



NURSE MARTHA ISABEL LODER (1884-1963) AND THE GREAT WAR: From Snook's Harbour to the Somme

(PART ONE)

BY MARGOT I DULEY

MARTHA (MONA) ISABEL LODER, BROUGHT UP IN A SMALL OUTPORT, IS THE FIRST NEWFOUNDLAND WOMAN KNOWN TO HAVE VOLUNTEERED AS A NURSE DURING WORLD WAR ONE. ON NOVEMBER 6, 1914, SHE SIGNED A CONTRACT WITH THE QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S IMPERIAL NURSING SERVICE RESERVE (QAINSR).¹ LODER'S WAR SERVICE OVERLAPS WITH THE INITIAL TRAINING OF THE FIRST 500 OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND REGIMENT, AND SHE WAS IN A THEATRE OF WAR OVER TEN MONTHS BEFORE THE REGIMENT LANDED IN SUVLA BAY ON THE NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 19, 1915. SHE WAS DEMOBILIZED ON MARCH 17, 1919.²

Mona Loder's war service began in Boulogne with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) when casualties were delivered to hospitals in open carts; then in the massive Base Hospitals that received the carnage of the Somme; and finally on an ambulance train during the Hundred Day Offensive that culminated in the Armistice. Hers is a narrative of fortitude, bravery, and dedication in the face of health challenges. It is a parallel story to those of the soldiers she nursed. Sister Loder's service record contains telling episodes of illness and exhaustion, yet she carried on.

With a few notable exceptions, the story of Newfoundland's nurses remains neglected despite

proliferating anniversary publications about the Great War.³ In addition to the biases of traditional military history, there are few primary sources telling the Newfoundland nurses' side. We do not know with precision the names and number of women who served either as graduate nurses or as nurses' aides (VADS), and they left few memoirs or letters.⁴ Fortunately Nurse Loder's journal⁵ from her time on an Ambulance Train in 1918 survives. Her earlier service can be reconstructed from her official record with the QAINSR, supplemented by secondary sources.

On October 6, 1915, *The Daily News* incorrectly reported that Maysie Parsons was Newfoundland's first war nurse and that she was leaving for the front. Parsons's Medal Record confirms that her service began shortly after in May 1915.⁶ However, Mona Loder signed a contract with the QAINSR on November 6, 1914, and she arrived in France a few days later, six months in advance of Parsons's arrival in Belgium. Parsons's war service was impressive, but she was not Newfoundland's first overseas war nurse.⁷

The Random Island volunteers

Mona Loder was born in tiny Snook's Harbour, Random Island, in 1884. Her father, John (1850-1916), one of four brothers, moved his family from Ireland's Eye and built his own schooner, *Mistletoe*. Due to the increasingly crowded fishing grounds of Trinity Bay, he also ranged northwards to Labrador and the Northern Peninsula. In his older years he served as Postmaster and Deputy Sheriff of the District Court.⁸

Mona Loder (QAINSR)



John and Martha Loder c 1905-10



Mona's mother was Jane Tilley Smith, originally from Hant's Harbour, and she operated a store. On the eve of the Great War, Mona had three surviving siblings: Thomas, William, and Lily (later Mrs. Robert Randell).⁹ Two more died in infancy, and two others drowned in separate incidents. Her uncle Silas also drowned while out sealing.¹⁰ The Loder family had an ample share of tragedy. Though her parents were relatively prosperous, Mona had a true outport upbringing in a family dependent on the fishery and gardening. She attended modest chapel schools. With the exception of Bessie Rowsell, a graduate of the General Hospital School of Nursing (1909), who was born in remote Pushthrough, most of the other graduate nurses who served came from St John's, with a few coming from larger communities, such as Harbour Grace, Placentia, and Petty Harbour.

Random Island had many men serving in the Great War: some 33 enlisted, 26 in the Royal Newfoundland

Regiment and seven in the Royal Navy.¹¹ At least one VAD, the poet Georgiana Cooper, also served. Three men from the immediate area of Snook's Harbour joined the regiment: Hayward Cooper (RNR #1479), Henry T Stone (RNR #2348), and Ephraim Cooper (RNR #4075). Mona was in touch with Snook's Harbour and concerned about the wellbeing of enlistees. With the exception of Esau Penney (#987) of Deer Harbour, Mona volunteered months ahead of anyone else on Random Island.¹² As a generality outport mobilization lagged behind that of St John's as the first appeals occurred during the busy fall fishing season. Loder was in Montreal doing private duty nursing when war was declared.

Loder's journal is silent about her motivations for volunteering, but her upbringing provides clues. Her parents, John and Jane Loder, were persons with strong religious convictions. They were lay leaders of the Congregationalist Mission on Random Island that

started in 1878 and lasted into the early 1890s, helping to found a church.¹³ The Mission was supported by the Queen's Road Congregational Church in St John's and the London Missionary Society. The church eventually merged with the Methodists.

Congregationalists and Methodists were highly supportive of the war effort, seeing Christian civilization embodied in "English values" at stake. Both denominations also provided theological support for women who wished to make a contribution outside the home. This included the notion of "sanctified women" assisting the poor, the prisoner, the unwed mother, and the sick. Women from both denominations took the lead in the first phase of the women's suffrage movement in Newfoundland arguing for the franchise on local prohibition issues in the early 1890s.¹⁴ In short, Mona Loder grew up in an atmosphere of piety, and one in which women were encouraged to make contributions to the community. She also grew up in a family dedicated to education and improving the lot of fishing families.

In addition to the church, Mona's father and mother helped to oversee the Congregational School in Snook's Harbour, writing the denomination's Training School in St John's to secure a well-qualified teacher. This school eventually closed and a Methodist one opened in 1895.¹⁵ When William Coaker's Fishermen's Protective Union formed in 1909 to challenge merchant dominance and the truck system, John Loder was a strong supporter. He travelled with Coaker to surrounding communities, and by 1910 was Chairman of the Trinity District Council.¹⁶ In addition to the FPU's demands for a fair return on labour, its emphasis on education, including night schools and a school in every community with over 20 children, must have been a strong inducement to the Loders. Mona, a very bright girl, had the support of her mother and father.

Common to many Newfoundlanders at the time, the Loders also identified with England as the "Mother Country." Patriotism seems also to have motivated Mona, and she retained a strong affection for Great Britain throughout her life.¹⁷

From training to the Front

Judging from her 1918 journal, Mona also was adventurous. She was calm in times of danger, and afterwards even made light of it. A tall, attractive woman with red hair and brown eyes, and an optimist by nature, she made friends readily. She rarely complained about

the trying and at times horrific conditions in which she worked and lived. Perhaps her resilience was formed during her outport upbringing. The self-sufficient residents of Snook's Harbour were used to ice, snow, heavy seas, hard work, and carrying on in the face of adversity. The nearest town and railhead, Clarenville, was roughly 20 kilometers by boat. Mona is remembered in her older age as not only highly intelligent but also determined, goal-spirited, kind, and with a wry sense of humour. She would need all of these qualities as a nurse in the Great War.

From about 1906 to 1910, Mona taught in three small Methodist schools in Aspen Brook, Elliott's Cove, and Snook's Harbour. They shared teachers, opening at different times of the year. It is believed her savings from teaching helped to pay for her nursing education.¹⁸ Loder left Random Island for the London Hospital (Camberwell, EC1), the largest school of nursing in Great Britain, a remarkable choice. The only other Newfoundland nurse known to have attended the London Hospital in this era was Matron Mary Southcott, who graduated in 1901 and returned to found the School of Nursing at the General Hospital in St John's in 1903. The London Hospital was among the most prestigious in England: Florence Nightingale had been an Honorary Governor, Queen Alexandra was President, and it had an attached medical school. Its Matron at the time Loder attended was Eva Luckes, CBE (1854-1919), next to Nightingale herself one of the most important figures in the professionalization of nursing in Great Britain. In the UK census for 1911 Loder appears on the staff of the Eaton Convalescent Home in Ramsgate, Kent, possibly strengthening her nursing school application.¹⁹

Entrance into the London Hospital was a challenging process involving an interview with the great Matron, followed by a rigorous seven-week Probationary Training Course culminating in exams. Mona met the test. Once examinations were passed, and subject to Luckes' final approval, the Probationer then spent two years on wards with exhausting shifts from 7am until 9pm. A further post-probationary year followed before full certification as a graduate nurse was achieved. She graduated from the London Hospital around 1914, and she then went to Montreal to do private duty nursing. When war was declared she quickly returned, setting sail on October 20, 1914, just 17 days after the First 500 of the Newfoundland Regiment boarded *Florizel* for Devonport.



