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## Book Excerpt: *Loyola, the Wars: in Remembrance of “Men for Others”*

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## Book Excerpt

# Loyola, The Wars: In Remembrance of “Men for Other”

by Gil Drolet

As a youngster in the sombre early November days of the mid-thirties, I was always drawn to the wreaths adorning the young maple trees bordering the north and south sides of Sherbrooke Street directly facing Loyola College in west-end Montreal. Blood-red poppies dignified the wreaths along with metal tablets bearing the names of people unknown to me. Instinct told me that these were reminders of the solemn remembrance due to men who had died in the First World War. I had heard stories from one of my mother's brothers who had almost survived without a scratch until 2 April 1918 at Arras when German rifle fire smashed his right cheek and shoulder.

That these symbols were displayed in front of the imposing Gothic buildings between West Broadway and Belmore Avenues meant nothing to me at the time other than that I should somehow contain myself in their presence. Now sixty years later, as those same trees struggle in vain to survive time and carbon monoxide, I finally know why the wreaths were there. *Loyola of Montreal*, a book written by the late Timothy Slattery QC, unlocked the mystery. In 1922, Sherbrooke Street west of Westhill Avenue was made a “Road of Remembrance” with the planting of hundreds of saplings to commemorate those who gave their lives in what was once called “The Great War for Civilisation.”

The thirty-six trees directly lining both sides of the street facing Loyola are memorials to each of the school's Old Boys who made the supreme sacrifice. Every year the wreaths with the names appeared in those long ago Novembers. Although recent research reveals that a thirty-seventh name (and tree) should have been present, one can

hardly blame a well-intentioned, though young and impetuous, Alumni Association for this oversight. In 1922, a grateful school had erected an impressive brass tablet bearing the names of the fallen as well as of those who had served. Once again only 36 names appeared among the dead....

As 1996 marks Loyola's centennial, the time is right to pay homage to the 94 of its young men who died in the service of their country from 1916 to 1952. Nor must we forget the many hundreds who served.

## The First World War

The first Old Boy fatality was 65698 Corporal Adrian McKenna of the 24th Battalion. McKenna was evacuated to England after first being wounded in the left shoulder on 26 October 1915. According to a letter from then Lieutenant Georges Vanier of the 22nd Battalion, (whose unit was part of the same brigade), Adrian had developed vision problems as a result of a reaction to anti-tetanus serum. He, like many others, also suffered from influenza though not from the strain that was to claim the lives of thousands, civilians and soldiers alike, in the late stages of the war and shortly



Corporal Adrian McKenna

afterwards. He rejoined his unit on 11 January 1916 and was killed eight days later when shot through the right lung by a sniper. Several of his mates managed to rescue him under heavy fire in thick mud but he died within an hour in his own trenches. He was 22 years old and is buried in Plot X, Row C, Grave 6 of La Laiterie Military Cemetery in Kemmel, Belgium.

As was the case for many others among Loyola's fallen, the *College Review* published excerpts from letters from chaplains, company commanders and friends from other units. In McKenna's case, the 1916 *Review* printed five such testimonials one of which (Vanier's) begins with these words: "By this time you know the terrible news of Adrian's death in action. What can I say that would not be empty? You know how I feel..."

Two letters, one written the day before his death, reveal unexpected details of life at the front. On 16 January, McKenna wrote:

...I am feeling fine again and ready to get after the Huns....I hope you will be able to make this out. I am lying on my bunk and writing by the light of one candle. I haven't been paid for a long time and I can't afford two candles. We were reckless last night and spent our last two francs on eggs, seven each....I am enclosing the stripes off my great-coat....The stains on them are blood from a man who was killed and whom I carried into the trench. Keep them for me till I get back...

Two days later he has left his billets and is now in his "Little Dug-Out in the West" – this letter reveals that some steps had been taken at home to insure his early return to Canada, something he had no desire to do ("I wouldn't dream of going back until I have done my "bit" and I am glad you didn't do anything until you heard from me...") Having earlier reassured people that all things are "jake" "(new slang word)," he signs off: "Goodbye for a while. It's dinner time, and I am starving as usual." The next day at 0730 hours, the sniper's bullet found its mark.

