

# GOWER REMEMBERS

**Private Wilfred C. Bradley**  
(1891-1916)



*“Dear Sir: I enclose herewith a cheque for \$96.06, being the balance of the estate of your late son, No. 398, Wilfred C. Bradley. You will notice that the cheque is payable to yourself and Mrs. Bradley. It will therefore be necessary for both of you to endorse it, before being cashed.”* (Letter addressed to Jacob Bradley, father of Private Wilfred Bradley, from the Deputy Paymaster, Newfoundland Regiment, June 29, 1917.)

Wilfred Bradley was born in Battle Harbour, Labrador, most likely in 1891, the son of Sarah Fanny Dawe and Jacob Bradley. The confusion about Wilfred's date of birth stems from the fact that no birth or baptismal record has been found for him. He wrote his age on his Attestation Paper when he enlisted in the Newfoundland Regiment in the late summer of 1914 as 21. If he was born in the first eight months of the year that would make his birth year 1893, which is unlikely because his sister Eliza was born in January 1893 and he was older than she was. Family history has him being born in 1891 which, while contradicting the age he recorded on his Attestation Paper, is most likely his birth year, and, for some unknown reason, he recorded it wrongly when filling out the form. That year also corresponds with the age listed at the time of his death (25) in his records with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which is responsible for the documentation and upkeep of the graves of British Army soldiers who were killed in fighting in France and Belgium.

Jacob Bradley, Wilfred's father, was a native of Cupids, one of the oldest settled communities in Newfoundland. He was born there in 1843 and spent his working life as a fisherman. He was successful enough at his chosen profession that he was able to acquire his own vessel at a fairly young age. He spent many years fishing in southern Labrador, selling his salted cod fish to the agents of one of the large export firms based in St. John's or Conception Bay. It is unclear if he lived there year round and may have returned to Cupids or some nearby Conception Bay community for the winter months.

Jacob married Susannah Elms of Bay Roberts at Battle Harbour on November 5, 1868. Over the next eleven years they were blessed with six children: Elizabeth Ann, Emma Jane, Henry Thomas, John, Jacob and Isabella. The first three were born in Caribou Cove, the second three in Indian Harbour, both

within relatively close proximity to Battle Harbour, where all six children were baptized.

Susannah Bradley died at age 37 on December 9, 1883. A headstone marking her grave is located in St. James Anglican Cemetery at Battle Harbour. Jacob carried on with his fishing, probably hiring a housekeeper to help raise his children. It often happened in such situations in rural Newfoundland and Labrador at that time and well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the employer-father often married the housekeeper. While there is no proof that this happened in this particular instance, Jacob did marry Sarah Fanny Dawe Gilford, a widow, originally from Port de Grave, at the Methodist Church in Bay Roberts on December 9, 1890.

The newlyweds were in Battle Harbour the following year and may have been there throughout the decade that followed. Their first child, Wilfred, is listed as being born there, while their second, a daughter, the Eliza mentioned above was born in Port de Grave. There were two more daughters, Fannie Sarah (born 1896 in St. John's) and Naomi (born 1898).

There is no clear evidence of when Jacob gave up fishing in Labrador and settled in St. John's. He does not appear in any of the St. John's city directories until 1908-09, when he was listed as a fisherman and living at 48 Feild Street. This would be the family home for the remainder of his life and beyond. Wilfred first appeared in the 1913 city directory, where he was recorded as living at his parents' house at 48 Feild Street and employed at Ayre & Sons Ltd. as a salesman. His sisters Eliza and Fannie were both living at the same address, Eliza working as a "tailoress" at I. F. Perlin and Company, and Fannie at J. Maunder's. Their brother Jacob lived next door at 50 Feild Street and, like his father, was a fisherman.

It would appear both from his position as a salesman and his penmanship on his Attestation Paper, that Wilfred had received a good education, probably in Battle Harbour and perhaps in St. John's after the family moved there. Like many other employees at Ayre & Sons Ltd., Wilfred was quick to answer the call of King and Country when war was declared in August 1914. He underwent a medical examination on August 28 and formally enlisted in the Newfoundland Regiment on September 7. His personnel file indicates that at the time of his enlistment he was 5 feet, 4¼ inches tall and weighed only 108 pounds. He had a fair complexion, with brown hair and blue eyes. He listed his occupation as a hardware clerk at a monthly salary of \$45.00.

Upon his enlistment, Bradley received Regimental number 398, which made him one of the renowned First Five Hundred or Blue Puttees. As such he went overseas on board the SS *Florizel*, which left St. John's on October 4, and, after rendezvousing with a convoy of Canadian naval ships off Cape Race, arrived at Plymouth, England on October 14. However, they were required to remain aboard the ship until the 20<sup>th</sup> and once ashore were required to march Salisbury Plain, a distance of more than 100 miles. There, in the shadow of Stonehenge, they discovered that their accommodations were just as primitive as that ancient structure.