Only the best-qualified and mature nurses were sent to the Front and Loder promptly received such a posting, though she barely met the minimum age. The fact that Ethel Hope Becher, Matron-in-Chief of Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, and Maud McCarthy, Principal Matron of the British Expeditionary Force France and Flanders, were also graduates of the London Hospital was undoubtedly in Loder's favour, and McCarthy in particular took an active role in scrutinizing the applications.²⁰ Qualifications included a "suitable background," the recommendation of a Nursing Superintendent, and, in recognition of the health risks facing nursing staff, it was "an advantage to have had typhoid."²¹

Sister Loder was first assigned to the London General Hospital for a very brief orientation period. Here she had her first acquaintance with the brutality of the war. "The London Hospital" was the largest general hospital in Britain, and in the early months it received all the serious casualties from the BEF. However, nothing could have prepared Loder or anyone else for the conditions in which she subsequently nursed.

Mona was first sent to Boulogne. By 1914 it was the main BEF medical centre. Hotels and casinos had been commandeered for hospitals, but Loder was at the 15

Stationary Hospital, in her words a "super shed," for the next nine months.²² Typhoid fever ran rampant, and in early 1915, following a severe reaction to a vaccination, she had to be hospitalized for a week at 14 General at Wimeraux, a coastal town near Boulogne. Soon she was back on duty as a Theatre Nurse, a stressful and skilled job as surgeons and nurses struggled to deal with the horrific new casualties caused by high explosives and machine guns. Loder nursed through the early and major engagements of the war including the Marne and the First Battle of Ypres.

The desired qualities of a Theatre (surgical) Nurse included unflinching calmness, knowledge of surgical procedures, and flexibility. The Sister's normal role was assisting the surgeon and attending to needed surgical instruments. However, during a "big push" with a flood of casualties and shortages of staff other aspects of pre-operative and post-operative patient care might fall to her, including the administering of anaesthetics. Theatre staff at these times did whatever was needed.²³ It was considered an especially responsible position. At the end of the war Loder was praised as having an excellent knowledge of surgical work, and as being "energetic, reliable and faithful."²⁴

At other times throughout the war, Loder was on

“Night Duty” as a Ward Sister, often the heaviest shift. Due to the threat of bombardment, ambulance and train convoys moved at night. Hospitals received a one-hour notice to prepare for the next influx, and the triage process began.²⁵ The Ward Sister was responsible for ward intake, day-to-day management of patient care, ward sanitation, and a mass of essential paperwork including reports, diet sheets, and implementation of doctor’s instructions. The physical, organizational, and emotional pressures were formidable.

“An indescribable scene”

Poor planning at the War Office, organizational rivalries, shortages of facilities, supplies and personnel, and confusion about the relative roles of the fully trained nurses and the VADS hindered medical mobilization in 1914 and for much of 1915.

Yvonne McEwan summarized the appalling hospital conditions in France: “Many of the hospitals were filled to capacity, and due to the shortages of beds and space, stretchers were placed between occupied beds, in corridors and on balconies. The men were nursed on trestles and on the floor. There was a dearth of mattresses, sheets, blankets, pillows, pajamas, dressings, antiseptics, bandages, soap, feeding cups, plates, cutlery, and all kinds of medical and domestic stores needed ...” The patients arrived muddy, bloodstained, lice ridden, and with malodorous wounds. One sister nursing in Boulogne described “an indescribable scene” in which “doctors and nurses were hopelessly outnumbered” dealing with terribly wounded men “with both legs off, their sides blown away; all were wounded in dozens of places.”²⁶ Sanitation was primitive with open latrines many yards away from wards, and patients arrived with suppurating wounds, some festering for days. In short, medical personnel were under tremendous strain: British casualties in France and Belgium in 1915 were over 285,000, as medical mobilization had not caught up with reality, nor had medical knowledge.

In the winter of 1914-15 nurses lived in shared tents or hastily constructed huts with inadequate heating, light, blankets, or clothes. Patients froze on wards and so did nurses, with some resorting to wearing gumboots with thick socks instead of their nursing shoes.²⁷ On April 22, 1915, the use of poison gas joined the catalogue of horrors inflicted by the new technologies of warfare.

On December 11, 1915, Sister Loder was herself admitted as a patient to a hospital.²⁸ Exhausted, Mona

had succumbed to diphtheria. She was not alone in falling ill. Up to 10 per cent of the nursing staff were sick on any given day. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission estimates that at least 650 female nurses, ambulance drivers, and VADs were killed during the Great War as a direct result of enemy action.²⁹ Many more fell ill from ongoing exhaustion and prolonged stress. Of these, an unknown number died prematurely after the conflict was over. “As the war progressed many nurses were sent home suffering from ‘General Debility’ often as a result of overwork ... and simmering low grade infections that never fully resolved.”³⁰ Two Newfoundland VADs, Ethel Dickinson and Bertha Bartlett, were among the indirect casualties, both succumbing to the influenza epidemic, the latter at Wandsworth and the former in St John’s. Among the many special appeals taken up by the Women’s Patriotic Association of Newfoundland was a fundraising drive in 1917 for the Edith Cavell Home of Rest in Kent for nurses. A Newfoundland Room was established.³¹

Diphtheria was a serious illness. Sulfa drugs had not yet been discovered, mortality rates were about 15 per cent, and there were risks of weakened heart muscles, kidneys, and nervous systems especially of the throat, arms, and legs.³² After five weeks Sister Loder was back on duty, but after effects seemed to have lingered.

On January 18, 1916, Loder was assigned to the 18 General Hospital at Camiers, north of Étapes. In the dead of winter, its poorly heated tents and wooden barracks would have taxed even the most robust. The two-week regular leave Mona took in the South of France in mid-February must have seemed like another charmed world, but soon she was back to work. She was granted a two-week rest leave from May 31 until June 13, but in the intense mobilization of forces prior to the Battle of the Somme, she was called back. She was on Night Duty on the disastrous First of July. Camiers was the Base Depot for the Machine Gun Corps but it received casualties from many regiments. Extreme trauma cases poured in, and because of the contamination from fields, manured for centuries, coupled with rats and decomposing animals and humans, all manner of infections set in, exposing medical staff once again to a high risk.

Loder did not leave a record of her experiences at Camiers, but her fellow nurse and Newfoundlander, Gertrude E English, did in a poem entitled “Ships that Pass in the Night.”³³



*They come to us bloody and dirty,
With faces of suffering and woe,
But we clean off the traces of battle,
The dirt and mud must go.
While dressing their wounds we tease them,
To make them forget the pain
For we know full well we hurt them,
But remember 'tis for their gain.
So we keep going and coming,
And over and over again,
Our wards are filled with new faces-
Some handsome, some sad, some plain."*

In her report for 1916, Matron McCarthy stated "some of the nurses had been on duty for 48 hours at a stretch."³⁴

By August 1916 Nurse Loder's superiors were again concerned about her health. Writing on August 14th, the Matron of the 18 General Hospital commented that "Miss Loder is an excellent nurse and ward manager" but "her health is not good at present and she is not fit for any very hard work."³⁵ Less than a week later, her father died, surely adding to her burdens.³⁶ Family memory also holds that she suffered another devastating personal blow during the war: the death of a fiancé. His name and date of death are not known. A small engagement ring was among her possessions upon her death. It is possible that he died in this same period, but that is conjecture.

Nursing in gas masks; questioning old rules

Whatever the cause, Sister Loder was recommended for "light duty" on Hospital Ships, a truly relative concept as ships bringing the injured back from the Somme to England were subject to submarine attack, and the difficulties of caring for injured patients compounded by rough seas. It is unclear whether she actually received this assignment or remained at Camiers. However, ten months later, in mid-June 1917, she was sent to Étaples, a major military base. Étaples' railways reached both the northern and southern battlefields and it had 16 hospitals.

At Étaples, Loder continued to serve on the demanding Night Duty shift, mostly at the 24 General Hospital. This was periodically interspersed with short illnesses of her own (gastritis and styes), again requiring hospitalization. She was alternately on the staff of Villa Tino, at Le Touquet, a special facility for sick sisters attached to the 24 General, and a patient there for four days herself. For 11 weeks she also worked at the 3 General at Le Tréport, nursing sick Sisters and officers. These assignments doubtless required tact, high competence, and self-confidence with so many potential opinions.