At 0500 hours on 25 April 1916, a sniper's bullet to the head ended the life of Lieutenant John Howe (Old Loyola 1900) of the 14th Battalion. His unit was in a relatively quiet sector of the line at the time having relieved the 13th Battalion two days earlier (Easter Sunday) left of the Ypres-Comines Canal. Howe was the grand nephew of

the Honourable Joseph Howe, Maritime rights champion and recalcitrant newcomer to the cabinet of John A. Macdonald shortly after Confederation. Lieutenant Howe was 25 at the time of his death and is buried in Plot V, Row A, Grave 24 of the Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery



Lieutenant John Howe

in Belgium. Unfortunately, his is the name that does not appear on the Loyola memorial tablet nor was a 37th tree planted in his memory. This is difficult to explain since his name appears on the cumulative Roll of Honour for the years 1916 to 1918 in consecutive college yearbooks.

The 2nd University Company, Canadian Expeditionary Force had welcomed McG/129 Private Joseph Herbert Butler to its ranks on 11 May 1915. By October of that year he was serving with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in France. In defending Sanctuary Wood for 18 hours against a fierce enemy attack, the PPCLI had 150 of its men killed. Sometime between 2 and 4 June 1916, Private Butler, enlisted as a student from Loyola, was one of the dead. He was 22 years old and is commemorated in Section A to C of the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial to Canada.

Among the many letters written by Alumni in service, there is a constant link of devotion to both the school and to classmates. Aboard a troopship on the way to the Balkans, Lieutenant Henri de Lotbinière Panet thanks the school for mailing him the *College Review*. He adds:

...Trench warfare is exciting enough, too much so at times, but this [Balkans combat] will be more open...we are badly needed in Serbia...if only we can land without running into a torpedo....I hope, some day, if I can fool the Bulgars as successfully as I have the Boches, to be able to get back to Loyola and see the old crowd again...

On March 7, 1916 Major George Boyce wrote to a Loyola friend thanking him for a Christmas box. Boyce, who as a surgeon in the field was to rise to the rank of Colonel and earn a Distinguished Service Order (DSO), edited "The Iodine Chronicle" for No. 1 Canadian Field Ambulance. One paragraph in his letter of March 7th reads as follows:

The old College was not very large in my day (1900) but some of the boys are doing well out here. Among those whom I met are my good friends, Lieut. Frank Maguire, 2nd Battalion, now on sick leave in England from injury received in the trenches; Lieut. Joe Power, 2nd Battalion, now in Canada sick; Lieut. "Chubby" Power, 3rd Battalion, now in England badly wounded; Lieuts. Pierre and Philippe Chevalier 14th and 22nd Battalions, one of whom is severely wounded; Sergeant Adrian Fletcher, whose application for a commission I recently signed; and Lieut. Arthur McGovern, of the 28th Battalion. I know Lieut. George Vanier is here, but have not yet seen him...

Before long Boyce would also be wounded as would Philippe Chevalier while Frank Maguire and Arthur McGovern would be killed. Vanier too would be wounded though not as seriously as he was to be in 1918.

On 7 June 1916 Captain Arthur Lawrence McGovern was killed at the Battle of Hooze while serving with the 28th Battalion. Though engaged in the practice of law he had enlisted in November of 1914 and, like several others, chose not to have next of kin notified in case of death. He realized that such terrible news might better be given

through the diplomatic channels of close friends. He was 24 at the time of death and is buried in Plot I, Row E, Grave 6 of Reninghelst New Military Cemetery in Belgium.

The College Review devotes five pages to McGovern, popularly known as "Terry." His own words



Captain A.L. McGovern

demonstrate an enviable regimental pride and limitless devotion to his men. His letter of 12 February closes on this note:

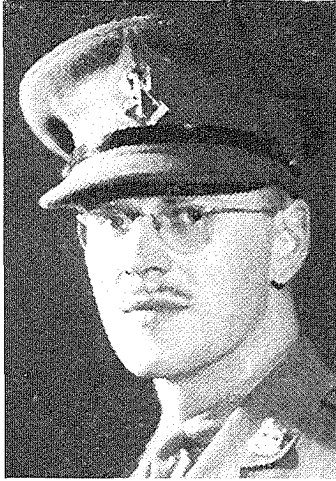
...We have gradually weeded out the unfit and the sloper and find ourselves to-day as fine a body of men as wear the King's uniform. When you have slept, eaten, fought and fasted with men for such a period; when you have seen them with the shells bursting close by, or the sniper's bullet skimming over their heads; when you have seen them cheerfully erecting barbed-wire entanglements in the open, about 125 yards from the Huns; when you have seen all these things, you are proud to belong to such a Battalion, very proud of your men, and your only ambition is that in the time of trial they will have no reason to be ashamed of you...

