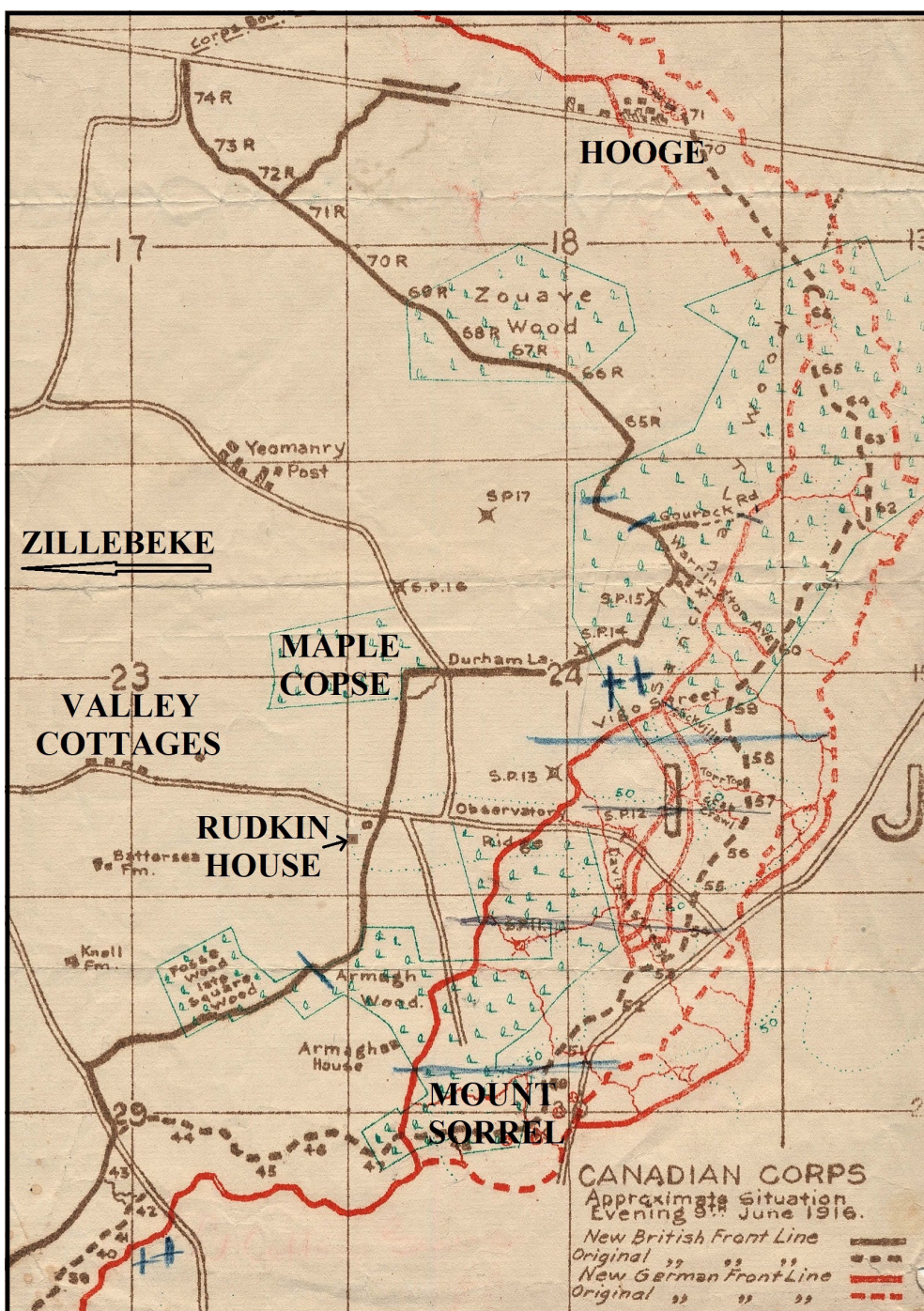


Figure 7. Position of the 13th Battalion, just east of Zillebeke, Belgium, on the evening of the 3rd June 1916: No. 1 company in the rear of Maple Copse, No. 2 company moved to Zillebeke village, No. 3 remained in reserve in the old positions and No. 4 moved to Valley cottages. (Canadian War Museum, George Metcalf Archival Collection, DOCS MAPS 59-D30.F5)

5 Killed, 22 Wounded, 2 Shell Shock and 1 Illness. Pte. L. B. Tower was initially reported as wounded but succumbed to his injuries that same day (Figure 8).

On 28 June 1916, Mrs. Tower received a letter signed by Major

General Sam Hughes, Minister of Militia and Defence for Canada offering sincere sympathy and condolences over the death of their son. One can only imagine the grief felt by the family. Searching for answers, Pte. Tower’s sister

Casualty Form—Active Service.

Regiment or Corps *C. Coy. 55 Batt. Can. Inf.* *Westminster House, 7, Millbank, S.W.*

Regimental No. *445007* Rank *Pte.* Name *Tower L. B. Leonard Bruce*

Report		Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 215, Army Form A. 86, or other official documents.
Date	From whom received			
TRANSFERRED TO 13th BATTN. C.E.F. 12/4/16				
EMBARKED FOR FRANCE.			15 4 16	724 Ab. 2a.
16/4/16.	Can. Base Depot.	Arrived in FRANCE for 15TH CAN. BATTALION.	Can. Base Depot.	16/4/16. K.I. 101/ED/3/284. Pt. II Ord. No. 19, 7/5/16.
7/6/16		Proceeded to join West Sh. Field		7/6/16 Pte.
12/5/16	C.E. 13th	Joined West		5/5/16 15213 D.C.P. 324, 23/5/16
9/6/16	C.E. 13th	Wounded in Action		5/6/16 15213
11/6/16	10 Can. Field	Died of Wounds	10 Can. Field	5/6/16 Letter 179/2542. D.C. 1344, 16/6/16.
		Buried at Moulin St. Landery - 19 d. 25-2. Sect 28.	7/6/16	Av. R. Sinden

LIEUT.