They would remain on Salisbury Plain under the most trying conditions, until early December, when they were taken north to Scotland by train. They would spend the Winter and Spring of 1914-1915 in training in Scotland, first at Fort George and later at Stobs Camp, with a brief respite as the guard force at Edinburgh Castle, the first colonial troops awarded that honour.

In the summer of 1915, the main body of the Regiment was sent to Aldershot, in the south of England, where they soon received orders to board the SS *Megantic* at nearby Devonport for transport to the eastern Mediterranean and the war. *The Megantic* left Devonport on August 20 with 1020 members of the Newfoundland Regiment on board; it docked at Alexandria, Egypt, ten days later. Over the next three weeks they travelled by train to Cairo for a period of acclimatization, and then sailed north to the Greek island of Lemnos. From there on the night of September 19-20, they went ashore at Sulva Bay on Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula. They were welcomed by the Turkish army with a barrage of shells and other small artillery fire.

The members of the Newfoundland Regiment who were part of the Gallipoli Campaign had not only enemy fire to contend with, but also had to endure severe weather conditions for much of the time they were there. As well, various debilitating diseases afflicted some of the men. Bradley was a victim of one such disease: on November 9, 1915, less than two months after arriving at Gallipoli, he was evacuated and admitted to the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Hospital in Cairo, suffering from dysentery. He remained there for almost four months. He did not rejoin the Regiment until March 1, 1916, just in time for their transfer to the Western Front in France.

The veterans of the Gallipoli Campaign left Port Suez, Egypt, on March 14, 1916 arriving in Marseilles, France, on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Bradley was with the Regiment when they were ordered to attack near the French enclave of Beaumont Hamel on the morning of July 1, 1916, the opening day of the Battle of the Somme. However, he did not see action that morning as he appears to have been part of the ten percent of the Regiment who were held back from the fighting and brought up to the front lines later that afternoon. There is a

notation in his personnel file that he was with the Battalion in France on July 4, 1916.

Not having engaged in the fighting at Beaumont Hamel allowed Bradley to fight another day. He was with the Regiment on the Western Front during the summer of 1916 while it underwent a period of recuperation and rebuilding, and was with his comrades when they returned to the fighting at Le Transloy, near Gueudecourt, in October. It was during the fighting there that he received a number of gunshot wounds. He was admitted to the 5<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Rouen, France, on October 14, and died there as a result of these wounds on October 17. He was buried at Saint Sever Cemetery in Rouen, France.

In the years following Bradley's death his parents received the three war medals to which he was entitled: the Victory Medal, the British War Medal and the 1914-1915 Star, as well as his Memorial Plaque, commonly known as the Death Penny, which was presented to the next of kin of British soldiers who had been killed in the war. They also received the cheque \$96.06 referred to above and a small package containing his personal effects at the time of his death. This package included his identity disc, several letters and postcards, two Egyptian coins, a purse, a photograph in a frame, several other photographs, a New Testament, a belt with three badges, razor blades and two other coins. Mention is made that he had not completed the last will and testament section of his pay book.

For several years after Bradley's his death, his parents and after his father's death in 1922, his mother, inserted small memorials to their son in the St. John's newspaper *The Evening Telegram* on the anniversary of his death. Each was similar yet distinct. The first of these appeared on October 17, 1917 and read:

In memory of 398 Pte. Wilfred Bradley, died of wounds received "Somewhere in France," Oct. 17, 1916.

In some distant land he is sleeping  
Far away from the land of his birth,  
And his loved ones at home are weeping  
For no more they shall see him on earth.

The memorial for 1922 reads:

IN LOVING MEMORY  
of Pte. Wilfred Bradley, who died of wounds, Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

Until the day dawns and the shadows flee away.  
Mother.

Many of Wilfred Bradley's siblings moved from Newfoundland to British Columbia in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where the descendants of some of them still reside. Only his brother Jacob appears to have remained in St. John's, where he married and had a family, some of whom continue to carry on this branch of the Bradley family in Newfoundland and Labrador.

*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, similar to this one, will appear as an insert in the Bulletin and there will be a reference to that person in the service. In this way we hope to recognize their contribution to the war effort, the many sacrifices they made, some with their very lives, and the debt of gratitude we owe to each of them.*

*We also hope to learn more about them from their descendants or other relatives, thereby fostering a link between our past and our present as we begin our 201<sup>st</sup> year as a faith community.*

*If you know of any relatives of these servicemen and woman please contact Bert Riggs at [briggs@mun.ca](mailto:briggs@mun.ca) or at 726-6169.*