In 1917, Étaples was considered a problematic base due to declining troop morale that culminated in a three-day Mutiny that started on September 9. Some 1,000 British, Australian, and New Zealand


troops were involved.³⁷ Étapes was notorious for its intensive training combined with harsh discipline. It also contained large prisoner-of-war camps. It was a city of contrasts: looking in one direction one could see the small boats of fisherman still at work and their ramshackle houses; on the opposite bank of its river mouth, as ambulance driver Betty Stevenson described it, were “the tents crawling up the hill like white snails.” She was later killed in an air raid.³⁸

Though Étapes was about 70 kilometers from the nearest battlefield, because of its importance it was subject to frequent bombing. The hospitals were on a road and railway line running along the River Canche, making them unobstructed targets. In April 1917, in response to the Arras Offensive, the Germans began aerial bombings of Base Hospitals. Nurses now went on duty with gas masks and shrapnel helmets.³⁹ The town of Étapes withstood so many attacks that it was awarded the Croix de Guerre in 1920.⁴⁰

By now the Great War was in its third year. Under prolonged and trying conditions it was not only soldiers who were growing restive. Camaraderie developed between nurses, patients, and ranks that flew in the face of regulations. On May 7, 1917, Sister Loder was required to sign the new QAINSR contract that contained the pledge: “I will devote my whole time and professional skill to my services hereunder, and will obey all orders given to me by my superior officers.” Among the “General Regulations for Nursing Staff—Professional and Moral Conduct” issued by Matron McCarthy—were reminders that “it is not desirable for members of the Nursing Staff to go to public places of amusement without permission. Neither is it permissible to accept invitations to dine or go out driving, etc with officers, either patients or friends.” Nurses were strictly forbidden to visit Officers’ Messes, and dances “were against the regulations.” Further “Cigarette smoking and the consumption of alcohol are banned.”⁴¹ Mona Loder’s journal shows that these rules were bent by mature and self-confident women who by now had seen and experienced so much.

Though she is characteristically sparse and professional with her emotions, Loder’s journal entries provide hints about how she maintained a sense of balance. She had an appreciation of nature and could take respite in it: Ligny [St Flochel] (Sept 18, 1918): “It is a most glorious morning, like spring, there is a soft wind & the birds are singing, the sun is shining. Three of us (Sisters) sat

out on the [railway] line ...” Ligny had three Casualty Clearing Stations. There is also an entry that reveals her private thoughts and memories of happier days in Snook’s Harbour: (September 12/13, 1918): “Arrived Doullens Station night, and stayed all day in garage. Had fire drill & went black-berrying. Left 6pm for Goury. It was a glorious autumn evening & we all felt homesick.” There were many friendships with other nurses, and sometimes a defiance of the fraternization rules: “Music at eve (Captain P and Nell).”⁴²

As 1917 drew to a close, Mona Loder had nursed in trying and at times horrific conditions through more than three years of war at base hospitals. She had endured illness, exhaustion, and personal loss. She and her nursing friends were questioning old rules. At the same time her superiors considered her an excellent nurse. Soon she would be sent on another demanding assignment, and one that placed her in heightened personal danger: an ambulance train. 

Part Two of “Nurse Loder” will be published in Spring 2016.

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1 My sincere thanks to Verna Loder Wroblewski for her invaluable assistance in the preparation of this article. She generously made her great aunt’s journal and pictures available to me, and provided additional insights and information. Many thanks as well as to Martha Robichaud O’Connor, great-niece, for photos and vivid memories; and to John W Loder for sharing family genealogy and information on John Loder and the FPU. Martha Isabell Loder, Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Nursing Service, National Archives, UK, Series W[ar] O[ffice] 399/4956, Digital Archives. Her locations throughout the war are from this official record (hereafter Loder Record QA), cross-checked and supplemented by her detailed notes of train destinations contained in “Mona Loder No 5 Ambulance Train [1918]” (hereafter Loder Diary) in Loder family possession.

2 Mining the digitized records of the QAINSR at the National Archives in Great Britain may rectify this neglect. Over 10,000 Nurses served in the QAINSR. Their places of birth are usually recorded.

3 Terry Bishop-Stirling, “Such Sights One Will Never Forget: Newfoundland Women and Overseas Nursing in the First World War,” in Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, eds *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 2012); Bill Rompkey and Bert Riggs, eds *Your Daughter Fanny: The War Letters of Frances Cluett, VAD* (St John’s, NL: Flanker Press, 2006) stand as outstanding exceptions.

4 In Margot Duley, *Where Once Our Mothers Stood We Stand:*

Women's Suffrage in Newfoundland 1890-1925 (Charlottetown, PEI, 1993), I identified 18 graduate nurses and 24 VADs serving overseas. Since then Terry Bishop-Stirling has identified five additional nurses and I three, for a total of 24 nurses; Bishop-Stirling and I also uncovered at least two additional VADs each, bringing their count to 28; for a grand total of 52 for both groups. It is likely others volunteered in the US, Canada, and Great Britain.

5 The document is both a logbook and a diary in format.

6 Medal Record, Maysie Parsons, WO 373/23/32113, National Archives (UK) digital download.

7 For Nurse Parsons see Terry Bishop-Stirling, "Such Sights", 128-129; "Maysie Parsons" *Newfoundland Quarterly*, July 1915, XV, 1; service record at Canadian Great War Project: CEF Soldiers at www.canadiangreatwarproject.com; letter from Nurse Parsons, June 13, 1915, La Penne in "Archival Moment," archivalmoments.ca/2015/newfoundland-nurse-letter-from-the-trenches; and "David Parsons request" at "Finding the forty-seven: Canadian Nurses of the First World War," www.rememberingfirstworldwarnurses.blogspot.ca; and Duley, *Where Once*, 114.

8 *Year Book and Almanac of Newfoundland* (St John's, NF: JW Withers, 1914), 77/184; personal Communication Verna Loder Wroblewski.

9 Thomas Loder married Leah French Efford (b ca 1892). Their children were John Samuel, Harold Batten, and Farleigh Isabel.

10 William L Loder (1874); Thomas E Loder (1879; Lily Joyce Loder (1881); Silas (1875/drowned 1892); Elkanah aka Cain (1877/drowned 1899); Rachel (1886) and John (1889) who died in infancy. Personal communication Verna Loder Wroblewski.

11 Computed from community lists at "Bonavista Peninsula Soldier," Great War Living History Committee, www.nfldww1.com; and names at "Wall of Honour" (rev 22 May 1914), www/the.packet.ca/media/flying/3555.

12 The lowest enlistment number for the Snook's Harbour area was #1477. The lowest for Random Island as a whole was #987 (L/Cpl Esau Penney of Deer Harbour). Both are 1915 enlistment numbers.

13 Jane Loder is listed in the 1935 census as Julia, but in her daughter's documents and ship's passenger lists she appears as Jane. In *Random Island* she is incorrectly identified as Mary Ann. For the Loders' roles in the establishment of Congregationalism on Random Island see, Box 3, Files 14, 15: Smith's Sound, Random Island, Archives of St David's Presbyterian Church, St John's.

14 See Duley, *Where Once*, Ch.1.

15 Wilfred BW Martin, with the assistance of Eileen Martin, *Random Island and Beyond* (St John's: Creative Publishers, 1991), 134.

16 Information on John Loder's FPU activities based on a paper by John W Loder.

17 "Harold Loder," in Malcolm Macleod, ed *Crossroads Country: Memoirs of Pre-Confederation Newfoundland* (St Johns, NL: Breakwater Press, 1999), 204.

18 "Loder, Martha," in Martin, *Random Island*, 199; also personal communication Verna Loder Wroblewski.

19 1911 Census, United Kingdom at www.findmypast.com.

20 For the roles of Becher and McCarthy, and their rivalries, see Yvonne McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of*

the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2014), Ch. 2.

21 *Daily News* March 15, 1915; also Duley, *Where Once*, 70-71.

22 Loder Diary, service summary page.

23 McEwan, 145-146; and Kirsty Harris, "Giving the Dope: Australian Army Medical Nurse Anaesthetists during World War One," *Journal of Military and Veterans Health*, Vol 21, 3 at www.jvuh.org (accessed 15/10/2105).

24 Matron JF Davies, 6 General Hospital (Rouen), April 7, 1919.

25 For base hospital organization and duties by 1917, see McEwan, 142-143;

26 McEwan, 54-55.

27 McEwan, 79.

28 Her service record places her at the 5 Stationary Hospital at LeMans but her personal notes place her at the 16 General Hospital at Le Treport Decemeber 11-27, 1915, and Hardelot (Lady Gifford's) from December 28 until January 19, 1916.

29 CWGC Reveals Sacrifice of Women in the Great War," News Release 23 November 2013; also "Étaples Military Cemetery" at www.cwgc.org/microsites/etaples-military-cemetery.aspx.

30 "The Fairest Force: Great War Nurses in France and Flanders," Sickness and Convalescence," Section 14 at www.fairestforce.co.uk

31 Duley, *Where Once*, 66.

32 Stanley A. Plotkin, Walter Orenstein and Paul Offit, *Vaccines*, 6th ed (Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier Health Sciences, 6th ed 2012), 157; and "Diphtheria", College of Physicians Philadelphia, www.historyofvaccines.org.