Figure 8. An extract from the World War 1 military record for Pte. Leonard Bruce Tower. Note the entry for 5 June 1916: "Died of Wounds". (Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9742 - 21).



Figure 9. Pte. Leonard B. Tower's close friend, "Bombardier" Avaird Ira Tower (1895-1966) was awarded the "Military Medal for Bravery in the Field" during World War 1. (Photograph courtesy Gary Tower).

Ada wrote to the department of defence to try and understand what happened. She received the following response.

17 August 1916. "Owing to the large number of casualties during the week of June 2nd to 6th & afterwards, we cannot find anyone who has any personal knowledge of how Pte. Tower met his death. Our records show he was brought into the Advanced Dressing Station on June 5th, about half a mile to the rear of the fighting line, very badly wounded, & died almost immediately on reaching there. He was buried in an official grave yard, an Army Chaplain conducting the Service. His personal effects including wrist watch, letters, &c were forwarded to the Canadian Base, France, & you will no doubt receive these in the near future." Sgt. F Walters, No. 529667, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, B. E. F., France to Miss A [Ada]. J. Tower.

As word of Private Tower's passing spread throughout his circle of family and friends,

condolences to the family included a brief letter from Avaird Tower (then serving with the artillery) (Figure 9), dated 28 June 1916, to Leonard's mother: "I want to extend and share with you, my sympathy, it sure was an awful blow to me to learn of Leonard's death as Leonard and I until a year ago have been together and knew each other like brothers. We will all be proud of Leonard as a hero, I almost feel ashamed that I let Leonard set an example by enlisting but will do all I can to avenge. I will close for now, yours in health And in sorrow."

Avaird's promise to Leonard's mother, "will do all I can to avenge" was more than just idle words. Cpl. Avaird Ira Tower, Regimental No. 326931, was awarded the Military Medal for Bravery in the Field. His citation reads: "with determination and an extreme sense of judgement was recognized on many occasions for his fearless penetration of enemy strong-holds easing advancement forward for the men". His eagerness of duty towards the

safety of others was recognized by his C.O. and Avaird was promoted to Corporal. His fearless endeavors did not go unnoticed which lead to a recommendation for a Military Medal by Lt. B. J. Gossage, 14th Bde. C.F.A."

The following letter, the most recent date in the collection, provides the best clue regarding the travels of the correspondence. On 6 July 1932, Leila (Copp) Tower, the second wife of Captain Leonard C. Tower, wrote the following note to Pte. Tower's sister Ada Marie (Tower) Hatfield (1895-1967):

"Ada is there anything here of your Mother's you want. I want you to come and get it. Your welcome to all

her things as far as I am concerned for I expect to bring my own furniture bedding etc, and I have all I need so now is the time for you to say what you want. Trusting you will soon find time to come and see us."

Captain Tower's first wife, Eliza Wilbur, died in 1926 and he re-married, as his second wife, Leila Copp. Leila was clearly cleaning house and offered Ada any personal effects of her mother that were in the house. It is likely that Pte. Tower's correspondence collection had been in the family home in Sackville and would have been a cherished possession of Eliza Tower. Ada likely took possession of the papers following her mother's passing. One of Ada's children was Rev. Leonard Fraser Hatfield (1919-2001); likely named in remembrance of her brother. Rev. L. F. Hatfield had a long and distinguished career, culminating in his appointment as Canon of All Saints Cathedral in 1969, elected the Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Nova Scotia in 1976 and in January 1980 was installed as Bishop of Nova Scotia. A working theory is that at some point Rev. Hatfield met, and possibly became acquainted with Lt. Rev. Cuthbert Cooper Robinson. Considering Lt. Robinson's past World War 1 experience on the front with Princes Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), this interest may have resulted in the papers ending up with the Robinson family.

Late last year, during travel restrictions due to the Covid pandemic, the collection of papers officially changed hands, at the upper Missaguash River bridge at Mount Whatley (our own



Figure 10. The official transfer of the Pte. L. B. Tower collection, at "Checkpoint Charlie" (Missaguash River) from Jill Robinson to Ken Tower, 1 November 2021. (Photography courtesy Mel Chisholm).

"Checkpoint Charlie" of Cold War fame), between Jill Robinson and Ken Tower (Figure 10). Thanks to the generosity of the Robinson family, and diligence of Jill Robinson, we have been offered a glimpse into the life of Leonard Bruce Tower and can honour a young man who gave the ultimate sacrifice for his country.

This collection of letters, mostly written in Leonard's own hand, are an irreplaceable and tangible connection to this fallen soldier. His memorial stands at the Menin Road South Cemetery, Ypres, West Flanders, Belgium. (Figure 11).

A full transcript of the Private Leonard Bruce Tower correspondence has been deposited with the Tantramar Heritage Trust.

REFERENCES

Canadian War Museum, George Metcalf Archival Collection. Control Number: 19870027-018 Call Number: DOCS MAPS 59-D30.F5

Fetherstonhaugh, R. C. 1925. The 13th Battalion Royal Highlanders of Canada 1914-1919. Published by The 13th Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada, 400 pages [see Chapter VIII, Page 97].



Figure 11. Memorial for Pte. Leonard Bruce Tower (1893-1916), Menin Road South Cemetery, Ypres, West Flanders, Belgium. (Photography courtesy Danielle Roubroeks).

Library and Archives Canada, Personnel Records of the First World War.

<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/search.aspx>

Memorial for Pte. Leonard Bruce Tower. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13807693/leonard-bruce-tower>