

GOWER REMEMBERS

Private Levi Rogers

(1885-1963)



The insignia of the Royal Montreal Regiment

“Mr. Henry Rogers of 38 Feild St., received a cable from Ottawa last night, saying that his son, Private Levi Rogers, of the Infantry, was officially reported missing on June 28th, and expressing sincere regret. ... His friends hope and pray that he may yet turn up O.K.” (The St. John’s Daily Star, July 10, 1916)

Levi Rogers was born in Lower Island Cove on January 23, 1885, the second of at least five children of Susanna Driscoll and Henry Rogers. The family included an older sister, Sarah Ann (b. 1883), a younger brother, Berkley (b. 1886) and two younger sisters, Gertrude (b. 1894) and Fanny Maud (b. 1896). Henry Rogers was a fisherman, who moved his family to St. John's some time before 1890, when he appears in the St. John's city directory for that year as a fisherman living at 91 Water Street. He appears in future directories as a labourer or a fisherman, and after 1894, his residence is at 38 Feild Street.

Levi may have attended the Methodist College after the family moved to St. John's; there is an L. Rogers on some class lists during the late 1890s. He did receive some schooling, as he signs his name on his attestation paper quite legibly. In his Attestation Paper when he enlisted in 1914, Rogers, in response to the question "Have you ever served in any Military Force?" has written in his own hand "British Navy 5 years". In all likelihood this was training for the Royal Naval Reserve, which took place aboard HMS *Calypso* in St. John's harbour starting in 1902. This training was part-time: the trainees committed to one month per year for a five-year period. He was also active in sporting circles as a soccer player and linesman and in the city brigades.

Rogers married Isabella Fannie England at the Gower Street Methodist Parsonage by the Rev. J. L. Dawson, on September 20, 1905. They grew up fairly close to each other on Feild Street. Her father, George, was a coachman. They had at least three children: Ralph Dawson (b. April 25, 1906); Susanna Frances (b. December 28, 1908), who died at the age of three months of an "*infantile debility*"; and George, whose birth record is unavailable.

Little else is known of Rogers' life before 1907. In that year he was working as a delivery man for John B. Ayre, who operated a bakery and confectionary establishment at 204 Water Street. The following story appeared in the October 14, 1907 edition of *The Evening Telegram: On*

Saturday night two youths, Levi Rogers and Sylvester Purcell, had a narrow escape from being killed. Rogers drives Ayre's bread wagon, and he had Purcell with him on the seat beside him for company, the hour being 9:30. While coming up Duckworth Street and when passing the crossing at the corner of Prescott Street, a sudden jerk, caused by passing over the stones, caused the board to give way on which their feet were resting, both youths were thrown into the street. Rogers escaped with only a few scratches, while Purcell fell between the wheels of the wagon, the wheels going over his legs. He was ... brought to Dr. Cowperthwaite's surgery. The doctor found that his right leg was badly sprained and that the left leg had also received some slight injury. ... It will be some little time before he will be around."

Rogers worked for Ayre for approximately six years; his last listing in a city directory is for 1913, where his occupation is given as teamster and he is still living with his parents on Feild Street. However, within the year he had left Newfoundland for Montreal. He was living there when war broke out in 1914 and he wasted little time in enlisting in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), eventually being assigned to the Royal Montreal Regiment, which formed the 14th Battalion of the 32nd Brigade of the 1st Division of the CEF. His enlistment took place at Valcartier, Quebec, on September 22, 1914; his regimental number was 26245.

According to his Attestion Paper and other documents in his army personnel file, Rogers was 5 feet 4½ inches tall, weighed 137 pounds, with a chest expansion of 36 inches; he had a dark complexion with brown eyes and black hair. It was noted that he had a small scar on his forehead at the hair, two scars on his scalp and one on his right leg. These may have been a result of the "*few scratches*" Rogers sustained in the bread wagon accident.

Rogers went overseas with his unit on board the SS *Andania* on October 03, 1914, arriving at Plymouth, England, on October 16. From Plymouth they moved to Salisbury Plain, where they set up camp and

trained over the six months that followed. Rogers' unit first saw action in the Spring of 1915. They left Southampton for Rouen, France, on April 07, and travelled overland to the area around Ypres, Belgium, where a major battle was about to take place.