33 *Newfoundland Quarterly*, XVII, 3 (Decemeber 1917), 9. Born in Newfoundland, Nurse English received her training in Battle Creek, Michigan, and served with the Harvard Surgical Unit in the 22 General Hospital at Camiers. The unit arrived in 1915, two years before the USA declared war on Germany. English returned to Newfoundland after the war and married a United Church minister. Biography from granddaughter, "Comments" at Maud Kealey, Flickr, "WWI Camiers Dannes France" at www.flickr.com/photos/2386476@NO4/2307510484

34 Quoted in McEwan, 127.

35 Loder Record QA, Report of Matron, 18th General Hospital, August 14, 1916.

36 John Loder died on August 20, 1916.

37 Details of the mutiny were suppressed in 1917, and even now remain obscure, but it is thought the ringleader was Pte Percy Toplis, a career criminal who served in the Royal Army Medical Corps. Archival documents have been subjected to the "Hundred Year Rule" and will not be released until 2017.

38 "Bertha Gavin (Betty) Stevenson," Literary Figures at Étaples, Étaples Military Cemetery, www.cwgc.org.

39 McEwan, 159.

40 Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Étaples, www.cwgc.com

41 McEwan, 153; and Loder Record QA, "Form of Agreement for serving Members Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service ..." signed Martha Isabell Loder, 7 May 1917.

42 Loder Diary, September 13, 1918.



ASPECTS

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(PART TWO)

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SUMMARY OF PART ONE

MARTHA (MONA) ISABEL LODER IS THE FIRST NEWFOUNDLAND NURSE KNOWN TO HAVE VOLUNTEERED IN WORLD WAR I. BORN IN TINY SNOOK'S HARBOUR, RANDOM ISLAND, AND EDUCATED IN MODEST CONGREGATIONAL AND METHODIST CHAPEL SCHOOLS, SHE GRADUATED FROM THE LONDON HOSPITAL, ONE OF GREAT BRITAIN'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS SCHOOLS OF NURSING. SISTER LODER ARRIVED IN FRANCE ON NOVEMBER 12, 1914, WHEN MEDICAL FACILITIES WERE PRIMITIVE. SHE WAS IN A THEATRE OF WAR TEN MONTHS BEFORE THE NEWFOUNDLAND REGIMENT LANDED IN SUVLA BAY ON SEPTEMBER 19, 1915.

MONA LODER'S WORK WITH THE QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S IMPERIAL MILITARY NURSING SERVICE RESERVE (QAIMNSR) STARTED IN BOULOGNE WHEN CASUALTIES WERE DELIVERED IN OPEN CARTS TO HOSPITALS SHORT OF SUPPLIES AS BASIC AS BEDS, ANTISEPTICS, AND BANDAGES. HER NURSING ASSIGNMENTS LATER INCLUDED THE MASSIVE BASE HOSPITALS IN CAMIERS AND ETAPLES THAT RECEIVED THE CARNAGE OF THE SOMME. SHE HELD THE DEMANDING POSITIONS OF THEATRE (SURGICAL) NURSE AND WARD SISTER ON NIGHT DUTY, THE SHIFT WHEN MOST CASUALTIES ARRIVED DUE TO THE HAZARDS OF DAYTIME TRANSPORTATION.

MEDICAL PERSONNEL FACED EXHAUSTION AND EMOTIONAL STRAIN AS THEY COPEd WITH THE FLOOD OF HORRIFIC PHYSICAL WOUNDS CAUSED BY HIGH EXPLOSIVES, GAS, AND MACHINE GUN BULLETS, AS WELL AS THE LITTLE-UNDERSTOOD MENTAL STATE OF SOLDIERS WITH "SHELL SHOCK." MEDICAL STAFF RISKED ILLNESS OF THEIR OWN INCLUDING TYPHOID FEVER, DIPHTHERIA, INFLUENZA, AND INFECTIONS DUE TO PRIMITIVE SANITATION. BASE HOSPITALS, ESPECIALLY ETAPLES, WERE ALSO SUBJECT TO AERIAL ATTACK AND SHELLING. TO COMPOUND LODER'S PERSONAL CHALLENGES, HER FATHER DIED WHILE SHE WAS AWAY AT WAR, AND IT IS BELIEVED THAT A FIANCÉ, WHO WAS A SOLDIER, DIED DURING THE CONFLICT. SISTER LODER'S SERVICE RECORD DURING 1915-1917 CONTAINS TELLING EPISODES OF ILLNESS AND EXHAUSTION.

Part Two of *Nurse Martha Isabel Loder (1884-1963) and the Great War* covers her final months of service on an Ambulance Train as well as her subsequent life. Loder's war record is one of fortitude, bravery, and dedication coupled with remarkable good humour and resilience. Her neglected story, as well as that of other Newfoundland nurses during World War I, deserves greater recognition.

1918: Hard work, no rest, 'lovely plums'

In February 1918, the final year of the war, Nurse Mona Loder was transferred to the 11 Stationary Hospital at Rouen, and was promoted to Night Supervisor. Rouen exceeded even Etaples in importance. In addition to its 18 hospitals with a capacity of 20,000 beds, it was a supply and repair base for the British Expeditionary Force with railway yards, a heavy repair workshop for vehicles, petroleum storage tanks, and the 3rd Echelon General Headquarters of the Deputy Adjutant-General. Located on the lower Seine, it was a maritime link into the heart of France. Rouen had many canteens and an active social life. Most of the hospitals in Rouen, including the 11th, had been there from the onset of the war, and were now mature facilities. Though housing and hospitals still mainly consisted of tents and huts of wood and metal, there were amenities such as nurses' lounges and clubs. Nurses, orderlies, and VADs planted flowers. More ominously, anticipating aerial attacks, hospitals were sandbagged at the base. Loder served in the 11 Stationary Hospital during the period in which it received casualties from the Last German Offensive that began on March 21, 1918.¹

On July 23, 1918, Loder took on her last and most dangerous assignment: the Number 5 Ambulance Train attached to the 6 General Hospital in Rouen.² The train would bring her very close to battlefields. This was the culmination of a long-standing wish. In 1915 she expressed frustration that nurses "are not allowed to pick up the wounded [at the front]. I wish we were. I should like it. I hear that no Nursing Sister is allowed within five miles of the firing line." She ended: "I shall be glad to go nearer if I am wanted."³

Loder was appointed Sister-in-Charge of the 5 Ambulance Train,⁴ and during the remainder of the war made nearly 90 journeys, some of them involving substantial risk and all involving great responsibility, along with long hours, irritating delays, poor roadbeds, mechanical breakdowns, and imperfect communications,

with the sick and sometimes dying on board. The male staff of doctors and orderlies were part of the Royal Army Medical Corps and the nurses on her train were with the QAIMNSR. The 5 Ambulance Train evacuated casualties from at least 18 different locations containing Casualty Clearing Stations, most of which were in Picardy, Normandy, Pas-de-Calais, and on occasion Belgium. The Ambulance Train also transported patients from Base Hospitals to waiting ships.⁵

Ambulance Trains were up to a third of a mile long and carried over four hundred patients, both stretcher cases and walking wounded. The physical and mental condition of patients varied. Originally Ambulance Trains were ill-suited French freight cars hastily commandeered for the purpose, but by 1918 they were usually equipped with a pharmacy, an emergency operating table, carriages with seats, hospital wards with three tiers of beds on each side, staff cars, and a kitchen. Propaganda pictures that accompanied public appeals for ambulance train funds showed immaculate coaches with pristine white sheets, teacups, and even flowers, with serene and equally immaculate nurses. Loder's diary shows that these propaganda images were far removed from reality.⁶ Her train was well-worn and subject to breakdowns, and the work intense.

Loder's first few weeks on the 5 Ambulance Train involved the daily loading, care, and unloading of 250 to 400 patients. Many initial trips were from Rouen to the nearby channel port of Le Havre, but even on these runs there were challenges.

July 23 "Loaded 5 am for Havre. Left at 7-30 with evacuation for England. Very stormy no ships. Pts [patients] sent to Hospital.... Left Havre 10 pm."

Loder had already been on duty 17 hours, and was not yet back in Rouen.

Nurses slept on the moving, bumpy train when not on shift, and in the staff coach at railway garages while awaiting orders or the completion of repairs. Interrupted sleep was common.

July 31 "Arrived back Sotteville [a suburb of Rouen] early am. Garage all day."

Loder's life on the Ambulance Train was one of hard work, lack of rest, and even danger alternating with times of waiting for new orders when recreation was occasionally possible. Nurses Clubs in the larger bases provided periodic opportunities to encounter nursing friends, unwind, and have "tea." Ambulance Train food was monotonous and not very appetizing. One

evening & got two chairs a foot stool
a bayonet German box & some other
things which we managed to bring
along to train
Capt Hannon & Capt O'Connor seeing
our booty wanted to set off for D. Orad-
meau we (Sister O'Rafferty myself)
went to show them the way but I had
no luck. tumbled into a few trenches
& had to return home empty handed.

