



Gunner Charles Garfield LeRoux (Number 1257614) of the 1st Brigade, Canadian Garrison Artillery, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Ligny-St. Flochel British Cemetery, Averdoingt: Grave reference I.B.11..

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a waiter, Charles Garfield LeRoux appears to have left little behind him to document his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. However, it may at least be said with certainty that he was in the city of Halifax during the month of July, 1916, for it was there and then that he enlisted.

(continued)

It was on July 14, 1916, that Charles Garfield LeRoux presented himself for medical examination in Halifax, thereupon being declared as... *fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. One week later, on July 21, he enlisted, underwent attestation and was *taken on strength* by the Number 8 Siege Battery of the Royal(?)* Canadian Garrison Artillery.

**At the time, the designation 'Royal' appears to have applied to units of the already existing regular Canadian Forces whereas those formations evolving from militia units for war-time service were simply 'Canadian': thus Canadian Garrison Artillery, Canadian Engineers etc.*

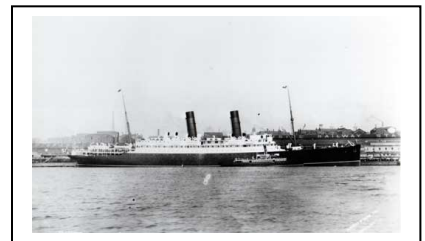
It would appear that when Gunner LeRoux was *taken on strength* by the 8th Siege Battery, he was in fact being transferred from the 1st Company of the Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery* with which he had already been serving for four months. The 1st Company was at the time based at the Halifax Citadel which Gunner LeRoux cited on his papers as his then-current address.

**Almost one-hundred per cent of the 8th Siege Battery personnel had previously served with the RCGA – and thus the unit may have retained its designation of 'Royal' on at least a temporary basis – the title disappears from later papers.*

The *official* conclusion to the formalities of Gunner LeRoux's enlistment was brought about on August 17, a month later: on that day, Lieutenant Colonel Howard(?) the Officer Commanding the 8th Siege Battery 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.*

Less than six weeks later, on September 26, Gunner LeRoux's 8th Siege Battery boarded His Majesty's Transport *Laconia* in the harbour at Halifax. The unit was not to sail alone: also on board were the 96th and 148th Battalions of the Canadian Infantry.

(Right: Laconia was a vessel of the Cunard Line. During the first two years of the Great War she was requisitioned as an Armed Merchant Cruiser but in the summer of 1916 she returned to her pre-War Liverpool to New York service – on one of her return journeys taking Gunner LeRoux on board. In February of 1917 she was torpedoed and sunk. The photograph is from the GC Archives web-site.)



Laconia sailed on September 27 and docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on October 6. It is uncertain as to where the 8th Canadian Siege Battery was then posted, but it may for a few days have been Witley Camp as this is where the 5th Siege Battery from Prince Edward Island - it having arrived in England at that same time – was sent.

Within days, on or about October 15, Gunner LeRoux's Battery was attached for further training to the Royal Artillery. It thus temporarily changed its designation, from 8th Canadian Siege Battery to 273rd Canadian Siege Battery to conform to the British system. If it then followed the path of the 5th (now 272nd) Canadian Siege Battery, it moved to Ewshot Camp, Aldershot and Lydd – this last being confirmed on the first page of the unit's War Diary – where it received its mobilization orders on February 6 of 1917.

Over the next few days, until the transfer was complete on February 10, the Battery was moving to Codford, there to await its ordnance, supplies and transport. By this time the unit was no longer designated as either the 8th Siege Battery or the 273rd Siege Battery. On January 24 the Canadian Garrison Artillery had altered the enumeration of its different formations: Gunner LeRoux and his comrades-in-arms were, from that moment, personnel of the 9th Canadian Siege Battery, Canadian Garrison Artillery.

The guns for which the 9th was impatiently waiting were among the smaller of the British howitzers: BL 6-inch 26 cwt* howitzers. Six inches was, of course, the calibre of the shell and twenty-six hundredweight was the combined weight of the barrel and breech.

The gun had been designed, built, tested and put into service all in the year 1915. It became a standard weapon of the British, Commonwealth and other national forces and was to serve in both world wars.

