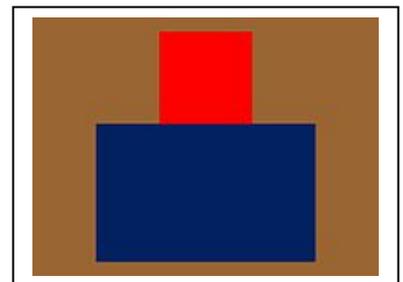




Lance Corporal Clayton Marcel Crowley (Number 69118) of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Ligny St-Flochel British Cemetery, Averdoingt: Grave reference II. E. 2..

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (New Brunswick) is from the Wikipedia Web-site.*)

(continued)

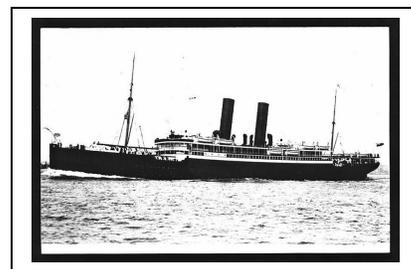


His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of both labourer and miner, Clayton Crowley was possibly the young man who on April 2, 1912, on board the SS *Bruce*, crossed the Cabot Strait from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland to North Sydney in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. If it were he, he was on his way to the industrial city of Sydney, in search of a job as a labourer.

Two-and-a-half years later, Clayton Crowley had made his way to St. John, New Brunswick. It was there that on December 22 of 1914 he presented himself for medical examination, for enlistment and for attestation, all on the same day. He thus found himself taken on strength by the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*) of the Canadian Infantry.

Even the *official* conclusion to the formalities of Private Crowley's enlistment was brought about on that same December 22: a major, acting on behalf of the Officer Commanding the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion declared – on paper – that... *having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been authorized only the month prior to Private Crowley's enlistment. It had begun training immediately in St. John – at Barrack Green Armouries - and continued to do so – with a week off during the Christmas period – until the time arrived for its embarkation for passage overseas. The ship that Private Crowley was to board was the requisitioned *Anchor Line* passenger vessel *Caledonia*.



(Right above: *The photograph of the Anchor Line vessel Caledonia is from the Old Ship Photo Galleries web-site.*)

A number of sources cite June 15 of 1915 as the date of Private Crowley's embarkation but this was apparently not so: the ship is documented as sailing from Montreal on June 9 having taken "A" Squadron of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles on board. Her next stop was St. John, New Brunswick, on June 13, where she welcomed not only the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, but also Section 1 and the Headquarters Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Ammunition Column, and a part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Cyclists Company.

*Caledonia* sailed from St. John to next put into Halifax for the 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the No. 2 Heavy Battery of the Canadian Garrison Artillery. She finally set out to cross the Atlantic on June 15 to drop anchor in the English south-coast naval harbour of Portsmouth-Devonport nine days later, on June 24. From there it was a train ride to the coastal area of the county of Kent – in the vicinity of the Channel ports of Dover and Folkestone – where the Canadians were busy establishing Shorncliffe, a large military complex.



(Right above: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)

(continued)

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was encamped at East Sandling, one of the subsidiary camps, just down the coast from Folkestone.

It was to be a relatively short wait for Private Crowley and his comrades-in-arms before they were called to *active service* on the Continent. On September 15 the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division took ship to France with the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion as one of the components of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade. Private Crowley and his unit - following an inspection by the King on September 2 - sailed on that September 15 from Folkestone to the French port-town of Boulogne on the coast opposite, some two hours' sailing-time away.

On the afternoon of the next day the Battalion boarded a train which, after some six hours, eventually was to make its way some fifty kilometres eastward to the community of Wizernes. The War Diary then recounts that the men were obliged to march... *all night to Bivouac about three miles from Arque* (War Diary). By the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup> the unit had marched to the larger centre of Hazebrouck and, a week later again, it finally reached permanent billets near Scherpenberg, a small rise – there are no *big ones* - in Belgian West Flanders.



