



Lieutenant Leonard Ayng Edens (Regimental Number 2547* and attached to Number 29 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps) is buried in Harlebeke New Cemetery – Grave reference IX. A. 6.

**Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were not considered as enlisted. These officers thus had no Regimental Number allotted to them.*

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And since officers did not enlist, they were not then required to re-enlist ‘for the duration’, even though, at the beginning, as a private, they had volunteered their services for only a limited time – twelve months.

His occupation prior to enlistment recorded as that of a student*, Leonard Aynged Edens presented himself in St. John’s for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John’s, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on April 19, 1916; it was a procedure which was to find him...*fit for foreign service*. He thereupon both enlisted and underwent attestation on the following day, April 20.

Leonard Aynged Edens was a recruit of the Ninth Draft.

**In 1911, Leonard Edens was boarding with a Mr. George William Percival and his family of 54, Church Road, Urmston, Lancashire, England, where he was an engineer apprentice testing transformers.*

Having been promoted to the rank of lance corporal on June 9 and subsequently directly to that of (acting) sergeant on July 14, some five weeks later, Sergeant Edens departed Newfoundland only days following, on July 19 of the same year on board the Allan Line steamship *Sicilian* (right) bound for the United Kingdom. His swift advancement in rank may have been due to his reported former service with the 6th Manchester Territorials.



(Right above: *The image of Sicilian is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel, built at the end of the nineteenth century, had served during the Boer War, having transported men, animals and materiel to South Africa. During the Great War she was not to be requisitioned as a troop-transport but continued to ply her commercial routes between the United Kingdom and North America.*)

Sergeant Edens had by that time written to Governor Davidson of Newfoundland concerning his desire to join the Royal Flying Corps. The Governor was to duly relay this information and request to his connections in Downing Street, the official residence of the Prime Minister and of other ministers of the British government.



Sergeant Edens reported to the Regimental Depot at Ayr on the west coast of Scotland at the latest on July 31 and received his Imperial Commission, appointed to the rank of second lieutenant, on the following day, August 1, 1916, in preparation for his secondment to the Royal Flying Corps and his future status as flying (pilot) officer*.

**Very few pilots of the Royal Flying Corps – and later the Royal Air Force – were not officers. This is true for both World Wars.*

(Right above: *The image is of a Royal Flying Corps cap badge and is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

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(Right below: *An aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr, where the ‘other ranks’ were quartered, is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

The Depot had been established as a base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in the summer of 1915 some eight months previously and it was from there that re-enforcements were – as of November, 1915 up until January of 1918 – to be despatched to bolster the fighting Companies of the 1st Battalion, at first to the Middle East, and then later to the Western Front.



Lieutenant Edens graduated as a flying officer from the flying school at Lilbourne on the last day of March, 1917, and was thereupon attached to the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent on August 11, being immediately posted to Number 40 Squadron – his rate of pay a daily six dollars* - and later, on or about November 27, to 29 Squadron. On December 12 he received promotion from second lieutenant to first lieutenant.



**This is to be compared to the daily rate of \$1. 10 (this included a ten-cent per diem field allowance) which was the pay of a private soldier of the Newfoundland Regiment, and to the even lesser remuneration of the British private of a single shilling – some twenty-five cents.*

(Right above: *The Nieuport 24 was a French plane flown by Lieutenant Eden’s Number 29 Squadron until April of 1918. – image from Wikipedia*)

There is some confusion concerning the date of the death of Lieutenant Edens. He was reported as *missing in action* on March 18, 1918, but also recorded elsewhere as having been killed at that time. However, a German source of May 5, received via neutral Denmark cites him as having died as a prisoner-of-war on May 7*. Whatever the case, he was at first interred by the Germans in Hooglede Cemetery in Germany itself, from which place his remains were later transferred to where they rest today.

**This is the date that the Germans marked on his original grave-site. After some insistence from the Newfoundland Graves Registry Office in London the later headstone – the one to be found in Belgium today – reads March 18.*

The son of Thomas John Edens – proprietor of two grocery and provisions outlets in the City, deceased January 22, 1920 - and of Margaret Mary Edens (née *Walsh*)* of 39, Queen's Street in St. John's – but the family formerly of both Monkstown and Rennie's Mill Road - he was also brother to John-Francis, to Gertrude-Mary, Francis-Augustine, Mary and to Gerrard (sic).

**The couple had married on February 13 of 1889.*

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Leonard Ayng Edens had enlisted at a *declared* twenty-four years of age: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, December 16, 1891.

His younger brother, Lieutenant John Francis Edens, also of the (*Royal*) Newfoundland Regiment – Regimental Number 883 - lies in Villers-Plouich Communal Cemetery; another brother, Lieutenant Francis-Augustine Edens, Regimental Number 2894, also served in the (*Royal*) Newfoundland Regiment and survived the Great War; a sister, Margaret (Mary?), was in Halifax at the time of the *Explosion* in December of 1917 but seemingly survived that catastrophe.



(Right above: *The remnants in Belvedere Roman Catholic Cemetery in St. John's of a family memorial which once stood to commemorate the sacrifice of Lieutenant Leonard Edens and of his brother Lieutenant John Edens – photograph from 2015*)

Lt. L. A. Edens R. Newfoundland Regt. late of this Squadron, was flying Nieuport Scout B6836 on the day he was missing. When last seen he was in a “dog fight” over Roulers. 11.45 a.m I regret that I am unable to give you any further information.

XXXXX

(sgd.) C. H. Dixon'

Major

O. C. 29 Squadron, R. A. F.*



**On April 1, 1918, the Royal Flying Corps – subservient to the Army up to that date – became an autonomous entity: the Royal Air Force. It is the R.A.F. insignia which is perhaps incorrectly engraved on Lieutenant Edens' grave-stone since he, of course, did not live to serve in the R.A.F.*

The above photograph of Lieutenant Leonard Edens is from the *Canadian Virtual War Memorial* web-site.

Lieutenant Leonard Ayng Edens was entitled to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



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. Last updated – February 12, 2023.