Oct. 14th Left Amiens at 6 A.M. & came to La
Chapelle. Arrived at 7-20 & left
again for Tincourt at 3-35 P.M.
Met the P.T.O. who promised us cases
at Amiens & dragged him
out of Amiens at Templeux le Guerdon.
at 6 P.M. Dark & Sister Black came
on with the S.M.D. at 7 P.M.

Oct. 15th Went to 48 P.C.S. with S.M.D. & came
back on 1st Ambulance saw
Lury for a few minutes she was
lucky giving Anesthetics began

to load at 11-20 A.M. mostly Gas
cases. Sister had, 14 Officers.
21. Civilians, French women & children
(found) who had been with the Germans
since 1914. One old lady nearly
died. They were detained at Amiens
at 1. A.M. 16th.
One Tommy died (foo) just before
we got to Amiens, Capt O'Connor appeared ^{at Amiens}
Reached Rouen at 8-45. Sister O'R.
went up to 403 Stationary with a very bad gas
patient. Capt Hannon left for 402 A.T.
& Capt Parsons joined 5 A.T. (from team)
Left R. again at 2-45 p.m. for Templeux le
Guerdon, arrived 5-30 A.M. 17th -

Oct 17th Loaded at 11. A.M. and left at 2 P.M.
20 Officers, 30 Civilians, Sister
left load mostly Influenza
Civilians detained at Amiens,
Laid night duty, quiet time
no excitement.

" 18 Arrived at Rouen 4-30 A.M. went to
bed at 6. Sister O'Rafferty went out

M. B. Brought from 401 P.C.S. to 402

wit described the pastries as “warranted to resist any 15 inch shells at any range above 10 yards.”⁷ Tasty food was so rare and special that Loder noted it when it was available.

Though the final German offensive had foundered by mid July 1918, bombings of Base Hospitals and railway lines continued.

Ambulance Trains were marked with prominent Red Crosses but that did not save them from attack.

August 1 (Sotteville): “Air raid warning 12-30 am. Heavy barrage-a few bombs dropped. “All clear” 1-30, warning again 2 am. No firing.”

The following day, the ambulance train nurses cheered up: “American MD is generous, bought us lovely plums, grapes, nuts, tomatoes and celery.”

In early August 1918, the One Hundred Day Offensive of the allies began, and the work of the Ambulance Train staff became increasingly intense and dangerous. On August 7, they arrived in Longpré, part of greater Amiens. Sister Loder was initially puzzled about the destination for they had to “scrape up part of a load” consisting of “patients mostly medical (Dysentery) a few badly gassed cases.” Longpré had three Casualty Clearing

Stations (12, 53, 55).⁸ Secrecy precluded her knowing of the impending and crucial Battle of Amiens, the beginning of the allied counteroffensive. The Clearing Stations were themselves cleared in anticipation of greater and more severe casualties to come. It was the calm before the storm and from her train window Mona gazed at the beautiful countryside: there were “some small lakes with quantities of water lilies.” Two days later, the reason for the Longpré run became apparent.

August 9, 1918 Crouy [-sur-Somme]: Took “badly wounded right from the field.” The train evacuated 444 casualties from this location, 16 km northwest of Amiens, back to Rouen. The number of casualties exceeded the normal capacity of the train.

August 16, 1918: “It was a most perfect night. A glorious moon shining and as we sped along up country [to Amiens] one could see the flash of guns at the front & the star shells going up, the flash lights were playing & strange lights of all description were to be seen. I was riveted to the window...”

The next morning the reality of the shelling was starkly evident: “This station has got hit very badly. The buildings are in ruins, broken glass everywhere, Amiens Cathedral has not yet been damaged.”

Allied success at the Battle of Amiens was followed by General Byng's Third Army assault on the German positions along a ten-mile front between the Ancre and the Scarpe. The opening tank attacks began on August 21, and starting the next day Loder and her colleagues made the first of four trips to Ligny-St Flochel, close to the fighting, retrieving the wounded from its three Casualty Clearing Stations.⁹

August 27/28: *"Left for Ligny at 1 pm. It was a dull afternoon and evening with a mist. The searchlights looked quite pretty as we passed downcountry by the lake & the guns at the front lighted up the sky. Loaded this morning and came down via Etaples and Boulogne. Sister Wilson¹⁰ had a death on the way..."*

There was no assurance of safety even when the train arrived back from the front.

August 24: *Got back into...Station at 11 & began to unload had not finished when the alarm went followed by heavy barrage for a short time then a lull then another barrage, all of us donned our helmets and lay flat on the seats. One bomb was dropped that set something on fire up till now we have not heard what it was. We left for Etaples at 12:30 with our walking cases.*

As it turned out the Germans had hit a nearby ammunition dump.

On September 7, the 5 Ambulance Train and its staff were sent to the old German lines on the Somme from where they had received so many casualties. Now known as Dernancourt, "Edgehill" on the outskirts of Albert had three Casualty Clearing Stations and an adjacent cemetery.¹¹

[Arrived] at 1:30 Loaded 3 pm. The whole place looks like a barren wilderness the old CC Stations are a wreck and ruin, the spot we are standing on was no man's land in the retreat.

On another occasion when her train was stuck all day in "Amicourt" (likely Omiécourt, southwest of Amiens), in a spirit of adventure she and Sister Mary O'Rafferty, an Irish nurse recently reassigned from the Indian Nursing Service, explored former German dugouts.¹² They retrieved *"two chairs, a footstool, a bayonet, a German box & some other things which we managed to bring along to the train."* On a second foray Mona *"tumbled into a few trenches and had to return home empty handed."*¹³

Amiens was over but soon there were other important trips including two pre-clearances of a Casualty Clearing Station at Gézaincourt, Picardy, a little railway siding near Cambrai. It contained an Australian and British CCS,

the latter taking the walking wounded.¹⁴ This was the prelude to The Battle of Canal du Nord and Cambrai, the most important remaining German distribution centre.

Looming peace, looming perils

As the last part of the Hindenburg Line was breached in early October, the 5 Ambulance Train continued to be dispatched to evacuate casualties as well as on trips from Base Hospitals to awaiting ships. The nursing work was unremitting. On October 3, after a day of loading at Doingt and Brie, the train left for Rouen. Mona had to stay up all night, as *"patients were very bad."* Later the same day, she left on another evacuation. Then on October 5, on a trip from Lincourt to Trouville, Loder again nursed a *"very heavy load, several bad chest cases. Had two deaths on the journey four head cases almost died..."*¹⁵

By mid-October the train was within former German-held territory, and it now carried civilian casualties from British gas attacks begun in retaliation to those initiated by the German army in April 1915.

October 15: *"Began to load at 1130 am mostly gas cases rather bad, 14 officers, 21 civilian French (gassed) who had been with the Germans since 1914. An old lady nearly died. They were detrained at Amiens at 1 am."*

Increasingly her train contained wounded German prisoners-of-war. They were treated professionally.

October 16 (Le Tréport): *"Received orders for Calais at 3 am with evac[uation]. ...Loaded at 3 am for Calais. Sister Wilson got up and dieted all the patients. Carried several Germans one with amputation thigh had haemorrhage just as we were unloading at C. He revived after subcutaneous saline and was taken by car to No. 30 GH.*

At midnight Loder left for Ligny-St-Flochel. She had already been on duty 21 hours, snatching rest as she could.

At times there was a sense that the pace of the war was slowing down, and with it mounting infractions of Chief Matron Maud McCarthy's strict rules against fraternization with soldiers and male medical staff. In Doingt, a small village outside Peronne, captured by the Australian troops in the previous month, Mona played bridge; *"It was really awfully good fun."* At Abbeville, *"the M[edical] O[fficers] gave us a dinner party. Roast chicken."* She danced to the gramophone, and enjoyed a cricket match between the orderlies. She *"met the R[ailway] T[ransport] O[fficer], who promised us roses at Amiens & ragged him."*¹⁶ She was having a well-deserved enjoyable

time. However, there was a worrying new development.

On October 15, the same day Loder cared for civilian patients, Sister Betsy Brough had to be brought from the 50 CCS (Amiens) to the 8 General Hospital in Rouen with severe influenza; and two days later the train was carrying additional flu patients. By late October Loder noted: “*influenza rampant among personnel.*” Two were in hospital, one of whom, an orderly, subsequently died, and more were being conveyed to hospital as she wrote including “RS Pollard our Batman” who had been fighting the flu for days.¹⁷ Pollard was in close contact with the nurses for his roles included carrying their belongings, equipment, and even foraging for food.

