



**Sapper Frederick Addison LeDrew (Number 228046) of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Outtersteene Communal Cemetery Extension, Bailleul: Grave reference, II.A.33..**

**(Right: *The image of an 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops' cap badge is from the Flying Tiger Antiques web-site.)***

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as being that of a student, Frederick Addison LeDrew was documented by the Censor of 1901 as having immigrated to the Canadian city of Ontario from the Dominion of Newfoundland before the age of three years. His parents had apparently already been there for a number of years as Toronto is where his oldest sister was born in or about the year 1903. However, they apparently had returned to their roots for several years as it was in Newfoundland that his second sister was born in or about 1905, and he three years later again.

His pay records show that Frederick LeDrew was first remunerated for his services by the Canadian Army on February 15, 1916, although a further source suggests that the date of his enlistment was in fact the day before. The same pay card shows that it was also on that February 15 that he was *taken on strength* by the 201<sup>st</sup> Battalion (*Toronto Light Infantry*).

The official conclusion to the formalities of Private LeDrew's enlistment was brought about on the following April 27. At that time, the Officer Commanding the 201<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Hagarty, declared – on paper – that... *having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

It may have been that the 201<sup>st</sup> Battalion experienced recruitment problems as by that September of that 1916 it found itself being disbanded while still in Canada. In that month its personnel were transferred to two other Canadian Expeditionary Force units: to the 170<sup>th</sup> Battalion and to the 198<sup>th</sup> (*Canadian Buffs*) Battalion. It was to this latter formation that Private LeDrew was officially attached as of October 1.

Having then trained with his new unit for the subsequent twenty weeks and four days, Private LeDrew once more found himself being transferred. On February 21 of 1917 he was despatched to serve at the Number 2 Army Medical Corps Training Depot, a posting which was to last but two weeks.

Next, on March 8, was a move to the Canadian Army Service Corps Number 2 Training Depot from where, less than a month later, on April 4, he – as one of a reinforcement draft – was to start his journey to service overseas.

The ship on which the draft was to take passage for the United Kingdom was the Cunard vessel *Carpathia*, at the time requisitioned as a troop transport. Five years earlier, almost to the day, she had raced to the disaster scene and rescued some seven-hundred survivors of the *Titanic* only hours after she had sunk.



(Right above: *The photograph is of the RMS Carpathia at dock in New York, having arrived there after that rescue mission of April, 1912. In July of 1917 she was torpedoed and sunk.* – from Wikipedia)

The 12<sup>th</sup> Toronto Reinforcement Draft of the Canadian Army Service Corps, Private LeDrew's unit, was not to travel alone on board *Carpathia*. Also crossing the Atlantic on her were the 164<sup>th</sup>, 227<sup>th</sup>, and part of the 210<sup>th</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry. It is also possible that other units were also on the ship, but this is difficult to confirm.

Embarkation on the vessel began on April 10, Private LeDrew boarded on April 11 and *Carpathia* sailed from Halifax on April 12. Ten days afterwards, on April 22, she docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool.

From Liverpool the 12<sup>th</sup> Toronto Reinforcement Draft of the CASC was transported by train to the Canadian military complex of Shorncliffe where it was immediately taken on strength by the Canadian Army Service Corps Training Depot.

(Right: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago.* – photograph from 2016)



Private LeDrew was again about to be transferred to another unit; on this occasion, just three weeks after his arrival there, it was the CASC Reinforcement(?) Depot to which he was attached, it also stationed at Shorncliffe.

From there on August 15 he was *taken on strength* by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian (Reserve) Battalion at West Sandling Camp, a subsidiary of the Shorncliffe establishment, and some six weeks later again was sent from there to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Overseas Reinforcement Depot. It was during this period at the 1<sup>st</sup> CORD that the authorities decided to do something about Private LeDrew's dubious eyesight: thus he underwent examination.

He was admitted into the Canadian Ear and Eye Hospital, Westcliffe, at nearby Folkestone on September 19 for testing. It is likely that Private LeDrew had been affected by problems with his sight for several years: it might even be speculated that his multiple transfers – until the authorities decided how he might best serve the Army – were the result of poor eyesight. The testing resulted in a report, an extract of which follows: *He is fit for overseas service. Glasses have been ordered. Condition was previous to enlistment and is not caused by service.*



(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the top of the white cliffs of nearby Dover* – photograph from 2009)

Final transfers such as Private LeDrew had recently experienced, to a reserve battalion and to a reinforcement unit (camp or depot), were usually the prelude to a transfer to *active service* on the Continent. But this – at least for the moment – was not to be so in his case.

During the period of September 24-26 Private LeDrew was *struck off strength* by the Reinforcement Depot, was *taken on strength* by the Canadian Railway Troop Depot and had travelled from Shorncliffe to Purfleet, some seventy kilometres distant, on the northern bank of the River Thames in the county of Essex. There he reported *to duty* to the newly-established Depot.

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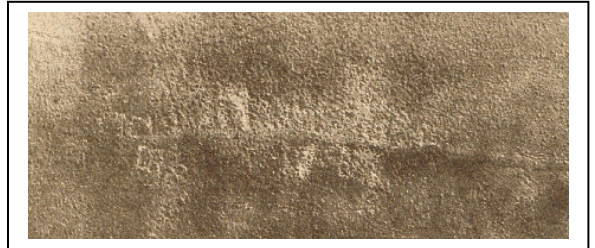
Days later, on October 2-3, he was attached to the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops, which had been organized there six months earlier. In fact, the parent unit of the Battalion had been despatched to active service on the Continent in that April of 1917, only a single month after its organization. Private LeDrew was one of a number of arrivals at Purfleet who were to be sent as re-enforcements after only days of training.

