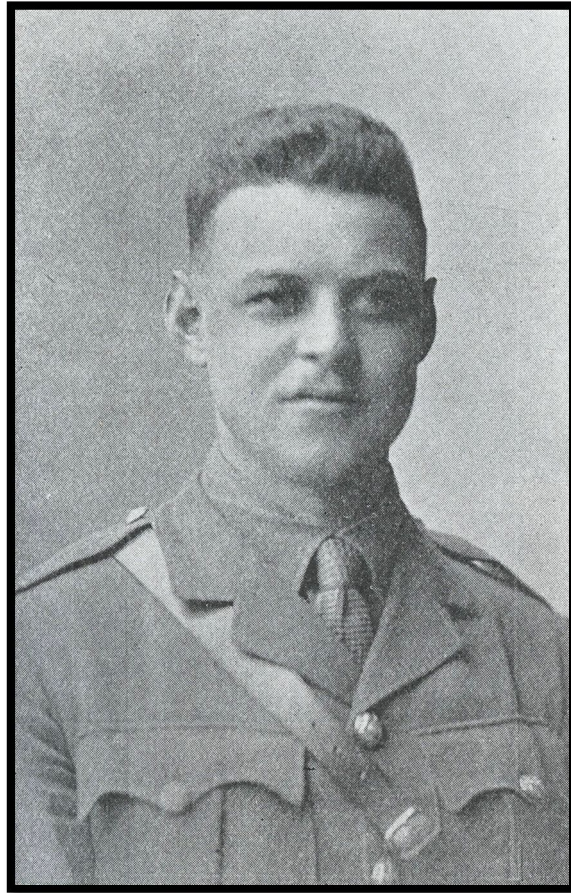


GOWER REMEMBERS

Lieutenant Hubert Clinton Herder
(1891-1916)



“Lieut. Hubert Herder, Newfoundland Regiment, killed in the first stage of the big offensive on July 1, was one of the soldier sons of the proprietor of ‘The Evening Telegram,’ St. John’s. Two other sons, Arthur and Ralph were wounded in the same attack, when the Newfoundland suffered badly. Miss Herder, a sister, is a war nurse. Hubert was already wounded, but was keeping his place at the head of his men when he received his second and fatal wound.” (London Chronicle, July 18, 1916.)

Hubert Clinton Herder was born in St. John's on January 29, 1891, the fourth son and fifth of twelve children born to Elizabeth Barnes and William James Herder. He was baptized at Gower Street Methodist Church on September 25 of that year by the Rev. Dr. Humphrey P. Cowperthwaite. His father, originally from Old Perlican, was the founder of the first daily newspaper in St. John's, *The Evening Telegram*, in 1879. His mother, in addition to the work inherent in raising such a large family, was also quite involved in church and philanthropic endeavours, including a period as president of the Ladies' College Aid Society during the First World War.

Hubert attended the Methodist College in St. John's, where he excelled in academics. However, it was his prowess in athletics, both at the college and in the city leagues, that gained him recognition as a first-rate football (soccer), hockey and baseball player. In newspaper reports of the 1910 and 1911 city hockey league games, his abilities as a goal scorer are recounted and praised, in particular his three goals in his team, the Crescents, 7-2 win over the Victorias on February 21, 1910 and four goals in defeating the Victorias by the same 7-2 score on February 3, 1911.

A month later he played on a make-shift city team that was playing an exhibition match with a visiting team from Nova Scotia, the Windsor Swastikas; Herder scored three goals in the St. John's team's 5-4 victory. Later that year, on July 7, he was reported in a local newspaper as having "distinguished himself by brilliant play" in a football league game. He was also singled out for his toughness: *The Evening Telegram* for September 15, 1909 reported that he had been at practice with the Methodist Guards football team for the Inter-Collegiate series when he broke a bone in his left forearm, a result of a collision with another player. Even though he was in considerable pain, he "bore it stoically" and walked home, where a doctor was summoned to tend to his injury.