(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)



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

Thus the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion arrived in Belgium, to the south of the already-shattered medieval city of Ypres, a sector which it would come to know well as it was to remain there for the best part of a year. It was there that Private Crowley was to become familiar with life in the trenches\*.



It was also to be there, during the autumn of that year and after some eight weeks of trench warfare, that Private Crowley was to receive a promotion in the field. On November 19 of 1915 he was elevated to the rank of lance corporal.

(Right above: *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 Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally 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 so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.*

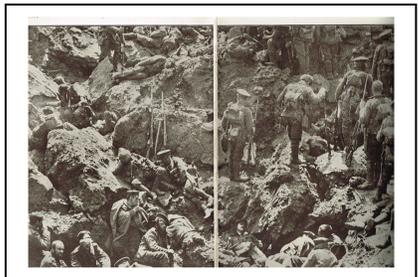
***Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.***

***(Right: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration)***



**In early April of the next year, 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division underwent its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation. It was at a place called St-Éloi where, on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of March, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then followed up with an infantry attack. The role of the newly-arrived Canadian formation was to follow up on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.**

**However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the often putrid weather which turned the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and then a resolute German defence, greeted the newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 3-4. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.**



***(Right above: An attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – from Illustration)***

**However, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, albeit a part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, had found itself playing a peripheral role: while other units had at times been fighting up to their waists in water and mud, the Battalion War Diarist could find time to comment on the weather for twenty-two days in a row.**

**The next major altercation in which Lance Corporal Crowley and the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion were to be involved came about in early June in the south-east sector of the *Ypres Salient*.**

**Six weeks after the confrontation at St-Éloi, on June 2, the Germans attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under British (and thus also Canadian) control. This area was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.**



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

**(continued)**

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, overran the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans had been unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences.

In the meanwhile, Lance Corporal Crowley's 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was still in the area of St-Éloi, serving in the left sub-sector. There the unit was to then be 'standing to', in the same place, for the following four days, thus to take no part in the counter-strike of the day following the attack, June 3, an operation which proved to be a costly disaster for the Canadians. In fact, on June 7, the Battalion found itself retiring to a camp in the rear rather than advancing towards the fighting.

(Right below: *The Canadian memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-west of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance.* – photograph from 1914)

On only the next day, however, June 8, Lance Corporal Crowley's unit was sent forward to relieve troops in support positions in the area of *Railway Dugouts*, just to the rear of the places of the heaviest fighting – but still a favourite target of the German guns. There it remained until June 12 when, once more, it retired to the rear.



(Right below: *Maple Copse, the scene of heavy fighting in June of 1916, and its cemetery wherein lie numerous Canadians* – photograph from 2014)

By the time that the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved up to the front once more, on the following day again, the action at *Mount Sorrel* and vicinity was all but over. During the night of June 12-13 the Canadians had once again attacked and, thanks to better organization and a good artillery barrage, on this occasion had taken back almost all of the lost ground.



At the end of the confrontation, both sides were back much where they had been eleven days previously.

(Right: *Railway Dugouts Burial Ground (Transport Farm) today contains twenty-four hundred fifty-nine burials and commemorations* – photograph from 2014)

There was little infantry action during the next week – nothing mentioned in the War Diary – apart from the routine patrolling, but the same Diary notes exceptionally heavy enemy artillery fire for five of those days. The Battalion was relieved and withdrew to Camp "D" on June 20.



(continued)

**(Right: A century later, reminders of a violent past close to the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres, an area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature. – photograph from 2014)**



Once again the 26<sup>th</sup> had played a minor role in a major action. So minor, in fact, that Lance Corporal Crowley had been granted an eight-day period of leave which he began on June 7, returning on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

Where he had gone for those days is not documented but about a week later again he was on his way back to the United Kingdom – not on leave, however.