The Loyola Memorial Tablet has the initials DSO and the word "Posthumous" after McGovern's name. There is no record of his having been awarded the DSO (nor is the DSO granted posthumously) and the error is probably due to the great reputation he had established in his unit with the men and his brother-officers as revealed in the many tributes to his leadership. Rumours travelled fast by word of mouth and any honours, granted or unconfirmed, were eagerly seized upon....

## The Second World War

During the First World War, Loyola, a young institution, furnished close to 300 students and alumni to the military war effort. Twenty years later when the 1939-45 conflict had broken out between 1,200 and 1,500 of her sons answered their country's call...

Daniel Charles Young had been an inveterate member of the Canadian militia at the outbreak of war; whereupon he went on active service as a major with the 17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars. He requested and was granted a transfer to the Royal 22<sup>ème</sup> Régiment where he was taken on strength as a lieutenant. By the time the 1st Division went into action in Sicily, Young was a captain with the Van Doos. Some two weeks before he was grievously wounded he was promoted to major. Records are slightly confusing regarding Young's wounds. The regimental history



Major D.C. Young

records that shortly after the struggle for Ortona during the Italian campaign, the 3rd Brigade of which the R22eR was a part, was ordered to push on to the Arielli River in the face of stiff opposition from German paratroops. The Van Doos were assigned the seizure of the high ground at the fork of the Riccio River. Gaining the objective took two days and was costly in casualties one of which was Major Young whose wounds were so severe that nothing could be done to save his life. The 30-year-old company commander was hit on 30 December 1943 and died of wounds in a military hospital on 28 January 1944. He is buried in Plot III, Row E, Grave 1 of the War Cemetery in Bari, Italy.



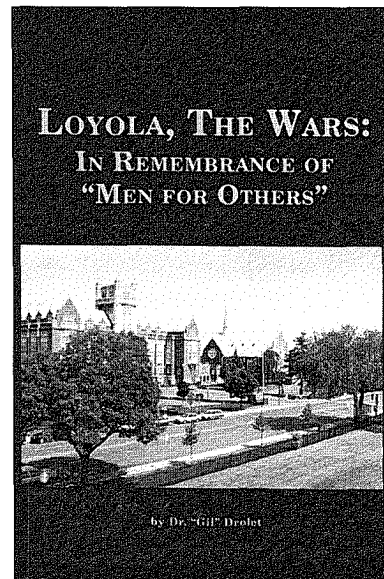
Flying Officer  
W.E. McNicholl

All wartime fatalities are tragic but some stand out because of certain heart-wrenching details. Such was the case of J35964 Flying Officer William Eugene McNicholl of 116 Squadron, RCAF who was lost at sea when the Canso flying boat he was piloting made a forced landing in foul winter weather off the coast of Newfoundland. He and his crew were officially declared dead on 6 February 1944. Repeated attempts were made to pick them up but the weather would not allow it. Messages from the raft indicated that McNicholl did a masterful job of trying to keep hope alive but time and the climate took their toll eventually and the frustrated air crews trying to effect a rescue were

powerless in the face of the elements. The sea finally claimed the crew. McNicholl is commemorated on Panel 3, Column 4 of the Ottawa Memorial.

The Casualty Card filled out in the name of D86403 Staff Sergeant Bernard MacDonald reads simply "KIA near Mussolini Canal – near Anzio, Italy." The hour is 1330 and the date is 29 Feb. 44 when the body was tagged. The only other comment is: GSW (Gun Shot Wound) neck." In fact, MacDonald, 28, was killed 13 days earlier while with the 3rd Regiment of the 1st Canadian Special Service Battalion in the bloody fighting for Anzio where he is buried at the Beach Head Cemetery in Plot XVII, Row C, Grave 8.

In the Burmese theatre of operations on 28 February 1944, an accident occurred during an Air Test which was to take the life of a veteran air crew member of 215 Squadron (RAF-India). On that day, 25-year-old Pilot Officer (Air Bomber) Robert Cecil Stuart McGee (J86063) died of injuries sustained in the crash of his Wellington bomber. He is buried in Plot 3, Row G, Grave 1 of the Chittagong War Cemetery in present day Bangladesh which was part of Burma in 1944.



Dr. Gil Drolet, *Loyola, The Wars: In Remembrance of "Men for Others"* (Waterloo: Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, 1996) \$19.00, 44 pages ISBN 0-9697955-5-6. To Order, write to Loyola High School, 7272 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec, H4B 1R2.