(Right: A photograph dated February of 1918 of a gun-team of the 2nd Canadian Siege Battery positioning one of their BL 6-inch 26 cwt* howitzers – from the Wikipedia web-site)

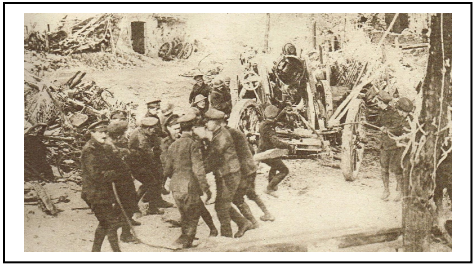
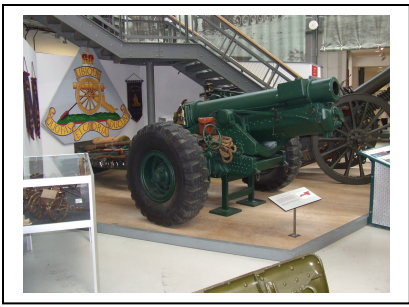
(Right: Another BL 6-inch 26 cwt howitzer, this one on a carriage of the Second World War – the photograph taken in the year 2011 at the Royal Artillery Museum, ‘Firepower’, at the Woolwich Arsenal)

After a month’s delay, on March 21 the 9th Canadian Siege Battery travelled from Codford to the south-coast port of Southampton, from there to take ship to Le Havre, the French port-city on the estuary of the River Seine, in the vicinity of which the Canadians had established a General Base Depot. The Battery was to remain there, in *Dock Rest Camp*, until the first day of April.

(Right above: The French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

During the first number of months that they were in service, the new howitzers had been towed by horse-power - literally. Proving to be too heavy and cumbersome for this form of transport, by the time that four of them came into the possession of the 9th Battery, motor transport had been supplied.

Thus the journey from le Havre to Houdain, thence to Mont St-Éloi at the end of March – for some – and beginning of April – for the others – was made by both train and motor-lorry (truck).



(Preceding page: Canadian gunners struggle to manoeuvre a heavy gun into place among the debris of a shattered French village. – from Le Miroir)

(Right and right below: The French village of St-Éloi – not to be confused with St-Éloi in Belgium where the Canadians served in 1915-1916 - at an early period of the Great War and again a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – destroyed in 1783 – are visible in both images. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016)



On the morning of April 5 the Battery personnel hurriedly began to construct its new positions, to organize and then to register its guns. It was apparently not to be until April 8 that these preparations were deemed satisfactory.

In the meantime, those other artillery units with their weapons already in situ had been busy; artillery preparations for the imminent offensive had been well under way by the beginning of April. The guns had been busy cutting wire, and selected targets – particularly those which were to be objectives of the different stages of the upcoming attack – had been receiving more than the usual attention. There was also counter-battery work and, during the final days before the attack, support for raids on German positions.



On April 9 of 1917 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the War for the British, one of the few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive was a disaster.

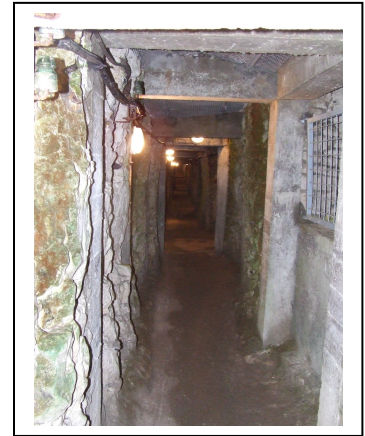
(Above right: the Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010)

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, separate entity, stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

(Right: Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, burdened with all the paraphernalia of war, on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration)



(Right: *Grange Tunnel - one of the few remaining galleries still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years later – photograph from 2008(?)*)



Excerpts from 9th Canadian Siege Battery War Diary entry for April 9, 1917: *The attack on VIMY begins – According to instructions the Battery opened fire at 5.30 am... After first round No. 4 Gun went out of action owing to lack of pressure in recuperator... No. 3 Gun very shortly afterwards also went out of action temporarily for same reason...*

All the guns appear to have been experiencing problems during the day although none seems to have been out of commission permanently.

Later on the same April 9: *Prisoners in batches of 50 & 100 begin coming in past the Battery at 9.30 am – the battle appears to be almost a complete success, only on the right the 4th Div. is held up at Hill 145*.*

**Hill 145 was taken on April 10. It is where the National Memorial today stands.*

Many of the further reports received during the day were of the success of the artillery operations. By the end of the morning the Canadian infantry had achieved its objectives and was consolidating the captured positions in expectation of enemy counter-attacks. In several cases these German counter-strikes were dealt with by the Canadian artillery.