Lance Corporal Crowley had been involved in an accident: how he had contrived to be wounded twice by a bayonet is not documented but it appears to have occurred on or about June 21. He had incurred... *a bayonet wound, index finger L. hand, middle phalanx, BW left flank...* and a slight injury to his left forearm, wounds that had apparently subsequently been left undressed for two days.

He was reported as having been treated on June 22 in the 8<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital in Boulogne\* from where he was immediately despatched to England on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Newhaven*.

*\*It is curious to note that the Royal Army Medical Corps officer in charge of his case at Boulogne, a Major Sinclair, saw fit to categorize his injuries as trivial and that they would... 'not interfere with his future efficiency as a soldier'. In the end Major Sinclair may have been correct but it was to be almost twenty-four months before Lance Corporal Crowley\*\* re-joined the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the field.*

*\*\*His medical files almost unanimously cite his rank as that of a private. However all other records confirm him as having been a lance corporal.*

Upon his arrival on the other side of the English Channel Lance Corporal Crowley was transferred on paper from the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion to a Canadian Casualty Assembly Centre and, in practical terms, from the ship to Southwark Military Hospital, East Dulwich, in the south-east London area where he was admitted on June 24.



**(Right above: The photograph of a peace-time Newhaven is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)**

There Lance Corporal Crowley remained until July 19 when he was forwarded to the Hammersmith Military Hospital in the London district of Shepherd's Bush. He was to remain there for a further two months; upon his discharge on September 21, the following memo accompanied him:

(continued)

19<sup>th</sup> Sept 1916 Patient can partially flex 1<sup>st</sup> finger. Hand otherwise good. Has probably divided long extensor tendon. Should improve with use.

Rec'd for discharge Class A - Discharge to Depot.

His case then discharged to one of the fore-mentioned Canadian Casualty Assembly Centres\*, Lance Corporal Crowley himself was apparently to remain in London for a further week before being admitted into the Canadian Convalescent Hospital, Woodcote Park, in the town of Epsom. There another month was to pass before he was passed along to a different CCAC, this one at Hastings on the English south coast, on October 27.

*\*In fact the Canadian Casualty Assembly Centres were supposedly totally bureaucratic in nature, designed to arrange and supervise the whereabouts of Canadian sick and wounded arriving back from service on the Continent. The system worked poorly and it was abandoned after about a year.*

Four days later, on October 31, Lance Corporal Crowley was on his way to the Reinforcement Depot... for *full duty* where he was *taken on strength* by the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Training Battalion. Three further months were then to pass before he was again transferred, on this occasion, January 31 of 1917, to the 13<sup>th</sup> Canadian (Reserve) Battalion (New Brunswick) which was then in the process of being formed at Bramshott in the southern county of Hampshire.



(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*)

Lance Corporal Crowley was to serve in the 13<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion for sixteen months. By that time he had seen a bit of the south coast of England: the unit had moved to Shoreham on February 20 – a week after he had written a will in which he had left his all to his mother - and on to Seaford on October 23 before having returned to Bramshott on April 24 of 1918.



(Right: *The mortuary chapel and a part of the military plot in Seaford Cemetery in which are buried two Newfoundlanders – photograph from 2016*)

By the time he reported back to Bramshott, Lance Corporal Crowley was married. He had been granted permission to do so by his Commanding Officer on November 19, 1917, and had transferred the monthly fifteen dollars from his pay that he had initially allotted to his father, to his new wife on January 1, 1918. Her name was Florrie and she was presumably English, her address recorded as 45, St. Leonard's Avenue, Hove. There appears to be little else documented about the marriage or about her, except that she was to receive a pension after her husband's death.

(continued)

It was on June 1, 1918, that Lance Corporal Crowley returned to service, and to the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, on the Continent, on this occasion likely having passed through Southampton and the French port-city of Le Havre to report – one of the mere seven *other ranks* to do so on that date – *to duty* to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot by then established in proximity to the coastal town of Étaples.



On June 15 he left the Base Depot for the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp, reporting there on the morrow; from there, almost two months afterwards, he left to join his unit on August 12, one of a draft of fifty *other ranks* to so on August 14\*.

