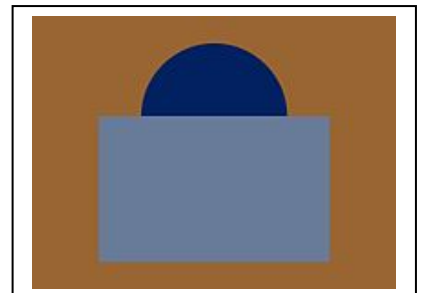




Private Leslie James (Number 439747) of the 52nd Battalion (New Ontario), Canadian Expeditionary Force, lies buried in Maple Copse Cemetery: Grave reference II.B.2.

Right: The image of the shoulder-flash of the 52nd Battalion (New Ontario) is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an electrician, Leslie James appears to have left behind him no history of his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Ontario, apart from the fact that he was in Port Arthur (today a part of the city of *Thunder Bay**) in the summer of 1915. For that community was where and when he enlisted.

**It was in 1970 that the cities of Port Arthur and Fort William amalgamated to form today's city of Thunder Bay.*

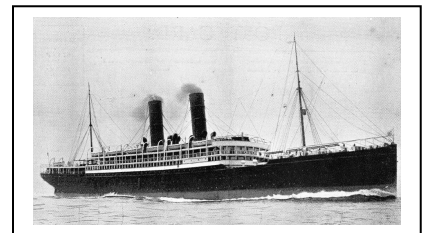
It was on September 11 of 1915 that Leslie James presented himself for medical examination and enlistment, this confirmed by his pay records as being the first day on which he was remunerated for his services by the Canadian Army. It was also the day on which he was *taken on strength* by the 52nd Battalion (*New Ontario*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, the soon-to-be Commanding Officer of that unit, Lieutenant Colonel Hay, declaring that Thomas Hannabury had been... *finally approved and inspected by me...and that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation**.

Private James was to train for the succeeding months in the vicinity of one of the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William, the activities of two separate groups of recruits –one from each city - being co-ordinated by the Commanding Officer of the Battalion who was based in the Armouries at Port Arthur. At the beginning there were no barrack facilities available and so the fledgling soldiers were billeted with the local populations.

The summer was to be spent in camp – but first of all it had to be built. It was apparently done quite economically as it was the Battalion personnel who provided the labour. The camp itself was established in an area known as *Gresley Park* at a distance of some five kilometres from the city of Port Arthur. It was taken over by the parent unit on June 15, the day after the First Draft of the 52nd Battalion had left for overseas service.

On November 3rd, 1915, camp was struck and the entire unit moved into the Armoury at Port Arthur, where it remained all day, and that night, in the midst of a snow storm, the 52nd Battalion of Port Arthur and Fort William, marched aboard two trains, and left its depot town to answer the call of the Colors. (The above information and excerpt is from the Port Arthur News Chronicle, it in turn from the Thunder Bay Public Library web-site.)

November 4 to 8 of 1915 saw the 52nd Battalion (*New Ontario*) transferred from Port Arthur by train – via Ottawa - to St. John, New Brunswick, there on November 23 to take ship on board the SS *California* for the trans-Atlantic voyage. The vessel was to sail for the United Kingdom later on that same day, then docked in the English south-coast port of Plymouth some ten days later again, on December 3.



Private James and his Battalion were not alone in taking passage on *California*. On board were two other military units: the 9th Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles and a contingent of the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps Reserve.

(continued)

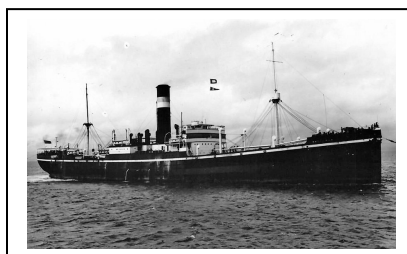
(Preceding page: *The photograph of the Anchor Line ship SS California is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-site. On February 2, 1917, she was torpedoed by a U-boat off the coast of Ireland and sunk with the loss of forty-one lives.*)

From Plymouth, Private James' Battalion entrained for Witley Camp in the county of Surrey. There the unit was to spend almost eight weeks training under the guidance of British instructors before the Canadians were ordered to the military establishment in the vicinity of the villages of Bramshott and Liphook in the county of Hampshire where it reported on January 25. The Battalion remained there barely three weeks.



(Right above: *Royal Canadian Legion flags amongst others adorn the interior of St. Mary's Church in the English village of Bramshott. – photograph from 2016*)

It was on board three ships, the SS *Matheran* – to be later sunk by a mine in 1917 – the *Queen Alexandra* and the *King Edward* that the 52nd Battalion took passage from the English port-city of Southampton en route for the Continent on February 20, 1916. On which ship Private Hannabury was to travel is not recorded.



(Right: *The photograph of the SS Matheran is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-site.*)

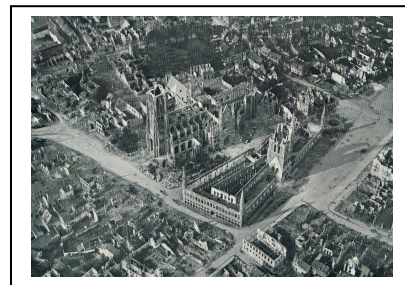
Having disembarked in the French port of Le Havre on the following morning, the unit proceeded to the nearby Canadian Infantry Base Depot where it was to spend the night under canvas – in a snowstorm – before being despatched by train north to Belgium on the next day again.



