

GOWER REMEMBERS

Private Edward Alexander Morris

(1895-1917)



“The regular weekly session of the City Council was held last night. A vote of sympathy in the death of Corporal Edward A. Morris, who made the supreme sacrifice in France, to Councillor Morris and family, was moved by Councillor Brownrigg. Councillor Mullaly seconded the motion and Councillors Vinnicombe and Tait as well as the Mayor paid a tribute to the deceased as a soldier and a citizen. Councillor Morris, father of the dead hero, thanked the meeting sincerely on behalf of himself and his family.” (The Evening Telegram, December 21, 1917)

Edward Alexander Morris was born in St. John's on August 28, 1895, the son of Frederica (Fanny) Shaw and Isaac C. Morris. He was one of a family of at least thirteen children, including eight daughters and five sons. His father began his career as a teacher and had planned to enter the ministry, but fate intervened, and he became a sail-maker instead. It was an enterprise he operated very successfully for many years. He was also very involved in St. John's municipal politics and served as a member of the City Council and was Mayor of St. John's for several months in 1921.

Fanny Morris died on September 22, 1895, 25 days after giving birth to Edward, in all likelihood of complications associated with childbirth. Isaac Morris remarried in 1899, to Rachel Cull of Fogo, and Edward and his siblings from both marriages would have been raised by her. Edward was educated at the Methodist College, graduating from there sometime around 1911. He subsequently gained employment at the newly opened King George V Seamen's Institute, as a clerk to the Secretary and Business Manager, Abraham Sheard.

His time there did not last long. On October 08, 1915, Morris enlisted in the Newfoundland Regiment, where he was assigned Regimental number 1894. According to his Attestation Paper, he was 20 years old, 5 feet 4½ inches tall, with a chest expansion of 36½ inches. Less than three weeks later, he was on his way by train for Quebec City. He left there on October 27, for the ocean voyage to Great Britain on board the SS *Corsican*.

Morris and his comrades arrived in Devonport, England, on November 09, and were soon off to Ayr, Scotland, where they joined the Regiment in training. Later that Fall he spent some time at Gailes Camp, where on December 09 he was confined to barracks for two days for exhibiting disorderly conduct and disregarding orders. This did not cause any permanent damage to his reputation, however, as on March 30, 1916, he was made a Lance Corporal.

Before his enlistment in the Regiment, Morris was a member of the Methodist College Literary Institute (MCLI), a debating forum, which

regularly held events to which the general public was invited. On April 13, 1916, roughly five and one half months after Morris went overseas, the MCLI held its annual dinner at Woods Restaurant in St. John's. In attendance were a number of dignitaries from government and other fraternal organizations within the city. Toasts were made and patriotic speeches were given by those present. "A feature of the occasion last evening was the handsomely designed Honor Roll of members of the Institute" who had enlisted in the Newfoundland Regiment or other fighting forces. That list contained the names of a dozen young men from Gower Street Methodist Church, including Edward A. Morris. (*The Evening Telegram*, April 14, 1916).

It would seem that Morris may have had a dislike for early morning activities and an aversion to being told what to do. On June 5, 1916, he was absent from the morning parade at 6:30 a.m. and received a severe reprimand. The next day he was sent to the Western Front, as part of the British Expeditionary Force. He joined the Battalion in the Field on June 30, just in time for the next day's fighting at Beaumont Hamel. He was one of a number of fresh recruits who joined their Regimental comrades on the field of battle that day.

Morris received a gunshot wound to the head at Beaumont Hamel on July 01. He was admitted to the 87th Field Ambulance on July 02, and then to number 11 General Hospital at Dannes Camiers, France. By July 13, he was at the Convalescent Hospital at Étapes, where he remained until he rejoined the Battalion in the Field on July 21.

He spent the next few months with the Regiment being assigned to various locations on the Western Front. On October 12, 1916, the Regiment was sent to Gueudecourt to relieve the Royal Fusilliers. From there, on October 18, he was evacuated to hospital suffering from pleurodynia. He was admitted to number 20 General Hospital at Camiers on October 22, and spent four weeks there before being released to base at Rouen on November 22.

He may have celebrated his release from hospital a little too well, as on December 02, he was relieved of his Lance Corporal stripe for what was described in his personnel file as “Neglect of Duty”. Three days later, he back with his Battalion, where he remained for the year that followed. On July 02, 1917, he was assigned duties as a cook for A Company. He was with the Regiment that year during fighting at Monchy le Preux in April, at Steenbeek in August and Broembek in early October, during the latter two engagements as cook. He was returned to the fighting on October 19, in time for a major assault at Cambrai during November. He was killed in action there on December 03, 1917.

There is a small amount of correspondence in Morris’s personnel file following his death, including the formal letter from the Colonial Secretary, Richard Squires, dated December 18, 1917, informing Isaac Morris of his son’s death. A subsequent letter, dated January 26, 1918, addressed to Major Walter F. Rendell of the Regiment, from Isaac Morris, gives permission for the contents of a parcel (a pair of skin boots) sent to Edward before his death, be given to some other soldier. There is another, dated July 18, 1918, and signed by Lieutenant William V. Warren, again to Isaac Morris, returning his son’s kit bag. There are also two cards signed by Isaac Morris, one acknowledging receipt of his son’s Memorial Plaque (or Death Penny), dated August 19, 1921; the other for acknowledging receipt of his son’s Victory Medal and his British War Medal, dated October 07, 1921.

Edward Morris’s remains were never recovered; his name is listed on the Beaumont Hamel Memorial, which contains the names of Newfoundland soldiers and sailors with no known graves. However, in the Morris family plot in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John’s, his death is commemorated on one side of a headstone, which also marks the resting place of other family members. His older brother, Rupert Roy Morris (1892-1960), was also a member of the Newfoundland Regiment and will be commemorated at a later date.



Morris family plot in the General Protestant Cemetery, St. John's

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 or at 726-6169.