*\*Recorded in the War Diary as having arrived on August 15*

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

\* \* \* \* \*

Since Lance Corporal Crowley’s hospitalization in June of 1916, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*) had served continually on the Western Front: in the autumn of 1916 it had fought at the *First Battle of the Somme*; in the spring of 1917 it had played its role in the *First Battle of Arras*, notably during the Canadian success of the first day of that offensive, April 9, Easter Monday, at Vimy Ridge.



(Right above: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcelette – photograph from 2015*)

(Right: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)



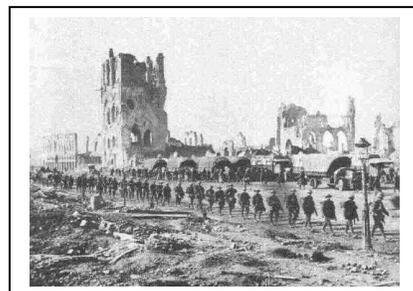
August of 1917 had seen a short Canadian-led campaign in the Lens Sector of northern France, the most notable episode of which had been the taking of *Hill 70\** in the northern outskirts of Lens itself. The Canadians had then been forced to curtail their efforts when the British High Command found itself in need of re-enforcements for its ongoing offensive in Belgium and so called upon them and the Anzacs.

*\*Those expecting Hill 70 to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear. Yet it was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than the city of Lens itself.*



(Preceding page: *This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. – photograph from 1914*)

This last-mentioned campaign, officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, is undoubtedly better known to history as *Passchendaele*. The Canadians fought in that campaign during the last month of the battle, from mid-October to mid-November.



(Right: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

Then, most recently, there had been the German spring offensives.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, they launched a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21. The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops there.

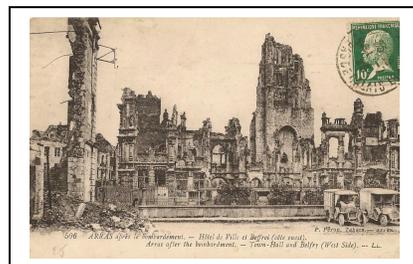


(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)

The German advance continued for a month, petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was the result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were the most significant.

*\*A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*

The War Diary suggests, however, that the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not involved in the heaviest of the fighting, if in any at all. Posted mostly near Wailly, just to the south-west of the city of Arras, the majority of the casualties that the unit had incurred were due to incessant enemy artillery activity rather than to any infantry action.



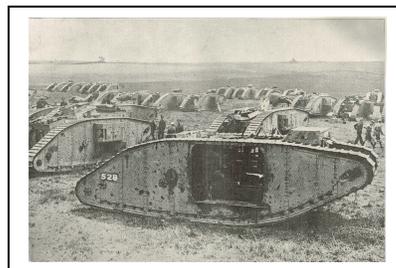
(Right: *The City Hall of Arras and its bell-tower looked like this by the spring of 1918 after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery. – from a vintage post-card*)

The Battalion was to remain in approximately the same area, to the south of Arras, after the crisis, moving some few kilometres south-west to Berles-au-Bois and Bretencourt and, when in reserve, a little further to the west.

Thus a relative calm descended on the front as the German threat faded – for the enemy the campaign had won a great deal of ground, but nothing of any real military significance on either of the two fronts. Nor was the subsequent calm particularly surprising: both sides were exhausted and needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce.

The Allies from this point of view were a lot better off than were their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were by now belatedly arriving on the scene. An overall Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

Towards the end of July, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion – and a large number of other Canadian units – had begun to move in a semi-circular itinerary - to the west of, then south of, and finally east of - to finish in front of the city of Amiens and there to face the German forces where they had remained after the attacks of the previous March and April. On August 2, while en route, the Battalion had undergone two days of tactical training in co-operation with tanks. On the evening of August 3 it received orders to move forward once more, towards the assembly area – on foot as usual\*.