(Right: *The French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Having travelled via the northern French town of Hazebrouck, the 52nd Battalion – just over one thousand strong all ranks - arrived in the Belgian community of Poperinghe at about three o'clock in the afternoon of February 23, the unit's companies thereupon marching to their various billets.

The 52nd Battalion (*New Ontario*) was one of the units of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component, since January of 1916, of the 3rd Canadian Division. The 3rd Division was itself only newly formed, as of midnight of December of 1915 – January 1 of 1916, and most of its personnel were only now adjusting to the life of a soldier. The Canadian 3rd Division's first posting – a temporary one as it transpired – was to a sector to the south-west of Ypres.

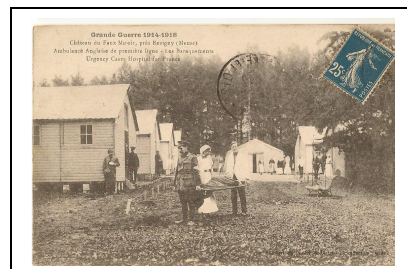


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(Previous page: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

During the third and fourth weeks of March, 1915, the 3rd Division was transferred into the *Ypres Salient*, an area which was to prove to be one of the most lethal theatres of the entire *Western Front*.

During that same month of March, on the 9th, Private James was admitted into the 6th Canadian Field Ambulance – stationed at Locre but with a number of subsidiaries in several locations at the time. Diagnosed as suffering from German measles, he was transferred on that same day to the 7th General Hospital (for infectious diseases) in the northern French centre of St-Omer.

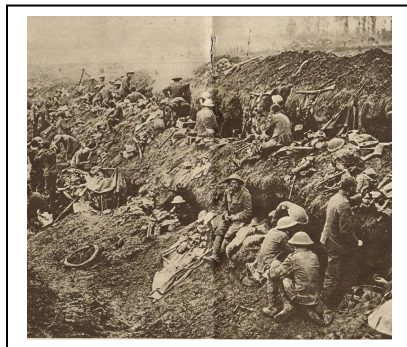


(Right: a *British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some* – from a vintage post-card)

He was discharged from hospital to duty on March 25 and apparently almost immediately ran afoul of the Battalion authorities. For being... *Absent from 6.30 pm parade...* on the same date – thus hardly having returned to camp – Private James was awarded three days of Field Punishment Number 1.

For the two weeks after its arrival in Belgium, the 52nd Battalion had undergone training in trench warfare. From March 10, the date of its first posting to the front, until early June of 1916, the newcomers were to experience, at first hand, the daily routines of life in – and out of – the trenches*.

**During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres or behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearer to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.*



Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding sentences and troops could find themselves in a position at times for weeks on end.

(Right above: *Some months later, Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916 – by that time equipped with steel helmets and the less-visible Lee-Enfield rifles (see below) - from Illustration*)



(continued)

(Preceding page: *Remnants of Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 at Sanctuary Wood – photograph from 2010*)

On March 23 the 52nd Battalion was undertaking... *Preparation for eight day tour in front line.* That day and the next were a busy time as the positions were taken over and work parties organized for dugout construction and improvement, for wiring and for carrying stores and ammunition. The enemy artillery was active for much of this time and during the 23rd and 24th the Battalion incurred seven wounded.

The entire War Diary entry for May 25th reads as follows: *Killed, 439747, Pte. James, L., Wounded, 439477, L/Cpl. Sievers. Orders issued that men always to have rifles with them in trench and on no account to leave bay without rifle. Report on Transport rec'd. Foot not reads, "very good improvement here, T.O. seems to have grasped what is required and I fancy will see it carried out". 4 O.R. selected as special trench wardens on communication trench in advance of Maple Copse. Enemy shelled heavily Crab Crawl, Trench 57, Bay 1,2,3,4, and registered on Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse. Retaliation 18-18 pdrs. rather ineffectual. Gas alert off. Lieut. Pringle reported to Brigadier regarding proposed staff appointment. Maj. Gordon reported 10 p.m., buried Pte. James, Maple Copse.*

The son of James Wigley (also found as Wyley) James, telegraph operator, and Margaret James (née Warren) – to whom he had allocated a monthly twenty dollars from his pay - of Hearts Content, Newfoundland but, by the time of enlistment, of 250, Holmesdale Road, South Norwood, London, he was also brother to Bertram, to Stanley-Edward and to Marion-Eleanor*.

**The Hearts Content Anglican Parish Records document the birth of Robert Leslie Martin James on August 25, 1889. There appears to be nothing further in the available papers and files to help confirm or refute this as being Private Leslie James.*

Leslie James had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-five years: date of birth in Hearts Content, Newfoundland (according to his attestation papers) August 25, 1889 (but see *, *italicized* paragraph above).

Private Herbert Harris was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 27, 2023.

