



Joseph Ovila Fernand William Thomas was born on August 11, 1925, in Montreal.

His parents, Louis William Thomas and Aurore Thomas, née Lavoie, gave him the nickname Fernand.

Fernand had three brothers and two sisters, was Roman Catholic, and the language spoken at home was French.

Fernand had attended primary school for six years.

When he reported for military service on May 1, 1944, he had worked for six months as a machine operator for Canadian Copper.



Canadian Copper 1939

Fernand Thomas was registered with the annotation: "N.R.M.A."

To clarify:

The National Resources Mobilization Act was passed 21 June 1940 by Parliament. It represented the government's response to the public clamour for a more effective Canadian war effort that arose in the wake of the stunning German victories in Belgium and France. The Act enabled the government to requisition the property and services of Canadians for home defence. An earlier promise made by PM Mackenzie King in 1939 not to introduce conscription for overseas service was honoured, but it was reversed in August 1942 following the national plebiscite of April 1942. The amended NRMA permitted the sending of conscripts overseas in addition to the existing regular volunteer forces. The NRMA was important politically as it attested to the government's determination to intensify the war effort. It tended to appease the conscriptionists without antagonizing the anti-conscriptionists. In military affairs the Act created a duality in Canada's military that was to last until the war's end. It also resulted in the training of a large body of men for military duty. From 1940 to 1944 close to 60 000 NRMA soldiers ("zombies") volunteered for general service, and several thousand more were sent to the front after the use of conscripts for overseas service actually began late in 1944.

On May 4, 1942, Fernand married Pauline Dalfond. The young couple's ages are striking; Fernand was 16, while his bride was 17.

When Fernand reported for duty in 1944, his son Yvon was not yet a year old. Whether he was trying to avoid the N.R.M.A. call-up by starting a family will always remain a mystery. Anyhow, he signed up for active duty on September 14, 1944, to be deployed anywhere.

After District Depot No. 4, Fernand's first posting, starting in June 1944, was No. 43 Canadian Army (Basic) Training Centre in Sherbrooke, Quebec.

He spent a few days in hospital there.

In mid-August 1944, he was transferred again, this time to the infantry training camp in Farnham, Quebec.

Apparently, it took some time getting used to, because during the first days of September, it was recorded that he was "Absent Without Leave" (AWL) for three days.

In October 1944, his absence was reported again, this time for one day. He was also granted official leave, initially 14 days in the second half of November 1944 and in December of that year four more days of embarkation leave. Fernand then was transferred to Camp Debert, the staging area for troops destined for the United Kingdom. Fernand disembarked there on the 25th of December 1944. He was assigned to a reinforcement battalion.

On February 10, 1945, Fernand crossed over to mainland of Europe. Then, on February 15, he was officially taken on strength by Le Régiment de Maisonneuve. A few days later, on February 18, his son Claude was born.

With the regiment, Fernand undoubtedly experienced action in the Reichswald and the fighting in the Hochwald during the Rhineland offensive. Fernand was promoted to corporal on March 18, 1945.

The battles around Xanten, the advance into the eastern and northern part of the Netherlands, the battles around and in the city of Groningen, and the advance towards Oldenburg followed.

The last entry in his army file: "Died on April 26, 1945, from wounds sustained in action against the enemy."

In the regiment's war diary, we read that the attack on Delmenhorst, Germany, was launched that day.

The regiment's A-Company bore the brunt of the fighting. Recorded was that 26 casualties were suffered, most of whom were in the A-Company.

One of the 26 must have been Corporal Fernand Thomas. He was given a temporary grave near Delmenhorst before being transferred to the CWGC Canadian War Cemetery in Holten. He rests in Plot 10, Row B, Grave 5.

*He was awarded:
1939-1945 Star; France-Germany Star; War Medal 1939-1945 and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with clasp.*