(Right above: *In 1917 the British formed the Tank Corps, a force which became ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again 'somewhere in France' – from Illustration*)

*\*While, at the outset, this huge transfer of troops had been undertaken by train and motor transport, the later stages had been accomplished on foot, in marches during the hours of darkness. The strategy had worked, for the attack of August 8 apparently took the Germans completely by surprise.*

(Right: *The venerable gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had apparently been able to see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918 – photograph from 2007(?)*)



The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary entry for that August 8, 1918, reads as follows: *Weather very fine. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division attacked at 3.20 a.m. (sic)*

*The 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade passed through the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry brigade at the first objective at 8.20 a.m. The attack of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was on a frontage of 2,200 yards.*

***The villages of WIENCOURT L'EQUIPEE, GUILLAUCOURT and all objectives were taken with a large number of guns and prisoners.***



The War Diary Appendix pertaining to the attack cites the success of the co-operation of tanks and infantry. It also notes that many of the casualties of the day were caused by enemy artillery, snipers, and – for the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion – by enemy aircraft operations.

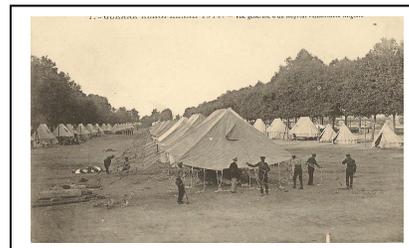
***(Right above: A group of German prisoners, some serving here as stretcher-bearers, being taken to the rear after their capture by Canadian troops: a tank may be seen in the background – from Le Miroir)***

By the time that the unit was relieved and placed in reserve on August 11, it had incurred approximately forty *killed in action* and two-hundred six *wounded in action*.

The Canadian advance continued but, for the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, there were soon to be other things in store. It is uncertain whether Lance Corporal Crowley was involved in fighting on August 15, the day of - or after - his arrival, as the unit returned forward to the front line on that date until August 18. But then it was withdrawn, retiring entirely from the area in much the same semi-circular fashion – as just as rapidly - as it had come, to finish on the sector of the front just to the south-west of Arras that it had left only weeks before.

On August 26 the Battalion took part in a general offensive following the route of the Arras-Cambrai main road. Foch, the Allied Supreme Commander, had ordered a constant succession of attacks along the entire front so as to overwhelm not only the immediate opposition but also his capacity to re-enforce and to supply his troops.

It was a strategy which was to work. On the first day of the attack the War Diarist entered in his report of the day: *Not much enemy shell-fire. We passed about a mile beyond our old front line and took up positions there...*



Two days later, on August 28, the offensive was still continuing and the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in action...

***(Right above: a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card)***

***Casualty Report: Was wounded while in charge of a section, during an attack on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1917, and died the same day at No. 7 Casualty Clearing Station.***

The son of Edward Crowley (fisherman, deceased 1920) and of Mary Ann Crowley (née *Piercey*) of Western Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Allan-Eli, Herbert-Wilson, Jethro\*, Joseph-Sparkes, Robert-Gordon, Samuel-Piercey, John-Wesley\*\*, and James-William.

(continued)

**\*One source cites two Jethros – 1895 and 1898. Was the first an infant mortality?**

**\*\*This needs confirmation as it is from a single source. Another Crowley family had a John-Wesley born 1887.**

Lance Corporal Crowley was reported by the Officer Commanding the 7<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Ligny St-Flochel as having *died of wounds\** on August 28, 1918.

**\*One source has him wounded on the previous day, not the same one.**

Clayton Marcel Crowley had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-two years and five months: date of birth, July 8, 1894 – *Ancestry.ca* cites the year as 1892 – both dates are compatible with the birth-dates of his siblings. (The *Puddester Family History* web-site, curiously, appears to record the birth of all his siblings but not of Clayton Marcel Crowley himself.)

Lance Corporal Clayton Marcel Crowley was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 27, 2023.