On October 8 he was on his way to France – and he was now Sapper LeDrew.

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One of the things that anyone familiar, even in a minimal way, with the Great War knows about is the mud. It was often created artificially by the weapons employed, from the stuff of countless millions of craters fashioned by high explosive. The roads, tracks and foot-paths, rutted, worn and gouged by the wheels, hooves and feet of the armies using them, had at times become impassable. And yet, these same armies need supplies, foodstuffs and munitions in myriad thousands of tons, just to fight to survive.

In 1917 the British High Command decided that the answer, at least partially, was railways: wide-gauge, standard-gauge, narrow-gauge and tram-lines. In places they were already in use – the Newfoundland Regiment had built a line during the spring of 1916 in preparation for the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Somme. But now it was to be undertaken on a large scale.



(Right above: *The work of two months of bombardment with high explosives: one may just about still perceive the outlines of the buildings once comprising the village of Ginchy. – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)

The answer to all this extra, and at times specialized, work was the creation of railway construction battalions. And since Canada by that time possessed one of the largest railway networks on the globe – and thus had the necessary expertise – the Canadians were asked to provide some of these specialized units.

At the outset, many of the troops were volunteers who had been railway workers before military service. Their numbers, however, were limited, and soon the recruiters were to become less particular in their choice of personnel. There were to be thirteen Railway Battalions and other specialized units.

Of the thirteen battalions, all but two had been formed between May of 1916 and March of 1917, the first ones having been in time to contribute to British offensive of 1<sup>st</sup> Somme. The 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion was officially formed on March 21, 1917; on April 20 its personnel landed in the French port-city of Le Havre. And by April 28, the Battalion was already in northern France, beginning work on that day on an east-west railway line along the Franco-Belgian frontier from De Seule to Ploegsteert.



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(Previous Page: *A view of the French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right: *Somewhere, possibly anywhere or almost everywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917. – from Illustration*)

The following months were spent in much the same northern area of France and southern area of Belgium – the region often referred to as Flanders. It should not be forgotten that from the last day of July of 1917 until mid-November, in Flanders, was to be fought the *3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele*. The railway troops were to be busy.



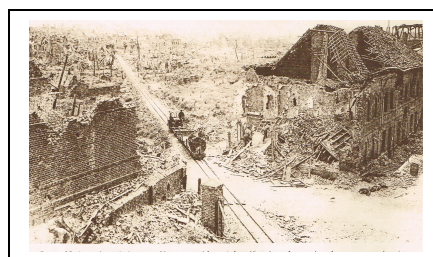
Sapper LeDrew was one of a detachment of seventy-nine reinforcements recorded in the Battalion War Diary as having arrived to report *to duty* from Purfleet on October 8. At the time the British were preparing for a further general attack and mention is made in the War Diary of light railways being employed for the transport of wounded to the rear – but while the Diary records much information about Battalion personnel, unfortunately there is little entered about the work being undertaken.



(Right above: *A light-railway at Vimy in April of 1917: As soon as the rails are in place it is being used to evacuate the wounded to the rear. Canadian troops and German prisoners both are tending to the injured. – from Illustration*)

After the conclusion of *Passchendaele* Private LeDrew's unit appears to have remained in situ – once again the Battalion War Diary records nothing of the Battalion's activities during this period – with one exception. On December 1 the personnel of the unit began to cast votes in the Canadian National Election.

The entries for the months of January and February as recorded by the 8<sup>th</sup> Railway Battalion War Diarist comprise little more than a litany of leaves granted to the United Kingdom, to Paris, to Nice and on occasion, back to Canada. Decorations awarded are also noted, as are several Good-Conduct Badges – except the one earned by Private LeDrew on February 15.



(Right above: *A light-railway line constructed by the Canadians traversing the remnants of the city of Lens in the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

In fact, it was noted in the War Diary, but not until March 8 by which time a further event concerning him had been entered on March 7: *The undermentioned Officers of this Battalion are hereby appointed and will constitute a Board of Enquiry, to thoroughly investigate the cause of, and the circumstances surrounding the death of 228046 Spr. leDrew...*

On March 5 of 1918 Private LeDrew had been working in much the same area where the Battalion had been since its arrival on the Continent, and near the village of Romarin which lies astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, its main thoroughfare acting as such. At Romarin by this time the Canadian Railway Troops had built a marshalling yard.

Extract from a hand-written eye-witness report by Number 5476, Private William Christie of the 10<sup>th</sup> Labour Company:

Sapper LeDrew was on duty at the time of his death and was acting as guard on a light railway train. His death occurred near where the R1 line intersects with the Romarin yards.

I know that the death of the deceased was accidental and caused by his jumping from the train to throw the switch and he slipped and fell in front of the train which had nearly stopped, the wheels passing over his body causing the injuries which resulted in his death. I do not think that the deceased was in any way to blame and I do not think that any other person or persons were in any way to blame for his death...

Sapper LeDrew had subsequently been evacuated from the scene of the accident to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Outtersteene. Later that day the Officer Commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> CCS reported: *Died of accidental injury – fractured spine*

The son of Alfred George LeDrew, labourer, and Martha LeDrew – to whom on October 10, 1916, he had willed his all - of Cupids, Newfoundland, before 357, Concord Avenue, Toronto, he was also brother to Janet and to Lillie-May.

Private LeDrew *died of an accidental injury* while at work on March 5, 1918.

Frederick Addison LeDrew had enlisted at the apparent age of eighteen years: date of birth in Cupids, Newfoundland, October 28, 1897 (attestation papers); but the Brigus Methodist Parish Records document 1898 as being the year of his birth.

Sapper Frederick A. LeDrew was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 27, 2023.

