

# GOWER REMEMBERS

## Private Henry LeDrew Tuck

(1884-1941)



*“Pte. Harry Tuck, son of Mr. Eli Tuck, of Freshwater Road, who has been on active service in France with the Canadians, arrived home by the express this morning.” (The St. John’s Daily Star, February 04, 1919)*



Henry LeDrew Tuck was born in St. John's on October 11, 1884, the son of Mary Ann LeDrew and Eli Tuck. He was one of at least nine children, five of whom died as infants or small children: Benjamin and Sarah Gertrude in 1879; and Mollie and another Sarah in 1886; the fifth was still born and not baptized. Those who survived to adulthood were Henry, commonly called Harry, and his three sisters, Ida Isabella, Nellie and Alma.

Eli Tuck was employed for many years as tidewaiter<sup>1</sup> and customs officer with Her Majesty's Customs in St. John's. His work often took him to other parts of the island to combat smuggling and collect import duties on international products entering Newfoundland communities by ship. Mary Ann Tuck had her hands full caring for and, in some instances, burying her children, but still found time for church work. She was a charter member of the Gower Street Methodist Church branch of the Women's Auxilliary Missionary Society, which had been founded in 1883, and partook in its Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1908. During its 25 years of existance the Society had contributed \$5,300 to foreign missions of the Methodist Church.

Harry and his siblings received a major shock in the wee hours of July 05, 1889, when he was just four and one-half years old. The family was awakened at a quarter to three by a burglar, who managed to steal \$36.00 from a bureau drawer before he was scared off by "the noise of the awakening household." (*The Evening Telegram*, July 05, 1889) It was thought that the culprit was a sailor off one of the many ships in the harbour.

Most Methodist children in St. John's attended the Methodist College, and Harry was no exception. He was even singled out for being ranked third in Class Two of the Primary Department at the school in an article that appeared in *The Evening Telegram* for July 14, 1893. His name was frequently found among the top students in the various reports found in *The Collegian*, the Methodist College magazine, especially in his latter

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<sup>1</sup> A tidewaiter is a customs officer who boarded ships upon their arrival in port to enforce customs regulations. They often had to wait for the high tide to do this, so the ship could dock in deep water.

years at the school. From these reports, it can be determined that he was a good student who did well in the basic subjects, such as English, Mathematics, History and Geography. In what appears to be his final year, 1900, he made the top ten in Geography.

It is uncertain when Tuck first joined the workforce, but, according to McAlpine's Directory of St. John's for 1904, he was working at the Reid-Newfoundland Company, operators of the Newfoundland Railway in that year, as a stores clerk. He remained there until sometime in 1906, when he decided to try his fortune in Canada. On October 08 of that year, a short note appeared in *The Evening Telegram* informing readers that Tuck was "employed in a place named Lac du Bonnet, 60 miles from Winnipeg, Manitoba, with the owner of a large lumber firm named J. D. McArthur. Dudley Pope, of Alan Goodridge & Sons, received a letter from Harry on Saturday, informing him of the above."

From Lac du Bonnet, Tuck relocated to Keewatin, a town in southwestern Ontario, in the Lake of the Woods area, near the Ontario-Manitoba-Minnesota border. It has since amalgamated with other nearby towns to form the city of Kenora. There, he worked in office of the Lake of the Woods Milling Company, which had been established in 1887 and produced Five Roses Flour. It remained in operation until 1967 and in its day was reputed to be the largest flour milling enterprise in the British Empire.

Tuck worked for that company until the end of the year 1915, when he and a number of other young men from Keewatin enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) for service overseas. His enlistment took place on December 31, with his father listed as next of kin. From his Attestation Paper we learn that he was 5 feet, 3 inches tall, with a clear complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. He was assigned to the 94<sup>th</sup> Battalion and spent the first five months of his service in training in Keewatin. On May 25, 1916, he and others who had enlisted around the same time that he had, boarded a special train in Kenora for Port Arthur, at the head of Lake Superior.

After a short time in Port Arthur, Tuck and his comrades were taken to Valcartier, Quebec, a major training facility for Canadian soldiers in World War 1. From there they were transported to Halifax, where, on June 28, they boarded the SS *Olympic*, which carried them to England and the war. In England during the Summer of 1916, Tuck was assigned to first the CEF's 17<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion, and then to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, also known as the Cameron Highlanders of Canada, with whom he remained for the rest of his war service. He left England for France in the opening days of November, reaching there on the 3<sup>rd</sup>; he joined his Battalion in the Field on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Tuck first saw action with the Cameron Highlanders in the Spring of 1917 at the Second Battle of Arras, on the Western Front. The fighting lasted from April 09 to May 16, but Tuck was only involved in the first half of it. On April 28, 1917, he was admitted to No. 14 General Hospital at Wimereux, on the French coast of the Strait of Dover. He was subsequently invalided to Mile End Hospital, on Bancroft Road, London. The diagnosis was trench fever.

