

GOWER REMEMBERS

Private Frederick Donald Bastow

(1894-1916)



Dear Sir,

I beg to enclose herewith copy of letter from the Record Office, London, giving particulars of the funeral of No. 700, Private F. Bastow. It will no doubt be some comfort to think that the friends on the other side of the water had some thought for your brave lad, and that he was accorded full military honours at his funeral.

(Newfoundland's Colonial Secretary, John R. Bennett, to Augustus Bastow, December 04, 1916)

Frederick Donald Bastow was born in St. John's on August 25, 1894, the oldest son and third of four children of Margaret Ann Bartlett and Ernest Augustus Bastow. His oldest sister, Annie Mary was born in 1890 and died in 1940; a second sister, Isabella Bartlett, was born on June 18, 1892, but died on September 21 of that year, at age three months. The youngest of the children was Henry Bertram (1897-1938).

Augustus Bastow first appears in the St. John's city directory for 1898 as an assistant auctioneer. His older brother, Marldon, owned an auction house in St. John's at that time, so it is not a surprising line of work for Augustus. The 1904 city directory lists Augustus as a truckman, while the 1913 directory indicates that he operated a grocery store. He and his family lived at 9 Cook Street and the grocery store was next door at 9½ Cook Street.

Margaret Anne Bastow, in addition to her work as a mother and homemaker, was a long-time member of the Ladies Orange Benevolent Association, Lodge Jubilee 137, in St. John's. She served as its Worthy Mistress in 1916 and in all likelihood occupied other offices over the years.

Very little is known of Fred's early years. It is likely that he attended one of the Methodist schools in St. John's although there is no extant record of him having attended the Methodist College. His Attestation Paper demonstrates that he had the ability to read and write, with his signature appearing there in a strong bold hand. His Attestation Paper also informs us that he was truckman at a salary of \$35.00 per month at the time of his enlistment in the Newfoundland Regiment, although the 1913 city directory lists him as a clerk at Steer Brothers.

Bastow's enlistment in the Newfoundland Regiment did not occur until December 15, 1914, more than two months after the First Five Hundred had sailed for Europe on board the SS *Florizel*. Because of his timing he got to spend Christmas with his family, before sailing for England on Board the SS *Dominion*, a member of C Company, leaving St. John's on February 5, 1915.

In addition to his occupation and remuneration, Bastow's Attestation Paper informs us that he was single, 5 feet, 5 inches tall and weighed 134 pounds; he had a light complexion, with light brown hair and blue eyes. He also had a scar on his right thumb. He received Regimental number 700.

As a member of C Company, Bastow's first introduction to the war in Europe was rather tame. He and his comrades, together with the men from A and B Companies, who were already in training at Fort George in Inverness, were assigned to guard Edinburgh Castle. They were the first colonial troops to be stationed at the ancient Scottish fortress.

The Newfoundland Regiment left Edinburgh Castle on May 11 for Stob's Camp, near the Scottish city of Hawick. There they continued their training until early August when they were taken by train to Aldershot in the south of England. Two and one-half weeks later they transferred to nearby Devonport, where on August 20, they boarded the SS *Megantic*, bound for the eastern Mediterranean and the war.

Arriving in Alexandria, Egypt, on August 31, the Newfoundland Regiment spent roughly two weeks in Egypt getting used to the climate before boarding the steamer the *Prince Abbas* on September 13. It took them north to the Greek island of Lemnos. From there, on

the night of September 19-20, the Regiment sailed across a narrow arm of the Aegean Sea for Suvla Bay, on Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula. They were welcomed upon their arrival by a constant barrage of Turkish shells and artillery fire.

The Newfoundlanders spent almost four months at Suvla Bay, where, in addition to the Turks, they encountered incredibly hostile weather. Freak storms, water-logged trenches and below-freezing temperatures caused considerable havoc and forced many of the men to be evacuated to hospitals in Egypt and Malta, suffering from trench foot, various pulmonary diseases, and frostbite. Bastow was one of the lucky ones, in that he did not succumb to any of these afflictions. However, 'lucky' is a relative term, since he remained as part of the fighting force at Gallipoli until almost the end, being evacuated in late December, and arriving back in Alexandria on January 1, 1916.

Those members of the Regiment who were able to leave the Gallipoli Peninsula under their own power spent January, February and early March in either Alexandria or in Port Suez, at the southern extreme of the Suez Canal, enjoying a short period of rest and relaxation. It was from nearby Port Tewfik, on March 14, that they boarded the MT *Alauria*, which would take them back across the Mediterranean to the French city of Marseilles.

Arriving in Marseilles on March 22, the Newfoundland Regiment immediately entrained for northern France, arriving three days later at Pont Remy, a village near the Western Front. They would remain in this general area throughout March, April, May and June, taking part in preparation for what was known as the Big Push, an all-out assault on the German positions along the Somme River.