On April 10 the Canadians finished clearing the area of Vimy Ridge of the few remaining pockets of resistance and also continued to consolidate the area, still in anticipation of German reaction which, in the event, was surprisingly light.



(Right: *German prisoners being escorted to the rear by Canadian troops during the attack on Vimy Ridge – from Illustration*)

There had on that day, April 10, been the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up of the previous day's success proved impossible. Thus the Germans were gifted the time to close the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

For the 9th Siege Battery, April 10 had been a day of frustration: by then all the guns were out of action and it was decided that the weapons would have to be returned to the workshops. And if that was bad for morale, worse was to follow.

The guns came back on April 14 but their range subsequently proved to be unsatisfactory. Then on April 17 and 18, the weapons were ordered to be handed over to the Number 3 Canadian Siege Battery. On the following day the Battery personnel were placed in reserve, working to put up shelters and to improve dug-outs.

It was to be a further eight days before the unit had its guns returned. On the following day, April 27, it was moving forward again, into new positions. For the next number of weeks it was to be primarily employed at counter-battery work. The entries of May 13 and 14 may serve as examples of the artilleryman's day:

Cité de Gaumont 13-5-17 A very quiet day in the battery. 100 rounds fired. Nos 1-3 & 4 guns out of action owing to defective recuperators. Enemy shelling at intervals directly in front of battery. Shortly after noon a shell burst in battery cookhouse. 6 NCOs & men being killed, and seven wounded.



Cité de Gaumont 14-5-17 - The battery was heavily shelled with Gas and H.E. with no effect. 160 rounds were fire on the work of neutralization of hostile batteries with good results. Nos. 2, 3 and 4 guns out of action.

(Right above: The 'hostile batteries' by this time in the war were often encased in strong-points built for the purpose; the Canadian positions would have been more exposed. – from Le Miroir)

The infantry unit war diaries of the Great War show that the different battalions were ever on the move, often changing positions and sectors as they undertook a further tour in the forward areas*.

**During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.*



Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(Right above: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration)

On the other hand, the artillery, once in position, tended to remain in that place for much longer periods. This was, logically, due to the problems that the displacement of heavy ordnance entailed. Thus it was, for example, that the 9th Canadian Siege Battery was in that position in Cité de Gaumont, a suburb of the coal-mining centre of Lens, from April 27 until October 17-18, a period of almost six months.

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As has been seen, the artillery was nearly always in action, perhaps particularly hard at work when called upon to support an infantry action. This for Gunner LeRoux's unit had been the case on and about August 15 of that summer of 1917.

August of 1917 had seen a short Canadian-led campaign in the *Lens Sector* of northern France, the most notable episode of which had been the taking of *Hill 70** in the northern outskirts of Lens itself.

**Those expecting Hill 70 to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear. Yet it was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie - to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than the city of Lens itself.*



(Above right: *This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15th Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. - photograph from 1914*)

Objectives were limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it had been expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it proved; on the 16th several strong counter-attacks were launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

These defences held and the Canadian artillery, which was employing newly-developed procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. Hill 70 remained in Canadian hands.

(Right: *A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, here under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action - from Le Miroir*)



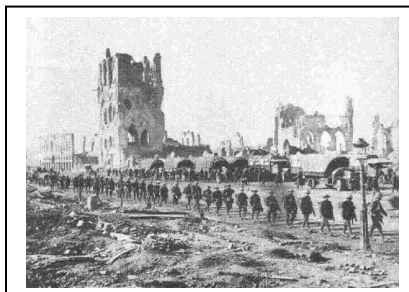
A perusal of the unit's War Diary shows an escalation of activity at that time accompanied by a greater expenditure of ammunition on targets such as railways, roads, cross-roads and assembly trenches in order to frustrate the organization of enemy counter-attacks on recently-captured positions. German troop concentrations were also targeted if and when they were discovered.

Two weeks after the event, a letter - from which the following excerpt is taken - was sent from the Commanding Officer of the Canadian 4th Division to his counterpart of the 1st Canadian Heavy Artillery Group, and then circulated to the various commanders of Canadian Artillery: *I will take this early opportunity of congratulating yourself, staff and personnel of No. 1 Group, C.H.A., on the splendid co-operation and work during the recent offensives in the LENS area. From all sides I have heard the same opinion, that the support rendered by the artillery was most satisfactory in every way...*

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Now, in mid-October, the 9th Canadian Siege Battery – and almost the entire Canadian Corps – was to make its way north into the Kingdom of Belgium. The Canadians had at the end of August been ordered to curtail their efforts in the Lens sector when the British High Command found itself in dire need of re-enforcements for its ongoing offensive and had called upon both the Anzacs and the Canadians to provide them.

