

GOWER REMEMBERS

**Major General Charles Philip Fenwick
(1891-1954)**



Mr. Charles Fenwick, son of Rev. M. Fenwick, leaves by this evening's train for Toronto University where he will study medicine.

(The Evening Telegram, September 12, 1911)

Charles Philip Fenwick was born in St. John's on July 10, 1891, the son of Margaret Hudson and the Rev. Mark Fenwick. His father, a Methodist clergyman, served in a number of Newfoundland communities beginning in 1883 and was associate minister at Gower Street Methodist Church during 1913-1914. Much of his tenure in Newfoundland was a mixture of chaplaincy and administrative work, as Chaplain to the Methodist Educational Institutions in St. John's and Guardian of the Methodist College Home from 1894 to 1916 and later as Superintendent of Missions for Newfoundland from 1916 to 1922. In addition to Charles, the

Fenwick family included three sisters: Alice, Ethel and Marjorie. A fourth sister, Emily, had died while still a young child.

Charles attended the Methodist College in St. John's, where he was a stellar student, winning many prizes over his years there. He then completed a year at the University of London, England. Such were his abilities that he was one of two nominees for the Rhodes Scholarship for Newfoundland in 1911, losing out to John Fox of St. Bonaventure's College. This decision may have been influenced by the practice in the early years of alternating these scholarships between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and Robert Tait, a Methodist who had attended Bishop Feild College, had won the previous year.

Not receiving the Rhodes Scholarship was only a minor bump in Fenwick's career path, however. As is noted above, in September of 1911, he left Newfoundland for Toronto, where he enrolled in the University of Toronto's Medical School. Occasional reports on his progress through the school appeared in local publications over the years including a note in *The Evening Telegram* for December 28, 1911, to the effect that he "is doing well at Toronto College. He played in the match for the inter-collegiate championship in Rugby and Association football as one of the Methodists which came out victorious." Obviously, his physical abilities were equal to his intellectual ones and considered as worthy of note in local papers.

Upon his graduation from medical school in the spring of 1916, Fenwick practiced for a short time in Toronto before accepting a commission as Captain in the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC), effective June 30, 1916, and proceeded overseas almost immediately. The following year he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and placed in charge of the Second Field Ambulance Corps. His actions at the Battle of Amiens that year resulted in him being awarded the Military Cross, the third highest honour bestowed upon the officer class who formed part of the British Army in the war. The two higher honours were the Victoria Cross and the Distinguished Service Cross.

Following the war, in 1920, Fenwick established a practice in Niagara Falls. Three years later he relocated to Toronto, all the while maintaining his connection with the military as part of the Non-Permanent Active Militia. With the outbreak of war in 1939 he became District Medical Officer for Toronto before he rejoined the CAMC and went overseas with the First Canadian Division. On May 20, 1940, he was named Assistant Director of Medical Services for the Second Canadian Division, a position he held until January 15, 1943, when he became Deputy

Director of Medical Services for Number II Canadian Corps. He spent only a few months in that post: on May 26, 1943, he became Deputy Director of Medical Services for the First Canadian Army in England and Northwest Europe, with the rank of Brigadier General. He was in that position during the D-Day invasion of Europe on June 6, 1944, with responsibility for the oversight of all Canadian medical operations that formed part of that military action.

That appointment did not herald the end of Fenwick's advancement in the Canadian military establishment. Late in 1944 he was promoted to the rank of Major General and named Director General of Medical Services for the Canadian Army, a position, later known as Surgeon General, that he assumed on January 24, 1945 and occupied until January 31, 1946. For his service to the Canadian Army Medical Corps and the war effort in general, he was named a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) by King George VI in 1944, and a Companion of the Order of the Bath, also awarded by the King, in 1946.

Following his release from the Canadian Army in 1946, he continued as a member of the Medical Defence Council and served as President of the Defence Medical Association during 1946-1947. Once more a civilian, he joined the staff of Canadian Pacific Railway as Chief of Medical Services, directing the work of eight district medical officers and 375 part-time medical officers who lived and worked throughout Canada.

Charles Fenwick retained an interest in matters related to Newfoundland although he did not live there after he went off to medical school in 1911. In the late spring of 1946, he accepted an invitation to travel to Corner Brook, where he was part of the launch of a campaign to raise funds for an extension to the Corner Brook General Hospital. He delivered what was referred to by the local paper, *The Western Star*, as a stirring address to those gathered at the Glynmill Inn for the occasion, which was held on June 4. Fenwick told his audience that he was quite pleased that the hospital would be subsequently known as Western Memorial, in recognition of those who had fought and died in the Second World War. He also commended the Commission of Government and the people of Corner Brook for their initiative, referring to the hospital as "a great health insurance and the finest group health insurance which you could possibly undertake." His comments reached far beyond those at the Glynmill Inn, as the complete proceedings for that evening's event had been carried live on radio station VOWN.

Not long after Fenwick's military service ended his father, age 87, died on May 5, 1946, in Toronto, where he had been living in retirement for some years. His mother had died in St. John's on January 6, 1919. Fenwick appears to have inherited his longevity genes from his mother, rather than his father, since he died on March 20, 1954 at age 62 in Montreal, where he had resided for some years since the war. He was survived by his wife, Alice Jacqueline Scott McCullough of Toronto, whom he had married on June 8, 1921, and by their two daughters. Alice died in North Vancouver on May 29, 1987, at age 93.

Charles Fenwick holds the distinction of being one of the highest ranking officers in World War I who were natives of Newfoundland and he was the highest ranking Newfoundlander to participate in World War II, ample compensation, if any were needed, for losing out on the Rhodes Scholarship in 1911.

On Sunday, November 16, 2014, Gower Street United Church initiated a program of commemoration that will last for approximately the next four years. On roughly every third Sunday from now through to 2018, a brief write-up on one of these individuals, like 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 celebrate the 200th anniversary of this congregation. If you know of any relatives of these servicemen and woman please contact Bert Riggs at briggs@mun.ca 726-6169/864-8303