

LETHAL COMPANY

Lt William Mackenzie Thomson MC DFC

2Lt Harold Leslie Edwards MM DFC

20 Squadron RAF



by Stewart K. Taylor

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT; from the date of his 28 April 1893 home birth in a modest farm dwelling on the Fourth Line of Beckwith township, near Franktown, a village located on the main road that leads straight to Ottawa, baby Harold Leslie Edwards would soon outgrow his infant's clothes and like his farmer father develop into a 5ft 11in muscular young man with enormous chest expansion. With an education compromised by the untimely purchase of a general store, young Harold had to forego a high school diploma in favour of acting as a delivery boy for the family business; his only formal learning having come via all-age mixed classes taught by the same teachers in two one-room school houses: Prospect Public School and Crow's Nest School, both in and around Franktown. For two years, 1912 and 1913, he operated a crudely constructed, largely 'jerry-built' power saw to cut building logs – his father being a handyman carpenter and building sub contractor.

When the general store business failed, with the rural location to blame, the Edwards family moved to Smith Falls, Ontario. Harold went to work in that town, for an uncle who ran a profitable livery business. His father, now a major in the 240th Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Force, and his uncle, a captain in the same unit, were already in uniform and dealing with military matters.

Harold identified his trade, or calling, as a 'chauffeur' or repairer of autos on his own Attestation Papers on 16 December 1915, when he enlisted as a private in the 130th Battalion at Perth, Ontario. The moment this reserve unit reached Liverpool aboard the

SS Lapland on 5 October 1916, it was broken up to provide reinforcements for the 12th Battalion CEF. Advanced to the rank of corporal No. 787002, with an according increase in pay, he left West Sandling, the Canadian Reserve Forces base, on 14 November 1916, as a trooper with the 38th (Ottawa) Battalion and headed for the war zone. The fighting on the Somme had drawn to a close, the last ground attacks taking place on 18 November 1916. The next major endeavour for the Canadian Corps – Vimy Ridge!



*Wearing RAF Pilot's wings, though he was not entitled to do so, this post WWI portrait of Harold Leslie Edwards MM DFC has a certain compelling look, an impression he certainly tried to convey to his immediate family in Smith Falls, Ontario, who received the original.
: L.A. 'Larry' Edwards (nephew) via S.K. Taylor*

Hill 145, the highest elevation of the Ridge, would require an assault by the 4th Canadian Division but before the capture from the 16th Bavarians of this prime piece of German held French real estate, slated for 9 April 1917, could effectively take place, and while the preparatory Allied artillery barrage was under way, the hefty framed 25 year old Corporal Edwards would be in line for the MM; a report of his valour was filed by the Division's resident secretary.

During the desperate fighting at Vimy Ridge in the memorable month of April, the advance of his company was temporarily held up by a well handled machine gun nest and its crew of six Germans.

The gun and its crew were well sheltered in a large shell crater, protected in front by barbed wire entanglements. Five separate attempts to advance in front and capture the gun were made by parties of volunteers, two at a time, but they fell, one by one. Corporal Edwards and a comrade then worked their way around the flank, taking cover over the uneven, shell pitted ground, took the Germans by surprise, disposed of five by rifle, bayonet and revolver and carried