The Newfoundlanders were mainly involved in trench construction and maintenance, making several forays to the front lines, interspersed with periods of rest at Louvencourt.

The Big Push was expected to take place in late June or early July. In advance of the assault, in early June, 60 members of the Newfoundland Regiment were selected to form raiding parties. Bastow was one of them. The group received three-weeks of intensive training to prepare them to carry out night-time excursions into “No Man’s Land” where they hoped to learn as much as possible about the German defenses.

The raiding parties ventured into “No Man’s Land” on two successive nights: June 26-27 and June 27-28. While participating in the second of these raids, Bastow received a severe wound to the head, the result of a bullet through the eye. He was taken back to the Allied lines, where that same night, June 28, he was admitted to number 87 Field Ambulance and later transferred to number 29 Casualty Clearing Station. The bullet had fractured his skull and had penetrated his brain.

There was little that could be done for him in the battle zone, and with the massive influx of wounded from the opening day of the Battle of the Somme on July 1, he was invalided to England on July 4. Two days later he was admitted to the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth. He remained there for three months, before his death on October 12, 1916, which was probably hastened by his having contracted meningitis.

Bastow was buried on October 16, 1916, in the Newfoundland section of London’s Wandsworth Cemetery, with full military honours. Seventeen of his comrades are also interred there. A letter

to Newfoundland Governor Sir Walter Davidson, dated October 17, 1916, from Captain Henry Timewell, Chief Paymaster and Officer in Charge of Records for the Regiment in London, provides a description of his funeral. His brother, Private Henry Bertram Bastow, # 1016, was brought down from Ayr before Fred's death and attended the funeral. So, too, did "*two ladies from the Newfoundland War Contingent Association, six men from the Newfoundland Regiment and a number of patients from Wandsworth Hospital.*" His "*coffin was drawn on a gun-carriage, and the Guard of Honour and firing party was composed of men from the Sufflok Regiment.*" Eleven days later a report based on a letter Bastow's father had received from a man named Henry Reeve appeared in *The St. John's Daily Star* and contained similar information, including that a wreath from St. John's Hill Wesleyan Methodist Church in London accompanied the coffin to the cemetery.

Bastow was only 22 when he died. Information contained in his Regimental personnel file leads one to believe that had had a tough time adjusting to the life of a soldier during his first six months in uniform. He found some solace in alcohol, which often caused him to get into trouble with his superiors. Punishment resulted, including being confined to barracks or camp for several days, forfeiting pay, and in several instances Field Punishment No. 2, which required that he be placed in fetters and handcuffs for a definite period of time.

This behaviour appears to come to an end in early July 1915. However, on May 10, 1916, he was court marshaled for "*Disobeying a lawful command given by his superior officer.*" and sentenced to one year's imprisonment at hard labour. This sentence did not prevent him from remaining on active service up until he received his head wound, and was remitted on August 11, 1916, while he was in hospital at Wandsworth.

In 1918 a 72-page booklet entitled *100 Poems* was published in St. John's. It was the work of Richard Bugden, and included many poems by him and other well-known local versifiers such as James Murphy. One by Bugden was in honour of Fred Bastow.

IN MEMORY
of Private Frederick Bastow,
Died of wounds October 12th 1916.

All earthly skill has failed
This dear young life to save,
And now this gallant lad
Lies in a soldier's grave.
He's numbered with the dead,
The bravest and the best,
With Briton's hero sons
Dear Fred is now at rest.

His country's call he heard,
And gladly did respond,
Exchanging home and joys
For khaki, sword and gun.
He loved his home and friends,
And for them did his best,
To his honour be it said,
He loved his country best.

And with our gallant boys
Who volunteered to go,
Was added one name more,
The name of Fred Bastow.
And now among the dead
Of great immortal fame,
With mingled pride and tears
We see our hero's name.

Good bye, dear Fred, good-bye,
Your part you nobly played,
You served your country well,
Your name will never fade.
Could we but see your grave,
And place thereon some flowers,
Our hearts would linger there,
Through many lonely hours.

Upon the Honour Roll
Of dear old Newfoundland,
In letters worked with gold
Your name shall ever stand.
You died that we might live,
Our battles you have fought,
And with your precious life
Our liberty you bought.

God bless and comfort those
Who mourn to-day a son,
Help them to trust in Him
The only faithful One.
Who will in His good time
Bid all earth's sorrows cease,
When parents and their boys
Shall have eternal peace.

Like many of his comrades, he may not have been an ideal soldier, but in the end, he gave his life that others might enjoy freedom and peace in a hostile world.

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 201st year as a faith community.

If you know of any relatives of these servicemen and women please contact Bert Riggs at briggs@mun.ca or at 726-6169.