Trench fever is a debilitating disease caused by a bacterium, *Bartonella quintana*, which is found in the stomach walls of the body louse. Body lice were rampant in the trenches on the Western Front and many soldiers came down with the disease. The disease usually enters the body through the transfer of body fluids from the lice. It undergoes an incubation period that often lasts two weeks before symptoms emerge. These symptoms commonly manifest themselves through a fever, which lasts about five days. This fever is typically quite sudden, with, in addition to the high fever, intense headaches, pain in the eyeballs when the patient attempts to move them, very sore muscles in the legs and back, and heightened sensitivity of the shins. Many patients appear to have made a recovery when they suffer a relapse. Such relapses are common and can re-occur many times before complete recovery, which may take several months. While few people die from trench fever, permanent damage to the heart may ensue. Other aftereffects may include myalgia, fatigue, anxiety, headaches, high blood pressure, neuralgia and depression.

Tuck's prognosis followed the expected course. He was discharged from Mile End at the end of May, but was soon admitted to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital, at Bromley in Kent. He spent much of the next year in and out of hospital, as the disease flared and waned. A summary of a letter that he wrote to his father shortly after entering hospital appeared in *The Evening Telegram* on May 19, 1917. It confirmed that he was in hospital suffering from trench fever and that he described the fighting at Arras as "terrible".

On December 07, 1918, Tuck left England to return to Canada. In all likelihood, he landed in Halifax and travelled by train to Winnipeg, where he was discharged from the CEF on January 18, 1919. It was noted in his discharge documents that he was suffering from myalgia and defective vision, both long-term effects of trench fever.

A short time after his discharge, Tuck returned to St. John's, arriving there on February 04. His father and one, or possibly two of his sisters, Alma and Nellie, were living there. His other sister, Ida, had married William G. Currie, and they had relocated to Toronto. His mother had died before the war, on September 09, 1911, at age 61. His visit was noted in several local papers, including *The St. John's Daily Star*, which is cited on page one of this biographical sketch.

Tuck remained in St. John's for several weeks, before sailing from St. John's to Louisburg, Nova Scotia, in mid-February 1919. Then it was a train ride back to Keewatin, where he returned to work as a bookkeeper for the Lake of the Woods Milling Company. According to the 1921 Canada Census, he lived at a boarding house owned by Angus and Sophia McCrimmon on Wharf Street. In addition to Tuck and the owners, there were twelve other people living in the house, including two of the McCrimmon children. The Census also records his yearly salary: \$1,200.00.

Shortly after his return to Keewatin, Tuck, along with a number of his fellow veterans, were fêted by the town at a special event held on August 04, 1919, to recognize and commemorate their war service. Each was

presented with a badge and a medal and each had his name inscribed on the Municipality of Keewatin for King and Country plaque, which was given a permanent home at the the Keewatin Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. His name was also engraved on a large bronze plaque erected by the Lake of the Woods Milling Company in memory of the staff members of that enterprise: 54 men who had been killed in the war and 191 who had returned.

Tuck's father died on February 26, 1922, at age 78. His sister Alma went to live with Tuck for a few years, but she left in 1926 to take a position as a governess in New York. His sister Nellie had served as a member of the Voluntary Aid Detachment in the war and later underwent nurse's training. She worked in various care facilities in the post-war period. In 1934, Tuck moved from Keewatin to Winnipeg, where, he resided in an apartment at 440 Balmoral Street, and lived on a disability pension. By 1943, he had moved to 358 Edmonton Street and it was there that he died on October 13, 1941, two days after his 57<sup>th</sup> birthday. His sister Alma was listed as his next of kin. His funeral took place on October 19 from Clark-Leatherdale Funeral Home and his body was interred at Brookside Cemetery. He never married and with his death the male side of his immediate family died out, perhaps a direct result of the war that had caused him so much pain and suffering.

*On Sunday, November 16, 2014, Gower Street United Church initiated a program of commemoration that will last for approximately four to five years. On roughly every second Sunday through to the end of 2018, a brief write-up on one of these individuals, similar to this one, will appear as an insert in the Bulletin and there will be a reference to that person in the service. In this way, we hope to recognize their contribution to the war effort, the many sacrifices they made, some with their very lives, and the debt of gratitude we owe to each of them.*

*We also hope to learn more about them from their descendants or other relatives, thereby fostering a link between our past and our present as we begin our 203rd year as a faith community.*

*If you know of any relatives of these servicemen and women please contact Bert Riggs at [briggs@mun.ca](mailto:briggs@mun.ca) or at 726-6169.*