That offensive, officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres* – and ongoing since the last day of July – was to come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – at least was later ostensibly *professed* to have been - one of the British Army's main objectives.



(Right: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

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

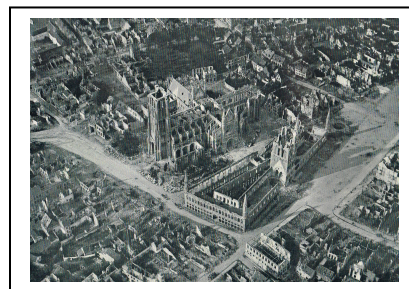


From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was to be the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was true with the 2nd Division finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.



(Right: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians which stands in the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele (today Passendale) – photograph from 2010*)

Using its motorized transport, the 9th CSB in its entirety – plus its ammunition column - was able to make the transfer from Lens to the city of Ypres in some forty-eight hours, reporting there on October 20.



At Ypres it took possession of the gun stores of the 112th Siege Battery of the Royal Artillery and, on October 21, of its gun positions on the road from Ypres to Zonnebeke. The enemy welcomed the unit with some sporadic shelling, one wounded casualty being recorded as a result.

(Right above: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2nd Ypres - which shows the medieval city as already just a shell, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

The action during this posting to the Passchendaele Front was inevitably to be more intense than it had been for the most part during the previous summer spent in the Lens Sector, but the tasks and duties of the Battery were of the same ilk: destroying wire, counter-battery fire and creeping barrages whenever the Canadians and British attacked; and work such as it had performed at *Hill 70* in August whenever the enemy threatened a counter-attack.

Of course, the Germans reacted to it all and their artillery, as always, was very effective. At times their air force also put in an appearance and bombing from above was becoming a much more frequent peril. The War Diarist also found time to complain about some new gun positions, poor and exposed, and also once more about the guns themselves which appear once more to have often been again out of service.

By November 8 only one gun in four was usually in service; by November 12 there were none – one if not two had been damaged during this period by enemy counter-battery fire and some Battery personnel wounded - and on the following day, November 13, the four howitzers of the 9th CSB were taken into workshops for repair.



(Right above: *Canadian artillery troops manoeuvring a heavy gun into position during Passchendaele, never an easy job – from Le Miroir*)

During the week that followed congratulatory messages arrived from the High Command, but no guns were forthcoming from the workshops. When one did arrive on November 20 it was not ready for action; when it was ready two days later, there was no ammunition available as the opposition had managed to destroy it.

On the following day again when the gun finally to be fired, ammunition having apparently arrived by then, unfortunately... *Unable to register the gun owing to climatic conditions* (War Diary).

By this time the *3rd Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele* had officially drawn to its close and the Canadian infantry battalions had been, or were in the process of being, withdrawn from Belgium. The 9th Canadian Siege Battery, however, was still operating much of the time but still with less than its full complement of guns. It continued to do so until it handed over its positions to a Royal Artillery unit on December 7. Six days later, Gunner LeRoux and his Battery were withdrawn from the *Ypres Sector* and moved south across the frontier back into northern France.

The remainder of December was to be spent out of action – at rest and perhaps relaxation - in various locations until Boxing Day when the unit reported to Villers-au-Bois for training. The War Diarist for the month makes no mention of the ongoing Canadian National Election in which all Canadian military personnel were to vote – but then he mentions no Christmas celebrations either.



(Right above: *Canadian soldiers in a rest area, and standing in front of a temporary theatre, peruse the attractions of an upcoming concert. – from Le Miroir*)

Half-way through the month of January the Battery was ordered into new positions, these at Thélus, in the vicinity of Vimy Ridge. Some three weeks later it was transferred into positions closer to Lens but the activities of each day were much the same as before. There was no infantry offensive in the offing to prepare for, so known enemy trenches, communications systems and artillery positions were the everyday targets, sometimes undertaken with the aid of observers flying above.

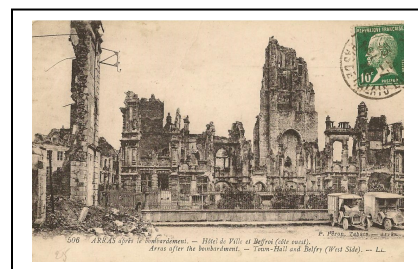
Of course, the German artillery was engaged in much the same manner and the 9th CSB was not immune from hostile shelling from time to time.