This, the Second Battle of Ypres, began on April 22, with the fighting concentrated at Gravenstafel. The Canadians were outfitted with Ross rifles that frequently malfunctioned, Colt machine guns, which often proved to be unreliable, and a type of webbing that rotted quickly in the trenches. The Germans had chlorine and one of the first to experience this type of chemical warfare was Rogers, who was gassed on April 23.

There is no indication in his file that Rogers went into hospital in the period immediately following his gas attack. However, he did enter hospital, No. 2 General at Harve, on July 17, 1915, suffering from myalgia, which involves severe muscle pain. He was discharged after a five-day stay but did not rejoin his unit until August 06, 1915.

Rogers' whereabouts are not listed in his file for the ten months that followed his return to his unit, although by the following summer he appears to have been at a Canadian base in England. He was reported missing from that base on June 28, 1916, but turned up with his unit two days later. It is possible that absence was part of a misunderstanding, as he was granted permission to undergo a Lewis machine gun course, which lasted from July 16 to 22.

The CEF was involved in the latter part of the Battle of the Somme, which lasted from July to November 1916. It is unclear if Rogers took part in the fighting. On October 27, he attended a bombers course, rejoining his unit on November 01; two days later, on November 03, he was attached to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Military Battery.

It appears that Rogers' health was not good following the gas attack at Ypres. On January 24, 1917, he was admitted to the St. John Ambulance

Unit Hospital at Étapes, France, with severe rheumatism; on the 27th he was transferred to No. 6 Convalescent Depot at Étapes and on February 01 discharged to camp. On March 20, he was back in hospital, this time the Canadian Stationary Hospital at Harve with neuritis. On April 13, he was moved to the Canadian Stationary Hospital at Harfleur, with a flare up of myalgia, rejoining his unit on April 28.

Six weeks went by before he returned to hospital, the 1st Canadian General at Étapes with PUO (pyrexia of unknown origins). On July 03, he was transferred to the War Hospital at Huddersfield, England, and on the 10th was moved to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Monks Horton. On July 19, he was taken to the Military Hospital at Shorncliffe for the removal of a bunion from his left foot. The rest of the summer he was out of hospital but was admitted to No. 5 Canadian General Hospital in Liverpool on September 26, with nephritis, an inflammation of the kidneys. From there he was sent to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital located at Hillingdon House, Uxbridge, and, on November 15, was invalided to Canada. He sailed from Liverpool on board HMHS Glenart Castle. In addition to the nephritis, he was also diagnosed with chronic bronchitis.

As a result of these illnesses Rogers was discharged as medically unfit for further service. On December 22, 1917, *The St. John's Daily Star* reported that “*Pte. Levi Rogers, of Feild Street, is back after 39 months absence. He was gassed, and is going back to Montreal next week to enter a convalescent home. He joined the Royal Montreal Battalion on August 14, 1914, and has spent two and one half years in the trenches of France. Before leaving here he was six years in the employ of J. B. Ayre & Co., Bakers.*”

Rogers became an in-patient at the GNCH, a convalescent home in Montreal, on January 09, 1918; he was believed to have a tubercular lung. From there he was transferred to the Byron Sanatorium in London,

Ontario, where it was determined that he did not have tuberculosis. He spent the Spring and Summer at the sanatorium, being treated for his bronchitis and other ailments. He was finally discharged on August 09, at which time his medical discharge report stated: *“This man states he is very nervous and has a general; debility. He has a loss of appetite – sleeps poorly and with no expectoration. Complains of occasional pain in left foot due to operation in France 1917. This man is not well developed. His great left toe is ¼” shorter than corresponding right toe due to crush in January 1916. Complains of being very nervous. Complains of indigestion. Rales throughout chest. Chest poorly developed.”*

Very little is known of Rogers’ life after he was released from the sanatorium. He did return to Montreal to live and may be the Levi Rogers who is listed in a number of Montreal city directories for the 1920s as a new vendor. However, this name disappears from the city directories after 1928. It is believed that he lived in the Montreal area for remainder of his life. He died at Ste. Anne’s Hospital, Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec, on June 08, 1963. His son George, who lived at 704 Egan Avenue, Verdun, Quebec, was listed as his next of kin.

At the time of his death, Levi Rogers was 78 years old. That was a good age for someone who suffered from a gas attack and so many other potentially debilitating illnesses during his service in World War I.

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.