

GOWER REMEMBERS

Private Charles William Field

(1893?-1965)



I beg to inform you that additional information has today been received from the Record Office of the First Newfoundland Regiment, London, to the effect that No. 115, Private Charles William Field, who was previously reported as having received slight gunshot wounds in the arm and side, has been admitted to the Third London General Hospital, Wandsworth, wounded. (Newfoundland Colonial Secretary John R. Bennett to Samuel Field, December 17, 1915)

Charles William Field appears to have been born in St. John's, the son of Emily Reid and Samuel Field, either in the last four months of 1893 or the first eight months of 1894. Records of his birthdate or baptism have not yet been found, but according to his attestation paper, completed when he enlisted in the Newfoundland Regiment in early September 1914, he gave his age as 21 years, no months, while his headstone, erected sometime after his death on February 19, 1965, gives his age as 71.

Samuel Field spent much of his adult life working at Frederick Smallwood's boot and shoe factory on Duckworth Street, initially as a shoemaker, but in later years as a foreman. One can assume that his son received some formal education, as he could read and write, but there is no indication where. The family lived at 38 Prescott Street, a middle-class neighbourhood within walking distance of the Methodist College, but the younger Field's name does not appear in the College's record book created shortly after the war to commemorate the war service of former students.

It is unclear when Field entered the workforce but he was certainly there by 1913, when he was employed at George G. R. Parsons' garage on King's Road (site of the present-day Moo Moo's Ice Cream Bar). At the time of his enlistment in the Newfoundland Regiment the following year he indicated that his occupation was a motor engineer at a salary of \$7.00 per week. That enlistment took place on September 2, at which time he

received Regimental Number 115, which made him the first member of the Gower Street congregation at that time to join up.

From his attestation paper, we learn that Field was 5 feet, 5 inches tall, with auburn hair and blue eyes. A member of the First Five Hundred, also known as the Blue Puttees, he sailed to England on board the SS *Florizel*, leaving St. John's on October 4, 1914 and arriving at Plymouth, England, some ten days later. However, another six days would pass before they were able to go ashore. He and his comrades spent the fall of 1914 in makeshift tents on England's Salisbury Plain, where they experienced constant rain and deplorable living conditions.

The Newfoundland Regiment was transferred to Fort George, Scotland, in early December. They would remain in Scotland, first at Fort George, then at Edinburgh Castle, and finally at Stobs Camp, near Hawick, until August 1915 when they went south to England, first to Aldershot for a few weeks of rest before travelling to Devonport where, on August 20, they boarded HMS *Megantic*, which would take them to the Eastern Mediterranean and the war. Arriving at Alexandria, Egypt on August 30, Field accompanied his comrades to Cairo the following day, where the Regiment spent the next two weeks getting used to the Mediterranean climate. On September 13, they returned to Alexandria, where they boarded the SS *Ausonia*, which would take them north to the Greek island of Lemnos. From there on the night of September 19-20 they crossed the eastern Aegean Sea to Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula.

It was there, at Suvla Bay, that the Newfoundland Regiment fired its first shots, encountered its first enemy fire and suffered its first casualties. Field was one of those casualties, receiving a gunshot wound to the humerus, the bone that runs from the shoulder to the elbow, in his left arm. He was immediately taken to the Hospital Ship *Reva*, which relayed him to the 17th General Hospital in Alexandria some four days later. The wound was very slow to heal, and he was subsequently evacuated to England aboard SS *Delta*, where he was admitted to the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth on December 14.

Field spent the next seven months in hospital, recovering from his wound. He was not released until July 24, 1916, which just may have saved his life in another way, as it caused him to miss the fighting at Beaumont Hamel on July 1, the first day of the Battle of the Somme. The seriousness of his wound was reflected in that, following a short furlough upon release from hospital, on August 3, 1916, he was assigned to duty at the Regimental Depot at Ayr, Scotland, where he remained for most of the next two years. He was re-assigned to the Battalion-in-the-Field on April 6, 1918, but his service there was limited, as he was granted special leave to sail to Newfoundland on August 13, 1918. He left London for Montreal in September, eventually making it to Newfoundland some weeks later. He was subsequently granted conditional leave on November 20, 1918, so that he could take up employment with the Newfoundland Railway Company. He was approved for demobilization on

February 11, 1919 and formally discharged from the Regiment two weeks later.

Shortly after being granted the conditional leave, Field received a clothing allowance of \$60.00 from the Regiment in order to enable him to purchase “civilian clothing, consisting of one suit of clothes, one cap, one tie, one collar, [and] one overcoat”. He also received a War Service Gratuity of \$420.00 to ease his transition back to civilian life.

Following his demobilization, Field lived at the family home at 38 Prescott Street. By 1924 he was working as a motor engineer at Newfoundland Atlantic Fisheries Limited, a St. John’s-based company which purchased fish products for export. According to the *St. John’s Classified Business and City Directory* (1932), Field was employed at that time by Furness Withy Red Cross Line as a marine engineer, which implied that he spent some time at sea.

He was still living and working in St. John’s in 1935 when he appears in the Census Return for that year as still living with his parents at their house on Prescott Street. By this time he had married Madge Noseworthy of Harbour Grace, and they were the parents of two-year-old Charles and one-year-old Grace. By the 1945 Census Return, however, the family had moved to Harbour Grace, where they were living with in-laws, Walter and Dorothy Walsh and their two children. By this time Madge had given birth to two more children, Lorraine and Arthur.

The Fields returned to St. John's in the late 1940s or early 1950s. During that time, both he and Madge were quite active in the various bowling leagues operating in the city. From the amount of press they received, the pair were evidently very good at the sport. At the Acro Bowling League's annual dinner held on June 3, 1959, they were singled out for recognition, with Madge winning the prize for "High Three Frames" in the Ladies Division with a score of 606. And, in 1982 with the establishment of the Bowling Hall of Fame (for five-pin bowlers), Madge Field was one of the first eight bowlers inducted.

Tragedy struck the Field family in 1961. On February 28 of that year, their younger son, Arthur, who had just turned 20 two days previous, accidentally shot and killed himself while cleaning a .22 rifle in his bedroom. Charles died four years later, on February 19, 1965, at the Grace Hospital. His funeral took place from the Anglican Cathedral (it appears he became an Anglican at the time of his marriage) on the 22nd with interment at the Anglican Cemetery on Forest Road.

Madge, who was 17 years younger than her husband, outlived him by more than 30 years. She died on March 10, 1996, by which time her son Charles had also died. She was survived by her two daughters and their husbands, her daughter-in-law, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, who form a distinct part of the legacy of Private Charles W. Field, RNfldR.

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 second Sunday from now through to the end of 2018, a brief write-up on one of these individuals 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