Betsy Brough, the severely ill nurse on the train, was a graduate of the Edinburgh Infirmary. She had previously served in Egypt and elsewhere in France. During 1918, she had rotated through seven Casualty Clearing Stations as well as a Stationary Hospital, spraining her ankle so badly it required recuperation in an infirmary. Influenza led to her evacuation to England, and it took her five months to fully recover and go back on duty at a military hospital in Scotland.¹⁸ Exhausted medical staff were succumbing to the influenza pandemic that was sweeping the world, taking millions of lives.

Recent scholarship argues that the virulent flu strain, popularly known as the “Spanish flu,” actually originated in China, and that its path of diffusion was through the mobilization of the Chinese Labour Corps.¹⁹ If so, an entry in Loder’s diary may be significant. She recorded three contact names important to her duties: the Principal Matron, her Colonel, and “Lieut BR Nichol, 38 Coy. Chinese Labor Corps.”²⁰ The CLC were an exploited workforce of farmers who were recruited after China declared war on Germany in 1917. Many of the 96,000 men involved worked in Northern France, and there were large camps near Boulogne, Wimereaux, and Etaples. Among their many duties were stevedoring and railway repair, both of obvious relevance to an Ambulance Train and its waiting ships.²¹ Whatever the pathway of the disease may prove to have been, influenza was now another risk for nurses.

The day after the news of the death of an orderly from Number 5, a goods train hit Loder’s train.

“I and Sister Tupper were just into bed when the awful bump came, everything was shot off the shelves & table on me & floor & I thought my last day had come.”

Mona was praised by the Medical Officer on the train for helping to put out a fire.²²

Though sanitation and working conditions had improved from the early days of the war, Sister Charlotte Tupper soon fell ill for the second time. She had been assigned to the Ambulance Train staff in September 1918 having recently recovered from bronchitis. After three months on the train she was transferred to the 8 Stationary Hospital but in February 1919 she was sent back to England due to an eye infection, coupled with “general debility,” an all-purpose term in use by medical boards after the war.²³

At last the war was over. Nurse Loder’s entry on Armistice Day of November 11, 1918, written from Rouen, speaks for itself:

[Sister] Wilson came up to see me this evening. She had been to a Thanksgiving Service. Armistice signed this am great celebrations since 12 midday. Col. sent us champagne for dinner. Isn’t it too lovely for words no one else to be killed, no more going over the top. I am so happy I can hardly keep the tears back.”

The war was over but the work of the staff of the 5 Ambulance Train was not. For the next two months they continued to evacuate the wounded from around the countryside to the large Base Hospitals and onto ships for home. By the end of November the strain of continuing responsibilities seems to have undermined the emotional reserves of the Medical Officer. The Ambulance Train had travelled overnight to Cambrai, and arrived at 9 am. Loading began at noon. They proceeded next to St André loading patients at 10:30 that evening. The train was then ordered immediately back to Boulogne. In a rare expression of irritation Nurse Loder wrote: “*Capt O’Connor made things a little unpleasant by breaking the window and giving way to a fiendish temper.*”²⁴

With the war formally ended Loder’s diary records other incidents when discipline gave way. On December 5, she was delighted to receive orders to travel to “Germain Neuville,” a new location further into the heart of France. They had “*a very pleasant run along the Seine*” to Paris and Versailles, continuing through “*very hilly, beautiful country.*”²⁵ Though she anticipated an enjoyable trip, this was not to be. The staff expected to load 400 lightly injured officers but 580 were waiting for the train, well over capacity. She wryly described subsequent events:

“Officers had dined well but not wisely. They were a very merry lot. Captain [JL] Parsons locked doors connecting staff coach with others and told nurses should not go near them until morning.”

Loder was concerned not for her own safety but about the 19 serious cases on board that the nurses could not reach.²⁶

Loder's final six-day trip on the Number 5 Ambulance Train was a protracted and anti-climactic marathon that began on December 27 and lasted until New Year's Day. The train, its staff, the tracks, and timetables sagged under the weight of war weariness. The train left Douai for Valenciennes, both in the north of France and only about 40 km apart, but early in the journey three coaches, including the nurses' car, were damaged in an accident. The local French authorities were unable to make repairs. The train was stuck in the same place for nearly two days but finally it inched on towards its intended final destination, Etaples, roughly 160 km distance. Still damaged, it went about two kilometres, then stopped for the night. The next day it travelled a little further but concerned French officials halted it. After partial repairs the train was given permission to reroute to Boulogne only to be halted again because another train had derailed. Again it was rerouted. On December 30, the Ambulance Train limped into Camiers. Throughout the trip nursing responsibilities had continued. Loder had been on night duty but as she was Sister-in-Charge she was involved in daytime issues as well. At Camiers, the exhausted patients had to be unloaded by the tired staff and it was "pouring with rain." Loder summarized the trip: "Everyone was fed up." However, the saga for the nurses was not over yet.

The next day, New Year's Eve, the male medical staff planned to leave for their base in Rouen but the nurses, with their damaged staff coach, were about to be left behind with no clear plans for housing or travel. Breaking rank, Sister Loder phoned Colonel Leslie, Assistant Director of Military Services, to intervene. The Colonel bribed the elderly French Station Master with whiskey and cigars and got the coach repaired. They proceeded to Rouen with great relief, arriving on New Year's Day: "It was glorious warm and sunny." A week later, on January 7, the 5 Ambulance Train was demobilized.

Postscript

*Can you forget their passing, the cheering and the waving,
The little group of people at the doorway of the shed,
The sudden awful silence when the last train swung to darkness,
And the lonely desolation, and the mocking stars o'erhead?*

—"Rouen" by May Wedderburn Cannan (VAD)²⁷

After such a period of intensity, danger, horrific sights, adventure, friendship, and heartbreak, Loder, like other nurses and soldiers, had to find a way back to normalcy. In Loder's case, her subsequent path was made more difficult by the onset of an economic depression in her homeland as fish prices collapsed. She demobilized into an unstable world that in general did not pay nurses well.

New Year's Day of 1919 included a church service in Rouen, but by now the evangelical injunctions of Mona's youth against cards, alcohol, and dancing seemed narrow. She was part of a self-confident generation of single nurses. She found a regulation that she and two other Sisters, "three full grown women," were forbidden to travel by train to Paris at night without a male escort to be absurd.²⁸ Like many nurses of her post war generation, with so many men dead, she needed to find a way to reconstruct a satisfying life and career, perhaps without marriage. Her first impulse was to return home. Twice in the preceding months she had gone to the sea and simply gazed at it.²⁹

While waiting to leave Rouen she sought out Newfoundlanders and "went to visit the Newfoundland boys at no 2 C.C." She met officers of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment including Captain George Hicks and Captain Hector McNeil.³⁰ "They took us to their hut & we sat round a glorious fire & drank champagne." She found her cousin, Ephraim Cooper from Snook's Harbour, and invited him to visit.³¹ She and five other nurses sharing a hut threw a party and invited "a Newfoundland sister from the 25 GH."³² In general, she and the nurses had "a ripping time."³³

Everyone was in a merry mood. Early on in the New Year Loder arrived at the Hospital Car of Ambulance Train 6 to find the Matron still in bed having been at a dance until 4 am.³⁴ Mona had her own confession: "In bed all day from over eating."³⁵ Special treats like melon, apricots, bacon and sardines are recorded in her journal, foods she had rarely if ever tasted since the war began.

Ordered back to England in March 1919, she was temporarily assigned to St George's Hospital, which specialized in plastic surgery, and also granted a month's leave, which she spent on holiday with two nursing friends while waiting to secure a passage to Newfoundland. These friendships and networks with other nurses continued for many years.

At last, on May 14, 1919, she was able to secure a passage to home via Montreal, reaching Clarendville two weeks later "after a rotten journey across the country." Her relatives were there to meet her and to take her

back to Snook's Harbour by boat. A month later Mona's "old chum" Sister Lucy Pownall Deakin arrived to spend time with her in Newfoundland. The visit stemmed from a wish Lucy had expressed to Mona five years earlier as the war raged.

Lucy Deakin (1884-1974) was born into a modest middle class family from Stockport, Cheshire. Her father was a restaurant keeper, and an older sister a shop assistant. She volunteered to serve with the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve immediately after the declaration of war. She arrived in France on August 8, 1914. By late 1915 she was serving as a Surgical Sister, and by 1916 she was administering anaesthetics at many Casualty Clearing Stations due to the shortage of doctors. She also served in General Hospitals as Sister-in-Charge of acute wards.³⁶

The same age, Sisters Loder and Deakin seem to have first met at the London General Hospital. Their paths continued to cross during the war. In the spring of 1915 they were both in Boulogne. Mona was at the 13 Stationary Hospital known as "Hell's Ante Room." In a letter to her parents she described it as "too terrible for words. We went about our work with lumps in our throats as we helped to dress the wounds." Lucy Deakin was at a nearby Clearing Hospital, also treating horrific injuries. Then a letter arrived from Snook's Harbour with news about a new baby in the Loder family. The two nurses looked forward to happier times. Mona wrote back: "Deakin is well and sends her love. She thinks baby John is a fine boy and longs to hold him. So I tell her she may do so after the war, if he does not object."³⁷ The friendship between Loder and Deakin helped to sustain them during the war and in their readjustment to civilian life.

