

***Thauvette, Gérard, Lance-Sergeant (D123085)***



- Gérard Thauvette was born 9 August 1922, in Montreal, Quebec. He was 22 years old when he died of accidental injury on 31 December 1944 in the Netherlands.
- On 19 January 1942, he enlisted at the No. 4 District Depot in Montreal South and was immediately sent to No. 41 Canadian Army (Basic) Training Centre in Huntingdon for basic military training. He was then sent to No. 8 Canadian Armoured Corps Training Centre in Borden, Ontario, where he qualified as a driver. He was sent overseas in June 1942 and posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> then the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Corps Reinforcement Units then on 22 August 1942, to the 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment (17<sup>th</sup> Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars. He and his squadron were deployed to France on the 11 July 1944. On 8 November he was promoted to acting sergeant.
- He had no military experience prior to enlisting.
- He left school at 15 after attending nine years of studies at Holy Cross School in Montreal.
- Prior to enlisting, he was employed for two years as a factory worker by Joseph Robb Marine Packing Company in Montreal. Before that, he had worked for two years as a soda fountain clerk owned by M. Holler. He had also worked on a farm.
- According to his medical examination, he was 5 foot 7 inches tall and weighed 137 pounds. He had brown hair and brown eyes. He was found fit for category A.
- Gérard was the son of Antonio (a carpenter who helped build the RCAF barracks in Kingston, Ontario) and Juliette Thauvette, who lived at 5676 Beaulieu Street, Montreal, Quebec. He had three siblings; Roland (19); Pauline (17); and Rita (15).
- Philip was a bachelor and had no children.
- The sole beneficiary of Gérard's will was his mother.
- His body is buried in the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, Groesbeek, Netherlands (Ref II. B. 12.) (plot, row, grave)

**Context**

- After D-Day, the 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment was deployed to France by squadron. Trooper Thauvette arrived in France with his squadron in July 1944. In France, the Regiment took part in the battles of Caen, the River Laison and the Falaise Gap. After the decisive Battle of the Falaise Gap, the Regiment then pursued the retreating German Forces through France, eventually helping to encircle and obtain the surrender of the large fortified German garrisons along the English Channel. It then moved into Belgium and the Netherlands, where it

participated in the battle of the Scheldt, and helped clear the enemy from the Breskens Pocket, the low-lying land south of the Scheldt Estuary. This operation was necessary to shorten the overextended supply lines from Normandy, and it gave the Allied Forces unrestricted access to the Port of Antwerp.

- After the Battle of the Scheldt, the advance of the Allied Forces stalled for the winter of 1944-45 notably while they redirected their supply lines through the Port of Antwerp and built up their supplies of ammunition, fuel, and other essential elements, in anticipation of a thrust into northern Germany. While this was going on, the River Waal in Central Netherlands became the frontline. Starting in October 1944, different British, Canadian, Belgian, and Dutch regiments rotated through a line of fortified outposts along the Allied side of the river. From 17 December 1944 to 3 February 1945, the 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment occupied a line of fortified outposts along the Allied side of the river west of Nijmegen. On December 30, 1944, according to the war diary, the Regiment received information about what was happening across the river from each of its three squadrons. "A" Squadron, where Thauvette was stationed that day, reported hearing machine-gun fire and passing motor freight. "B" Squadron reported seeing an adversary opening fire on an aircraft and "C" Squadron reported that all they could hear were trains and cars.
- However, on the morning of the next day, 31 December 1944, Trooper Thauvette was travelling in a large truck with other soldiers to be witnesses at a military court martial in Nijmegen. Near Leeuwen, in the Netherlands, the truck driver swerved on icy roads to avoid striking two small children. The vehicle went out of control and overturned in a water-filled ditch. Only one soldier survived the accident; the others likely asphyxiated or drowned. A military board of inquiry ruled they were accidental deaths.
- The following statement was made by Lieutenant E.W. Smith, who was the sole survivor of the accident: "I was thrown into the back of the truck and found myself under water. I managed to get my head above the water and called to the other four. They all answered me. There was just room between the surface of the water and the floor of the truck to allow our heads above water. I was conscious and talking to all the others for some time. We tried to get out of the vehicle, but the doors were all jammed, and the armoured sides were resting on the bottom. The petrol was running out of the inverted tanks and falling on the water around us. The fumes were very strong. I then lost consciousness and regained in a house after being rescued. The others must have been overcome and slipped under water. My head was in one of the foot wells at the side of the vehicle and evidently I did not slip under."