

GOWER REMEMBERS

Private George Gordon Green

(1891-1938)



If Pte. Green is a man of cheery disposition who is anxious to get to the front again, and full of enthusiasm generally, I could send him to Capt. Montgomerie as a travelling recruiter for work in the outports.

(Note to Captain Henry Timewell, Paymaster of the Newfoundland Regiment, from Major C. W. Whitaker, Officer Commanding, Newfoundland Regiment, April 3, 1916.)

George Gordon Green was born in St. John's on February 25, 1891, the son of Adeline Mullings and William Green., one of at least nine children born to that couple. Two of these children, Lillian Isabel (aged six years) and another named George Gordon (aged six months), died within three months of each other on August 8 and November 14, 1889, respectively. They were victims of a diphtheria epidemic that killed hundreds of children in St. John's that year. It was not unusual in some families for a newborn to be given the same names as a sibling who had died.

William Green began his working life as a printer with *The Morning Chronicle* and later *The Evening Telegram*, before joining Her Majesty's Customs Office as a tidewaiter in 1881. In this position he was required to board and inspect ships entering Newfoundland harbours to enforce customs regulations. He was employed there for more than 30 years, during which time he rose through the ranks, eventually becoming a customs collector. In all likelihood, given the size of her family, Adeline Green had little time for anything but housework and child-rearing. The family lived at 7 Parade Street.

Undoubtedly Gordon, as he was known, received a sound grade school education, a fact reflected in his later career. Where that schooling occurred is uncertain, as is his exact whereabouts during his formative years. He does not appear in the St. John's City directories for 1908-09 or 1913, but does state on his Attestation Paper that at the time of his enlistment in the Newfoundland Regiment his occupation was a shoe salesman for which he earned \$85.00 per month.

Green was one of the first to answer the call to form a regiment, receiving Regimental No. 156. He was the second member of the

Gower Street congregation to sign up, having done so on the same day as Charles Field, No. 115, who was closer to the front of the line than Green. According to his Attestation Paper, he was 5 feet, 8 inches tall, had a fair complexion, with dark brown hair and blue eyes.

After a short period of training in St. John's, he went overseas with the First Five Hundred, leaving St. John's on board the SS *Florizel* on October 4, 1914. The next ten months were spent in training at Salisbury Plain, England, and at Fort George, Edinburgh Castle and Stobs Camp, Scotland, before 1,000 plus members of the Regiment boarded the HMT *Megantic* at Devonport on the south coast of England on August 20, 1915 for transport to the eastern Mediterranean and the war. That trek brought them to Alexandria, Egypt, on August 30, and it was from there, after almost two weeks of acclimatization in and around Cairo, that they sailed north to the Greek island of Lemnos. On the night of September 19-20, they were transported across the Aegean Sea from Lemnos to Suvla Bay on Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula.

Green survived the initial shelling that the men encountered as they landed and the constant bombardment of shells and mortar fire from the Turks over the weeks that followed, which killed or wounded a number of his comrades. However, the Newfoundland Regiment's four months at Gallipoli was more notable for the number of its members who had to be evacuated because of diseases or non-combat injuries and afflictions than from wounds resulting from the enemy attacks. The weather that plagued them throughout their stay was a major culprit, with heavy rains flooding their trenches, causing many soldiers to suffer from trenchfoot. If left untreated, this could result in hospitalization. The rain eventually turned to snow and ice, and, as temperatures dropped, frostbite

became a serious problem. As well, many of the men came down with such pulmonary and intestinal diseases as tuberculosis, typhoid, diphtheria, jaundice and dysentery.

Green was unfortunate enough to get hit from both sides. On December 1, 1915 he was admitted to the 26th Casualty Clearing Station suffering from frostbite to his feet. On the 17th he was transferred to the 21st General Hospital at Alexandria suffering from enteric (typhoid) fever, where his condition was listed as “Dangerously Ill”. He was not declared “Out of Danger” until January 8, 1916. Frostbite continued to plague him and he was invalided to England on February 11 and admitted to Wandsworth Hospital in London shortly after his arrival there.

The severity of Green’s frostbite eventually led to his discharge from the Regiment on medical grounds. This occurred on either August 28 or October 13, 1916 – there are conflicting dates in his personnel file recording this event. In the meantime, he spent several months in St. John’s, arriving there on May 5 by train from Port aux Basques. The newspaper report of his arrival remarked that “he is still suffering [from frostbite] and cannot walk unaided.”

His disability did not prevent him from participating in a number of entertainments held to foster recruitment, however. On June 30, at the Methodist College Hall, he, together with Petty Officer Ashworth of HMS *Briton*, “gave a duet ‘The Rivals’ written by Dr. Rutherford of Bonavista”. This was part of the program at a special lecture by Private Philip Jensen of Harbour Breton, a member of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, on the Battle of Ypres. Funds raised at this event were in aid the Red Cross Fund.

The Green-Ashworth duet was so popular that they were asked to perform it a second time, which they did at Cochrane Street Methodist Church Sunday Schoolroom on June 12. Later that month Green and Private James Tobin, who was also on sick leave from Gallipoli, organized a very successful dance at the Catholic Cadet Corps Hall in aid of the Red Cross Fund. The dance, which was held on June 27, was attended by Governor Sir Walter and Lady Davidson and a number of officers and men of the Regiment. Green also took part in the musical program for the Penny Bazaar held at Canon Wood Hall on October 18.

Green's time in Newfoundland was drawing to a close, however. On November 11, 1916 he left St. John's on board the SS *Florizel* for Boston. The following year he joined the staff of Dack's Ltd., one of Canada's oldest and most prominent shoe stores, in Toronto. He appears to have remained in Toronto for several years as he married there in 1920. His wife-to-be was Jessie Currie Hamilton of Glasgow, Scotland, and they were married on January 7, 1920, at her parents' house at 237 St. Clare Avenue. In the spring of 1921 they relocated to Winnipeg, where Green became the manager of one of the Dack's branches in that city. It was in Winnipeg that their first child, a son, was born, on October 17, 1921. It appears that this child died in infancy.

Green spent two or three years in Winnipeg and then appears to have moved to Windsor, Ontario, in all likelihood as manager of a Dock's outlet there. A second son, Robert James, was born in Windsor on December 4, 1925. By 1928, Green was living in Toronto and managing a Dack's store there. He was employed by Dack's until sometime in 1934-1935. In the latter year he is recorded on the Voters List as being unemployed.

It is quite possible that Green's unemployed state was health related, as he died at the Toronto General Hospital on November 7, 1938. His immediate cause of death was listed uremia, a serious blood ailment, with secondary causes being arteriosclerosis due to heart disease and hypertension. It is also reasonable to surmise that all of these medical conditions were due in part to his time in Gallipoli. He was just 47 years old. Interestingly, Green's son Robert died at age 39 in 1965 and Robert's son Timothy died at age 50 in 2006.

After Green's father William died in 1915, his mother eventually relocated to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, where one of his brothers resided. Other siblings scattered to various parts of Canada. It is unknown if any of them remained in Newfoundland. On a final note, given Green's abilities as a singer, one is left wondering if he was a member of the acclaimed choirs that performed at this church in the early years of the last century. It is quite likely he was and that his voice echoed through the rafters at Sunday services and special concerts in songs of praise to the glory of God.