On February 25 Gunner LeRoux's unit was back in the area of Vimy, billeted in Thélus with its gun-positions at Petit Vimy. The sector was quiet and the expenditure of ammunition by the Battery was often minimal, from ten to thirty rounds per day – at *Passchendaele* it had often been in the hundreds – per gun.

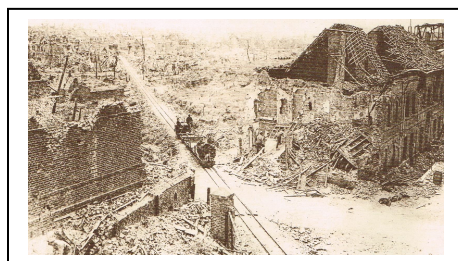
(Right below: *The City Hall of Arras and its bell-tower looked like this by the spring of 1918 after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery. – from a vintage post-card*)

On March 20 there had been an administrative change to the organization of the Canadian Garrison Artillery: the 1st, 3rd, 7th and 9th Canadian Siege Batteries were to be absorbed into the newly-created 1st Brigade, Canadian Garrison Artillery (Howitzer). This alteration appears to have made little subsequent difference to the day-to-day activities of Gunner LeRoux and his unit.

Also towards the end of March there was – according to the War Diary entries – a marked increase in German artillery activity in the sector and in those of nearby Lens and Arras. This escalation of aggression in the Vimy area and elsewhere on the Canadian-held front was to keep the British High Command uncertain of their intentions. In the meantime, the enemy was very busy in the area of *the Somme*.



Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, they delivered a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', launched on March 21. The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops there.



(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it and other areas heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)

The German advance continued for a month, petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was the result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were the most significant.

**A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*



(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

While the 9th Canadian Siege Battery continued to be busy in the area of Vimy, it was not called upon to serve on the front at *the Somme*. In fact, no Canadian unit, infantry, artillery or otherwise, appears to have been directly involved during this crisis.

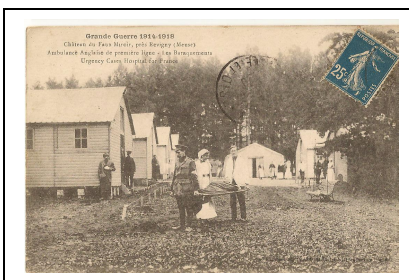
On April 15, the War Diary entry for the day reads as follows:

*PETIT VIMY – Thirty rounds of harassing fire were expended on various hostile battery positions between 6 am and 7 am – Two shoots of neutralizing fire were carried out on hostile battery...fifty-five rounds being fired. During the night 50 rounds were expended in harassing fire on hostile batteries... At about 10 am the enemy commenced shelling our position...firing about 20...H.E., apparently for ranging. At 2.30 pm he commenced a heavy bombardment on same location, and fired about 200 rounds. One shell burst in No. 4 GUN PIT, in which...the gun crew were working. The under-noted casualties occurred...Gnr C.G. LeRoux (DIED of W.)...**

**Eight other casualties were incurred at that time and during the remainder of the day, three of them fatalities.*

Circumstances of Casualty: Died of Wounds – While with a working party in a gun pit he was severely wounded in the back and thigh by shrapnel from an enemy shell. His wounds were dressed and he was taken to No. 7 Casualty Clearing Station.

Wounded, Gunner LeRoux had been evacuated from the field on the same day to the 12th Canadian Field Ambulance at Aux Rietz (today *La Targette*) from where after preliminary treatment he had been forwarded to the 7th Casualty Clearing Station at Tincques.



(Right: *a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)

The son of Wilfred Charles LeRoux, surveyor in the lumber industry, and of Alberta Tryphena LeRoux (née *Chinn*) – to whom on August 8, 1916, he had willed his all and to whom on October 1, 1916, he had allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay – of Sandy Point, St. George's Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Wilfreda, Jessie, Hilda, Edward, Maud and Bessie.

Gunner LeRoux was reported as having *died of wounds* on April 17, 1918, by the Officer Commanding the 7th Casualty Clearing Station.

Charles Garfield LeRoux had enlisted at the declared age of nineteen years and one month: date of birth at Sandy Point, Newfoundland, July 14, 1897 (attestation papers); the Sandy Point Church of England Parish Records cite July 11, 1900, as his date of birth*.

Gunner Charles Garfield LeRoux was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

****The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records his death at age seventeen.***



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 – January 27, 2023.