On September 12, 1911, Herder left St. John's by train for Port aux Basques, where he boarded the SS *Invermore* for the crossing to North Sydney, Nova Scotia. His friend and former Methodist College classmate, Charles Fenwick, was also on that ship. Fenwick was headed to the University of Toronto to study medicine; Herder was off to the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) at Guelph, to undertake a program in agricultural studies. He was scheduled to graduate in 1915.

His program at the OAC included standard academic fare: English Literature, Composition, Arithmetic, Botany, and Inorganic Chemistry, as well as specific courses in Animal Husbandry, Field Husbandry, Dairying, Poultry, Veterinary Anatomy, Hydrostatics and Soil Physics. The College also presented its students with opportunities for athletic endeavours, which suited Herder perfectly. He was quick to suit up for hockey, and, was reported to be "one of the best football players the college ever had" (*The Guelph Mercury Tribune*, December 13, 2014).

And there was rugby, which Herder took to like a duck to water. There is a picture in college magazine, *The O. A. C. Review*, of the 1912 college rugby team, winners of the Junior Inter-Collegiate Championship and runner-up for the Dominion Championship. Herder has a prominent place in the front row. In the picture, he is holding a small white dog, quite possibly the team's mascot.

It was excellence in his track and field, however, that earned Herder the nickname "Champ" while he was at OAC, an honour that originated in his first year. In the annual freshmen indoor meet held on December 2, Herder was proclaimed grand champion with a total of 25 points over the 14 events; the second and third place finishers received 13 and 10 points respectively. Herder finished first in the running high jump (4 feet, 9 inches), the shot put (41 feet, 4¾ inches) and the pole vault (10 feet, 3¼ inches), second in the standing high jump and the standing broad jump, and third in the fence vault. The nickname 'Champ' remained with him throughout his time at OAC and he is listed in the magazine under the

label “Year ’15 Honor Roll” as “Herder, Champ, First Contingent, C.E.F.” Obviously the C.E.F. designation is in error since he joined the Newfoundland Regiment; not the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Herder was still a year away from completing his degree at OAC when war broke out in the summer of 1914. It would appear that he was back in St. John’s for the summer months and did not return to Guelph, instead enlisting in the newly formed Newfoundland Regiment. In fact, he was so eager to enlist that he was very near the front of the line on August 21, when the doors of the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road opened to accept the first volunteers, close enough to the front to receive Regimental number 3. As with any bureaucratic operation, delayed paperwork resulted in his service with the Regiment dating from September 2, 1914.

The Attestation Paper that Herder completed when he enlisted provides interesting physical details about him. He was 5 feet, 10½ inches tall, weighed 152 pounds, with a dark complexion, black hair and brown eyes. It was noted that he had a scar on his forehead. He listed his occupation as an agriculturist.

Herder rose rapidly through the ranks of the Newfoundland Regiment, being named as a Lance Corporal on September 21, less than three weeks after enlistment. He went overseas with the First Five Hundred of the Regiment, leaving St. John’s on October 4, aboard the SS *Florizel*. They reached Plymouth Sound on the southern English coast on October 14, but did not disembark from the ship until the 20th. Then it was off to Salisbury Plain in central England, near Stonehenge, where the Regiment encamped for the next six and one-half weeks. It proved to be an exercise in perseverance as that area of England received record rainfall that Fall, which turned the ground to mud and made living in tents extremely challenging. While on Salisbury Plain, on November 15, Herder was promoted to Corporal.

On December 7, 1914, the Regiment travelled by train to Fort George, Scotland, and remained in training there until mid February 1915, when they were transferred to Edinburgh Castle, where they became the first colonial troops to guard the ancient fortress. They left there for Stobs Camp, near the Scottish town of Hawick, on May 11, where they continued their readiness routines for two and one-half months, before they were sent to Aldershot in the south of England on August 2. Here they underwent a short period of rest before they moved to nearby Devonport, where they boarded the SS *Megantic* on August 20, for the journey to the eastern Mediterranean and the war. During his time at Fort George, on April 6, 1915, Herder was made a 2nd Lieutenant.