Though they were at different facilities, their assignments continued to overlap at Etaples and Camiers, and both were in Rouen in their final months of service. On at least one occasion their paths crossed out in the field: On October 15, 1918 Lucy was at Number 8 Casualty Clearing Station (Elnes, Pas de Calais). Mona hitched a ride from a nearby train station and "*saw Lucy for a few moments she was busy giving anaesthetics...*" The war now over, Mona and Lucy spent four months together recuperating in the tranquility of Snook's Harbour. They decided to go to Brandon, Manitoba, where there were jobs.

Mona had to support herself after the war. Her father, "Skipper" John Loder, had operated a fishing schooner,

raised cattle, and owned land in addition to his house. When he died in 1916 his estate was valued at \$1800. Loder provided for his widow, Jane, by bequeathing one-third of the income from his fishing operation and the "enjoyment...of my dwelling house" so long as she did not remarry. Their eldest son, Thomas, received land and the remaining two-thirds interest in the fishing premises. The younger son, William, received an iron plow and land, but in the straightened economic conditions of the 1920s, these assets proved insufficient for him to remain on Random Island.

There was even less for a single Loder daughter to fall back on, though John Loder did his best to provide. His two daughters inherited land amounting to approximately thirteen acres each, but at that time it was of limited value. Martha and her sister Lily were also each entitled to one-twelfth of the fishing income upon the death of their mother but that inheritance was years away. Lily was married and no longer at home. John's special provision for his single daughter was that she have "the bed and bedding which she now uses" in the house, suggesting that her parents anticipated she would return.³⁸ However, Mona's horizons had broadened. Nurses in wartime had stretched the boundaries placed upon them, and Mona had changed. Moreover, the job opportunities in Newfoundland were limited. The two friends departed for Manitoba on October 23, 1919.

Nursing posts and family ties

Mona and Lucy were affiliated with the Brandon General Hospital as private duty nurses. Loder described Brandon as a very nice city with "*broad streets, well lighted, nice new buildings*" but the winter seemed interminable, and in the spring of 1920 she recorded that "*we have booked our passage to Blighty*" with the intention of finding an alternative to private nursing.³⁹ In September Mona began work as a Home Visitor with the London County Council, and was assigned to Brixton, a mixed working and middle class borough south of the Thames. A "Sister Wilson" hired her, perhaps the nurse of the same name who had served with Loder on the 5 Ambulance Train. Mona found the work in Brixton confusing and hectic, and living expenses high. Three years later she decided to leave, writing cryptically: "*Don't know that I mind leaving London very much but I hate breaking up the little home and leaving Lucy. Anyway it has got to be done.*"⁴⁰ Her mother, to whom she was devoted for the rest of her life, was still in Snook's Harbour.

In 1923 Mona Loder returned to St John's, and served as the first school nurse at the Methodist College on a two-year contract.

She was identified in the *Daily News* as "the pioneer worker in this branch of welfare work in Newfoundland," implying she was the first school nurse at any institution on the island. What is clear is that she initiated protocols, administrative procedures, and doctor's rotations and put the program at the college in place. She stressed the importance of school nurse programs at an address to the "Old Colony Club," whose membership contained most of the women involved in social reform and women's suffrage in St John's.⁴¹

Once again, she made friends easily, but Newfoundland's prolonged economic depression deepened. Though asked to remain, her low salary seems to have figured into her departure. At the last minute, she was offered the Matronship of the Nurses Home of the General Hospital but declined it. She would have been aware of the long history of conflict between nursing staff at the General Hospital and Dr Lawrence Keegan, its Medical Superintendent, who interfered in issues normally considered within a Matron's authority. It was a dispiriting atmosphere in which to work.⁴²

She left for Boston in January 1926, a city she had already visited and where there were better opportunities.⁴³ Both her brother William, who lived in West Lynn, and her sister, Lily (Mrs. Robert Randell), residing in Sommerville, had already emigrated to the "Boston States."⁴⁴ Yet Newfoundland continued to be a magnet, and after a time she returned.

In June 1929 she became Superintendent of the Child Welfare Association in St John's. The CWA had been launched by leaders of the Women's Patriotic Association eight years earlier with high hopes of reducing Newfoundland's child mortality rate through visiting nurses, baby clinics, milk stations, and education. Nurse Loder found St John's "very dusty, &

SHE WAS OFFERED THE MATRONSHIP OF THE NURSES HOME OF THE GENERAL HOSPITAL BUT DECLINED IT. SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN AWARE OF THE LONG HISTORY OF CONFLICT BETWEEN NURSING STAFF AT THE GENERAL HOSPITAL AND DR LAWRENCE KEEGAN, ITS MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT, WHO INTERFERED IN ISSUES NORMALLY CONSIDERED WITHIN A MATRON'S AUTHORITY.

much sickness among the babies."⁴⁵

During her tenure the CWA opened a soup kitchen for undernourished mothers and children, but the organization experienced mounting financial difficulties as the economy worsened.⁴⁶ A year later, Mona resigned, and she returned to Boston in August 1930 with her now adult nephew, John (Jack) Loder, whom Nurse Lucy Deakin had longed to hug while coping with the carnage of the Front.⁴⁷


Mona maintained close ties with her family both in the USA and in Newfoundland. She was admired and loved by her nieces and nephews, and she loved them. She "would do anything to help them get ahead." She took an active interest in the education of her nephew Harold Loder (1918-1990), who remained in Newfoundland and had a distinguished teaching career. When his previous schooling in Elliott's Cove, a two-mile walk from Snook's

Harbour, proved insufficient to be admitted to Memorial College, Mona encouraged him to take another year of high school at Prince of Wales College and helped to pay for it. He passed with Honours, attended Memorial in 1937, and eventually earned degrees from Mount Allison (BA) and Acadia (BEd).⁴⁸

In the fall of 1933, she brought her aging mother to Boston. The ever-vigilant US Immigration authorities required them to swear that they were not polygamists or anarchists.⁴⁹ Two years later, as her mother's health declined, Mona brought her back to Snook's Harbour in the hopes her memory and strength would improve, and though familiar surroundings had some temporary effect, Jane died in February 1937. This would be Mona's last extended stay in her homeland, though she returned to Snook's Harbour for a three-week visit in the fall of 1939, going on to Bishop's Falls to visit Harold Loder before returning to Massachusetts where she resided for the rest of her life.⁵⁰ Five years later, Mona's last remaining sibling in Newfoundland, Tom, was accidentally killed in a train accident. She made one final trip to Newfoundland in the 1950s.⁵¹

For much of her postwar nursing career, Mona Loder did private duty nursing, interspersed in at least four cases with work focusing on children: as a Home Visitor in Brixton, as a school nurse at the Methodist College, as superintendent of the Child Welfare Association, and at the Sharon Sanatorium Children's Pavilion, Massachusetts. With a wide background in war nursing, coupled with high praise as a surgery nurse and ward supervisor, she was amply qualified to continue in these fields in civilian life or to be a Matron. Her subsequent career choices may reveal something of her method of coping with the bad memories of war. Improving the lives of children, and seeing their innocence, may have been antidotes to the terrible sights she had seen. Lucy Deakin, who had served in many Casualty Clearing Stations and acute medical wards, chose the same career path and served for many years as a school nurse with the London County Council. Loder's postwar private duty nursing also speaks to her underlying adaptive capacity and wide knowledge. She nursed in hospitals and homes, dealing with many different rules, personalities, patients, and illnesses. At the same time, within the limits of her finances, she could set her own pace and make her own choices. In short, she found a way forward and as her great niece expressed it "got on with her life. Her whole face lit up when she smiled."⁵²

Fears of another World War mounted. Loder made another and likely final trip to England in July 1939 that included time in Cheshire where the Deakins lived. Old memories had likely reemerged, prompting a need to reconnect with nursing friends. Mona was in London on September 3, 1939 when war was declared. Her return journey involved a southern route via the Azores accompanied part of the way by a convoy of ten ships and three destroyers. One of the last entries in Loder's journal is this: "*Jean joined the Waves.*" Her American niece, who also became a nurse, had volunteered as her aunt had done a generation before.⁵³

Sister Martha (Mona) Isabel Loder, the first Newfoundland nurse to arrive on the Western Front in the Great War to end all wars, died on June 25, 1963.⁵⁴ Among her possessions was a small ring, believed to be that of a fiancé killed during the conflict.⁵⁵ She left it to her much-loved great niece and namesake, Martha, whose birth she had greeted with a bouquet of flowers.⁵⁶ 

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Acknowledgements

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1 "Rouen," www.throughtheselines.com.au; "St Sever Cemetery" (Rouen), www.cwgc.org; "WW1 Rouen and its base hospitals," www.spiritofremembrance.com.

