



## W. Victor Tranter Video Transcription

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“I had two rifle ball holes in my kit bag at the finish. I had to use a dead man’s rifle, as mine was shot and broken.” Words of Private Victor Tranter, May 7, 1915, from France.

My name is Cadet Ethan Ronholme from the Royal Canadian Air Cadets, 340 Griffin Squadron.

Approximately 2,000 Bruce County men and woman enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War. Over 650 did not come home or died later of wounds sustained in the course of duty. This is the story of William Victor Tranter.

Victor was born in Southampton, Ontario in 1894 to William and Annie Tranter. Victor enlisted in the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force only two months after the first declaration of war in September 1914. He was 20 years old. His Attestation Paper hints at why he volunteered so early: his uncle, Captain Lionel Tranter, witnessed Victor’s signature. Lionel was serving with the 32<sup>nd</sup> Regiment. A commitment to military service ran in the family.

Victor started in Valcartier Quebec. This was the main training base for the 1st Canadian Division in 1914. At that time, Victor and his family had no idea that the war would last until 1918.

Victor tells his mother in a letter on April 4, 1914, that he went to an Easter Service in a barn, saying: “Well, I enjoyed the service, but I believe I would sooner be in St. Paul’s. It always seemed like home to me. It was certainly great to listen to the responses of four hundred men and to hear them sing hymns to the music of the mouth organ.” St. Paul’s is the Anglican Church in Southampton, Ontario.

Victor sailed to England with the First Canadian Contingent in October 1914. He spent about four months at training camps on the Salisbury Plains. Training was hard. And it was worse because of all of the mud created by one of England’s wettest winters.

Victor writes a letter to his sister from the training camp in January 1915, hoping for better weather: “I think we are going to put in two months training in France. ... We will be going to the South of France – Summer all the time.”

He also sends her some Irish green marble pigs, souvenirs from his leave in Dublin. Adventure, and a chance to see the world, were some of the reasons men enlisted in the war in the early months. In addition to patriotism, opposition to German aggression, and personal ties to Great Britain.

Victor's diary entries tell us a little bit of what it was like when the Battalion left England:

February 9: "Took cattle boat to quarters. Very uncomfortable."

February 10: "Sea very wet and everybody sick. Received 1<sup>st</sup> ration of day Bread & Bully Beef."

Victor's first mention of coming near the front lines was in his diary on February 16, 1915.

"Could hear very heavy firing. All day and night." The following day, he writes "Marched to Armentiers – centre of line – firing very loud – several buildings destroyed."

A few days later on February 20: "Seeing real war for the first time – boys all cool."

The 1st Canadian Field Artillery Brigade War Diary entry for that day gives some context:

"Dug in with overhead cover from airplanes. Aircraft had dropped bombs which did not fall within 100 yards of this position."

The Canadian Division faced its first real test during the defence of St. Julien beginning on April 22, 1915.

In a letter to his Mother on that day, Victor writes: "I am writing again and of course, as usual, cannot find much to say." We can only imagine all of the things he couldn't, or didn't want to share. His diary that day says: "Left for Yser Canal near Ypres".

His letter was written just before he arrived at the Second Battle of Ypres where the Canadian Division suffered 6000 casualties over four days.

We can only imagine his mother's distress when she read Victor's May 7, 1915 letter:

"I had my right and left hand men shot down and the men that took their places were also shot." She must have been relieved that he was still alive, but frightened by him writing that: "3/5 of our battalion killed & wounded." It was probably little consolation that he wrote: "Knowles and I have had a raise, and have been asked by our officer to consider it as a reward for work done in the field."

An air of foreboding surrounds the letter as he said: "... so I had some good chance to study the chances a man has against the bullet and concluded that they were all against the man."

Two weeks later, he was in action again at Festubert, France. The Canadians made small gains trying to punch a hole in the German frontline. But, there were over 2,000 more casualties within the week. Victor was one of them.

He died in a hospital on June 10, 1915 several weeks after suffering shrapnel wounds at the Battle of Festubert. He was the first man from Southampton to die in the war. The Town sent a heartfelt letter of sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Tranter commenting: "He has 'quit himself well,' his spirit is far above the trenches in which he fought and we believe him safe in the care and love of the house prepared for him by the One who made sacrifice glorious in giving Himself for us."

A letter from the Chaplain of the hospital to Mrs. Tranter described the funeral of her son and enclosed a photograph of the cemetery and location of Victor's grave. He closes the letter saying, "There is so little that we seem to be able to do for you all who are so far away."

Victor Tranter is an example of the courageous commitment that many Bruce County families showed, sacrificing, and serving, fighting, and dying, for our freedom. We thank you, and we salute you.