Herder was not with the main body of the troops that left Devonport on the 20th. He had been assigned to the Transport unit, which left from Plymouth on board the SS *Minnewaska* on August 17, arriving in Egypt on the 25th, several days before the Regiment, in order to see to land and sea transport required in Egypt and later on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Shortly after his arrival in Egypt, on September 13, 1915, Herder was appointed as Regimental Transport Officer, placing him in charge of all the Regiment's transportation matters.

Interestingly, Herder did not accompany the Regiment to Gallipoli when it left Alexandria on September 13. Instead he remained in Egypt, possibly at Sidi Bishr Camp, near Alexandria until November when he was assigned to duties on the Western Egyptian Frontier, where he remained until February 1916. Before taking up those duties he was promoted to Lieutenant on October 15, 1915.

Herder rejoined the main body of the Regiment on February 22, 1916 and was with his comrades on March 14 when they left Egypt for France. They arrived at the French port of Marseilles on March 22, and immediately entrained for points north, arriving at the French village of

Pont Remy on the 25th. They spent the next three months preparing for the ‘Great Push’ as it became known, a major assault along a 35-kilometer front adjacent to the Somme River. It was there on July 1, 1916, the opening day of the Battle of the Somme, that the Newfoundland Regiment suffered severe casualties: of the reputed 801 men who went into battle that morning, 733 were either killed, wounded or declared missing in action. One of the dead was Lieutenant Hubert Herder.

Colonel G. W. L. Nicholson, author of *The Fighting Newfoundlander*, an authoritative history of the Regiment in World War I, describes his death thus: “‘B’ Company had not got far before its Commander, Captain Nunns, fell shot in the leg. He called to one of his subalterns, Lieutenant Hubert Herder, to take charge of the Company, and to carry on. Snatching up rifle and bayonet from his Platoon Sergeant, who had just been hit, Herder shouted to his men, ‘Come on, boys!’, and led them forward – only to fall mortally wounded shortly afterwards.” It was reported that he had already been wounded when he made this advance. His body was subsequently interred in Y Ravine Cemetery, Beaumont Hamel, France. Two of Herder’s brothers, Arthur and Ralph, both members of the Regiment, were also injured on that fateful day.

Back in Newfoundland, the news of his death and the deaths of hundreds of his comrades came as quite a shock to family and friends. He would not be forgotten, however. His medals (the Victory, the British War Medal and the 1914-1915 Star) were sent to parents and were on display in a frame in the offices of *The Evening Telegram* for more than fifty years, and are currently in the possession of family members. His parents also established a scholarship in his memory at the Methodist College.

Herder was also remembered by four of the institutions with which he was associated. His name appears on the honor roll at the Ontario Agricultural College, now at the University of Guelph; the Methodist

College Memorial plaque, now at Prince of Wales Collegiate, St. John's; the Presbyterian Highlanders plaque at St. Andrew's (the Kirk) Presbyterian Church, St. John's; and the honour roll at Cochrane Street United Church. His name appears on this latter memorial because sometime after the 1892 St. John's Great Fire destroyed the Gower Street Methodist Church that they had attended for many years, W. J. Herder relocated his family to the Cochrane Street Church, which had survived the fire. His membership in the Presbyterian Highlanders boys brigade does pique interest, since most Methodists schoolboys in St. John's joined the Methodist Guards brigade.

In addition to his brothers Arthur and Ralph, a third brother, Augustus (Gus), also enlisted in the Newfoundland Regiment. Arthur was killed at Cambrai on December 1, 1917. Ralph and Gus returned to Newfoundland. Their older sister, Elsie, also served overseas as a war nurse. Their stories will be told.



Newfoundland Regiment non-commissioned officers on board the SS *Florizel*, October 1914. Herder is second from the left in the back row. (Photo: courtesy of The Rooms Provincial Archives Division – A58-158)

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 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.