2 For the evolution of casualty evacuations, including Ambulance Trains, see Leo Van Bergen, *Before My Helpless Sight-Suffering, Dying and Military Medicine on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).

3 Letter from "Mona", from "British Hospital Base, France," *Mail and Advocate*, May 1, 1915.

4 See document dated August 30, 1920, and JL. Parsons December 14, 1918, in Mona Loder Record, Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service Reserve (hereafter Loder QA), WO 399/4956 National Archives (UK).

5 Loder provides a summary list of towns and villages sometimes with their CCSs; this list has been cross-checked and expanded with information from *Locations of Casualty Clearing Stations, BEF, 1914-18*, Ministry of Pensions, HMSO, 1923; and further correlated with dates and diary entries to analyze the purpose of the missions. Also invaluable in reconstructing her locations is "The Base Hospitals in France" at "The Long Long Trail" website, www.1914-1918.net.

6 The National Railway Museum (York, UK) has online images of ambulance trains, mostly newly manufactured or operating in GB itself, as well as some more realistic pictures from the Front. See www.nrm.org.uk >"Railway Stories" > "First World War."

7 *A Train Errant: Being the Experiences of a Voluntary Unit in France and an Anthology From Their Magazine, 1915-19* (Hertford: Simon, 1919), 31.

8 Loder Diary, August 7, 1918 (in possession of Verna Loder Wroblewski).

9 It contained the 1, 7 and 33 Casualty Clearing Stations; see "Ligny-St-Flochel British Cemetery, Averdoingt," www.cwgc.org. The trips were on September 22,23,28,31.

10 There are many references to Sister Wilson but she is never identified by first name. There were over sixty "Miss Wilsons" in the QAIMNS.

11 The area was recaptured August 9 but continued to be used as a CCS. "Dernancourt Communal Cemetery Extension," www.cwgc.com

12 Mary Josephine O'Rafferty was a recent arrival on the 5 Ambulance Train and under the supervision of Mona. She was from Arklow, Kilmurray, County Wicklow, Ireland, where her recently deceased father had been a farmer. A graduate of the Sacred Heart Convent, Lisburn, County Antrim, and the Richmond Hospital, Dublin, she originally served in India but transferred to the QAIMNS in 1916 working in hospitals in England. She arrived in France to work on the 5 Ambulance Train on 24 August 1918. WO 399/6346, National Archives (UK).

13 Loder Diary, October 13, 1918.

14 September 14 and 22. "Gézaincourt Communal Cemetery Extension," www.cwgc.org

- 15 "Lincourt" may refer to Lincourt Mailleroncourt-Saint Pancras, well into former German territory; or Lincourt Flavacourt, much closer to Le Havre but not the scene of recent conflict; or perhaps Élincourt, Picardy. Trouville is a port south of Le Havre.
- 16 Loder Diary, September 13 & 16; and October 2, 8, & 14, 1918.
- 17 Loder Diary, October 16-31, 1918.
- 18 Betsy Brough, WO 399/975, National Archives (UK).
- 19 Mark Humphreys, "Paths of Infection: The First World War and the Origin of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic," *War in History* (January 2014), 21(1), 55-81.
- 20 Loder Diary, 2.
- 21 "Chinese Labourers in Northern France During the Great War," www.rememberancetrails-northernfrance.com.
- 22 Loder Record QA, [Dr] J.L. Parsons, O.C. 5 A.T. December 14, 1918.
- 23 Charlotte Tupper was from Clonakilty, Co Cork, Ireland. She arrived in France in May 1918. WO 399/8464 National Archives (UK).
- 24 Loder Diary, November 30, 1918.
- 25 The precise location of "Germain Neuville" is not clear as there appears to be no town of that name. Loder located it "in the south." However Saint-Germain-au-Mont-d'Or and nearby Neuville-sur-Saône, north of Lyons, seem a possible destination. The location contained a Rest Camp and a small British Hospital that were evacuated during this period.
- 26 Loder Diary, December 5/6, 1918.
- 27 British poet and author who served with the Oxford Voluntary Aid Detachment.
- 28 Loder Diary, November 19, 1918.
- 29 Loder Diary, Le Tréport, September 9 and 15.
- 30 Captain George Hicks, MC was wounded at Beaumont Hamel, and returned to Newfoundland to recruit with his arm in a sling. He signed up over 270 men. He later earned a Military Cross at the Battle of Poelcappelle, October 9, 1917, and a Bar to his MC for his work as Battalion Transport Officer during the final month of the war. He was from Grand Falls. Captain Hector McNeil of St John's was a Blue Puttee who was Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant at Gallipoli. He was subsequently promoted to Captain and Quartermaster in France. His wife Fannie Knowling McNeil was a leader of the postwar women's suffrage movement, and as head of the Great War Veterans Association he also supported the cause.
- 31 Loder Diary, January 30, 1919. Ephraim Cooper enlisted in the RNR on October 31, 1917 and served until the end of the war. He returned to Snook's Harbour and later moved to nearby Elliott's Cove where he worked in sawmills. See interview "Born 50 years too soon," *Deck's Awash*, 12, 2, 15-16. Mona's mother (Jane Tilley Smith) and Ephraim's father (Moses Smith) were siblings. See "The Clutch: My Family," authored by Annette Macdonald, www.theclutch.ca and Hant's Harbour Baptisms, Vol. 59A, Public Archives of NL.
- 32 Loder Diary, March 1919, 1st entry.
- 33 Loder Diary February nd, 1919.
- 34 Loder Diary, January 3, 1919.
- 35 Loder Diary, January 8, 1919.
- 36 At various times she served at the 4, 6, 35, 41, 48, 50, 54, and 56 Casualty Clearing Stations as well as at the 4, 5 and 8 General Hospitals. See service record of Lucy P. Deakin, QAIMNS, WO 399/2147 National Archives (UK); 1891 UK Census, Stockport; 1939 Nurses Register, RG101/133OG/007/13, National Archives (UK); and "Lucy Pownall Deakin," www.findagrave.com.
- 37 John was the son of Mona's brother Thomas and his wife Leah. For her location see Loder Diary, 3; Letters reprinted in *Mail and Advocate*, April 1 and May 1, 1915.
- 38 Will of John Loder, Vol. 10,551-555 (1917), at "Newfoundland Grand Banks" <http://ngb.chebucto.org/Wills/loder-john-10-551-shtml>. Probated 1917; will witnessed by T.J. Duley, my grandfather.
- 39 Loder Diary, October 23, 1919-July 22, 1920.
- 40 Loder Diary, December 21, 1923.
- 41 "The Old Colony Club," *Daily News*, March 1925.
- 42 Linda White, "Who's in Charge Here? The General Hospital School of Nursing, St. John's, Newfoundland, 1903-30," www.cbmh.ca (accessed 8/21/2015).
- 43 Loder Diary, December 1925 and January 1926; also Passenger List, *SS Newfoundland*, 20 January 1926 (Boston) www.findmypast.com.
- 44 Personal communication, Verna Loder Wroblewski.
- 45 Loder Diary, June 8, 1929.
- 46 Margot I. Duley, "Armine Nutting Gosling: A Full and Useful Life" in Linda Cullum and Marilyn Porter, eds. *Creating this Place: Women Family and Class in St. John's, 1900-1950* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 135-137 (The Goslings and Child Welfare); Margaret Gibbons, "The Child Welfare Association," Honours Dissertation, Memorial University of Newfoundland, May 1996, esp. p. 40; "The Work of the Child Welfare Association," *The Encyclopedia of Newfoundland*, Volume 2, 309.
- 47 Passenger List, *SS Farnworth*, August 22, 1930 (Boston).
- 48 Loder Diary, October, 1935; personal communication, Verna Loder Wroblewski.
- 49 Passenger List, *SS Nova Scotia*, October 9, 1933 (Boston).
- 50 Loder Diary, September 16-October 8, 1939.
- 51 Personal communication, Verna Loder Wroblewski.
- 52 Personal communication, Martha O'Connor.
- 53 Loder Diary, 1945; Jean was the daughter of Lily and Robert Randell. She had visited Snook's Harbour with her mother in 1931 (Ship Manifest, *SS Newfoundland* at <http://ngb.chebucto.org/Passengers/nfld-Oct1-1931.shtml>).
- 54 She is buried at Puritan Lawn Memorial Park, Peabody, Essex, Massachusetts.
- 55 Regrettably his name is not known, and her 1918 journal is silent on this account as are her few surviving letters.
- 56 Personal communication, Martha O'Connor.