

# GOWER REMEMBERS

Second Lieutenant Harold G. Barrett

(1892-1917)



*“At the armoury this afternoon His Excellency the Governor, Lieut. Col. Sir W. E. Davidson, will present Mr. George Barrett, of Crosbie & Co’s with the Military Medal won by his son, Second Lieut. Harold Barrett.” (St. John’s Daily Star, March 27, 1917)*



Harold George Barrett was born in Old Perlican on September 1, 1892, the second oldest of six children of Matilda Green and Henry George Barrett. The family relocated to St. John's within a few years of Harold's birth. It was there that his four younger siblings, Ethel May (1896), Alan John (1898), Ralph (1899) and Fred Dawson (1904) were born. His older sister, Julia Mary, was born in Old Perlican in 1889. According to the 1898 St. John's city directory, the elder Barret was employed as a carpenter. The family lived at 50 Freshwater Road.

Very little is known of Harold's early life. He did attend the Methodist College in St. John's for some years, probably graduating from the school around 1908 at age 16. The 1908-1909 St. John's city directory lists him as working as a clerk at Royal Stores on Water Street, a position he still held according to the 1913 city directory.

Barrett was not part of the first contingent to enlist in the Newfoundland Regiment when war was declared in the late summer of 1914, but he was not far behind. He joined up on Boxing Day of that year receiving Regimental number 798. He obviously impressed his superior officers with his potential leadership abilities, as he was made a Lance Corporal at the end of his first month of service, on January 26, 1915.

As part of C Company, Barrett sailed for England on board the SS *Dominion* leaving St. John's on February 5, 1915. Because of the amount and thickness of the ice in St. John's harbour, the men of C Company had to be ferried out through the Narrows

and south to Bay Bulls on the sealing vessel *Neptune* to rendezvous with and be transferred to the *Dominion*.

After eleven days at sea, the *Dominion* arrived in Liverpool, England, on February 16, and the men were put on board a train to Edinburgh, Scotland, that same day. Once there, they were assigned to duty at Edinburgh Castle. They were soon joined by A and B companies, which had been in training at Fort George, Scotland, since December 1914. The Newfoundland Regiment was the first colonial force assigned duty at the historic castle.

After several weeks there, they spent the remainder of the spring and early summer of 1915 in training at Stobs Camp, near the Scottish town of Hawick. They left Scotland in early August, travelling south to England, where they were granted a few weeks rest and relaxation at Aldershot before making the short trek to the coastal town of Devonport. There, on August 20, they boarded the *SS Megantic*, which took them to the Eastern Mediterranean and the war.

The Newfoundland Regiment arrived in Alexandria, Egypt, on August 31, 1915, and left the following day by train for Cairo, where they spent several weeks becoming accustomed to the dry, hot climate. They left Egypt for the Gallipoli Peninsula on September 14, arriving at the Greek island of Lemnos on the 18<sup>th</sup>. From there, on the night of September 19-20, they crossed the Aegean Sea and landed at Suvla Bay, where their Turkish foes welcomed them with heavy shellfire. On the day he left Cairo, Barrett was promoted to Sergeant, having been made a full Corporal on June 04, 1915, before leaving the British Isles.

Unlike many of his fellow soldiers, Barrett came through the four-month-long Gallipoli campaign relatively unscathed. In addition to the Turks, the weather also proved to be a very formidable enemy. Thirty-one members of the Regiment were killed in action or died from wounds received; 15 others lost their lives to one of a variety of diseases contracted there; most were the result of exposure to the harsh winter storms that engulfed the area during November. Another 80 soldiers were wounded by shell fire or sniper bullets, while hundreds of others had to be evacuated because of various diseases or frostbite. When the time came for the Regiment to withdraw from Suvla Bay in early January 1916 their numbers had been reduced to some 400 active soldiers.

Barrett was one of those who took part in the final evacuation from Gallipoli. He and his comrades then spent two months in Egypt, recuperating from their ordeal, before leaving there on March 14 for Marseilles, France, where they disembarked on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. From there the Regiment travelled north to an area near the French village of Pont Remy, where they became part of the British Expeditionary Force preparing for a major assault on the German Army near the Somme River in northwestern France.

The Big Push, as it became known, was expected to take place in late June or early July. In preparing for the assault on the enemy lines, in early June, 60 members of the Newfoundland Regiment were selected to form raiding parties. They were given three-weeks intensive training to prepare them for night-time excursions into "No Man's Land" carrying out reconnaissance and trying to learn as much as possible about the German defenses. It was hoped they might be able to capture a German soldier who might be induced

to provide additional information once he was brought to the Allied side. Barrett was one of those designated to instruct these men as bombers. He and Sebastian Foran also took small patrols into “No Man’s Land” in advance of the planned raids.

Two such raids took place: one on the night of June 26-27; the other on June 27-28. Barrett was part of both raids. He came through the first unharmed but he was not so lucky on the second. The Germans opened fire on the group he was with and Barrett received bullet wounds to his right thigh and in the head, near his left ear. He was admitted to a nearby Casualty Clearing Station that same night. His head wound proved to be quite serious, however, and he was transferred to England on July 1, the same day so many of his comrades were killed or wounded at Beaumont Hamel on the opening day of the Battle of the Somme.

As a result of the injuries he received on June 28, Barrett missed the slaughter at Beaumont Hamel. In the days immediately following July 1, a result of the deaths of so many junior-ranked officers at Beaumont Hamel, Barrett was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. He spent part of the summer of 1916 in the Third General Hospital at Wandsworth, a borough of London, recuperating from his wounds. He was back with the Regiment by the fall of 1916, in time to take part in the fighting at Gueudecourt, where, on October 12, in the attack on Hilt Trench, his heroic actions while under enemy fire resulted in him being awarded the Military Medal.

He was with the Regiment throughout the fall of 1916 and early winter of 1917, seeing action at Le Transloy in January. Early in March he was admitted to the 25<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital at Rouen, France, suffering from diphtheria, an affliction that kept him out of action until late spring 1917. After a lengthy stay at the Rouen

hospital, he spent several weeks in a convalescent facility before being discharged to the Reinforcements Depot on May 7. By mid-summer he was back on the front lines, where he was killed in action on the opening day of fighting at Steenbeek, Belgium, on August 16, 1917. He was 24 years old. His body was eventually interred in Artillery Wood Cemetery near Ypres.

On February 11, 1916, Barrett completed the standard last will and testament document provided by the Regiment. In it, he wrote *“In the Event of my death I give the whole of my Property & Effects to my Father.”* Consequently, his service medals (War Medal, Victory Medal and 1915 Star) were eventually sent to his father and are currently in the possession of family members. His Military Medal had been sent to Newfoundland in February 1917, at his request while Barrett was still alive. It was presented to his father by the Governor, Sir Walter Davidson, in a formal ceremony at the Church Lads’ Brigade Armoury on March 27, 1917.

In addition to being recorded on the Memorial Plaque in the sanctuary of Gower Street Church, Barrett’s name also appears on the Methodist College Memorial Plaque, along with those of 84 other students, including one woman, Annie Frew, from that school who lost their lives as a result of their involvement in World War I. That plaque is now part of the Archives at Prince of Wales Collegiate in St. John’s.

Barrett’s younger brother, Ralph, served in the Royal Flying Corps in World War 1. His story will be told in a future issue in the Gower Remembers series.

*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 women please contact Bert Riggs at [briggs@mun.ca](mailto:briggs@mun.ca) or at 726-6169.*