

GOWER REMEMBERS

Major Stanley Counter Norsworthy

(1881-1966)



“My brother has been killed. I am going to take his place.”

(St. John’s Daily Star, July 31, 1915.)

Stanley Counter Norsworthy was born in Ingersoll, Ontario, on December 13, 1881, the second of four sons of Mary Jane Cuthbert and James Counter Norsworthy. In addition to the four brothers, Edward Cuthbert (b. 1879), Stanley, Alfred James (b. 1887) and John Weldon (b. 1890), the family also included one sister, Helen Alice (b. 1884).

James Norsworthy was a native of Devonshire, England, who immigrated to what was then Canada West in 1852. He conducted a very successful insurance and mortgage brokerage for many years, divesting himself of this business in 1890, upon receiving appointment as first inspector, and later chief inspector, for the North British and Mercantile Insurance Company in Canada. Mary Jane Norsworthy, who had married James on April 26, 1878, died at age 39, on February 27, 1891 from diphtheria; at the time of her death, her children ranged in age from 11 years to 11 months.

Shortly after his mother's death, Stanley, his older brother, Edward, and the baby, John, went to live with their father's brother and his family in St. Thomas, Ontario, where Edward and Stanley attended public school. Later the two older brothers were sent to boarding schools, Edward to Upper Canada College in Toronto and Stanley to Ridley College in St. Catherine's. Upon graduation from their colleges in 1898, both brothers enrolled as students in the Institute of Actuaries of Great Britain, and were two of the five successful candidates who wrote the final examination, out of a total of 36 Canadian entrants.

Within a few months after his graduation from Ridley, Norsworthy joined the employ of the Bank of Montreal in London, Ontario. He spent approximately two years with the bank there and another two years in Halifax, before being transferred to the Bank of Montreal branch on Water Street in St. John's, sometime around 1902. In St. John's he attended Gower Street Methodist Church, perhaps at the suggestion of Alfred M. Peters, who was also an employee of that branch of the Bank of Montreal.

Norsworthy remained in St. John's for approximately three to four years, during which time he boarded with James Morey and his family at 26 Monkstown Road. Morey was a Spaniard who had settled in St. John's in the previous century. He operated a very successful import and commission business and also served as Spanish Consul in St. John's for a number of years.

St. John's was a very cosmopolitan port-of-call in the early decades of the 20th century, with ships and visitors from many countries making regular stop-overs. Norsworthy appears to have adapted well to his new surroundings, becoming quite involved in events and activities outside the purview of his banking duties. His name can be found in *The Evening Telegram* several times during the summer of 1905, recounting dates on his very busy social calendar. On July 25, he was one of 40 members of the local French Club who attended a reception at Government House to meet Gabriel Louis Angoulvant, the Governor of St. Pierre, who was on an official visit to St. John's.

In September 1905, a squadron of British warships, under the command of HRH Rear Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg, arrived in St. John's harbour and remained for several days. To mark their arrival in the town, the 900 officers and crewmen marched from King's Wharf up King's Road, and along Military Road and Harvey Road to the Parade Ground, where they were reviewed by Prince Louis. The return to their ships took them down Parade Street to Long's Hill, Gower Street and Water Street back to King's Wharf.

The Prince, officers and crews of the various ships were feted and dined and treated to exceptional and generous hospitality, with various special events held for their honour and entertainment. These included a gala ball at Government House under the sponsorship of Governor Sir William MacGregor; a concert at the Total Abstinence Society Hall, hosted by the Deputy Mayor of St. John's, John R. Bennett, with musical and acting performances provided by locals and by crewmembers from some of

the ships; a boxing exhibition at the Prince of Wales Rink with internationally acclaimed pugilist Mike Shallow of Fermeuse and Boston.

Norsworthy may have been involved in some or all of these events but it is known that he was one of the halfbacks for the City team that played a rugby match against a Navy team on the afternoon of September 9. The City team lost that match by a score of 11 to 3.

Sometime over the next year or so, Norsworthy completed his term of service with the Bank of Montreal in St. John's. His next assignment was with the accountants' department at the main branch at Montreal, which was followed by two years at the Bank's branch in London, England. Then came four years as Manager of the branch in Mexico City. It was while he was in Mexico that war broke out in Europe.

Norsworthy's older brother Edward enlisted in the Royal Highlanders of Canada in Montreal soon after war was declared in August 1914. He received a commission as a Major and was instrumental in training the newly enlisted Highlanders. He went overseas with the first contingent of his Regiment, and saw action at Ypres in the spring of 1915, where he was killed in action on April 22.

When Stanley Norsworthy learned of his brother's death, he made immediate plans to leave Mexico City and his employ with the Bank of Montreal to enlist himself. On June 03, 1915, he received a commission as Captain in the Royal Highlanders and on June 10 he was on his way to England with a battalion of 40 officers and 978 men. He had been designated as Battalion Adjutant shortly after joining the Regiment. His Attestation Paper indicates that he was 6 feet tall, with a medium complexion, brown eyes and dark brown hair.

Norsworthy distinguished himself on the field of battle on numerous occasions over the years that followed. He first saw action at the Ypres salient in June 1916, when the Royal Highlanders were brought in to reinforce the Princess Patricia's against the German Army at Sanctuary

Wood. He was wounded in fighting at Zillebeke on the 26th and spent some time in recuperation before returning to the front lines in late summer.

September 16 proved to be a very eventful day for him in the fighting at Courcellette. In command of his Battalion, he was wounded a second time and awarded the Military Cross. The citation to his Military Cross stated: *“For conspicuous gallantry in action. He took personal supervision of the operation in the front line, displayed great courage and initiative. Later, though wounded, he remained at duty. He set a fine example of coolness and devotion to duty throughout.”*

After a period of recovery from this second wound, Norsworthy returned to France on January 02, 1917 in command of his Battalion and remained in command through the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April. For his actions there, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, second only to the Victoria Cross, in the British pantheon of military honours. The citation, which was presented by King George V at Buckingham Palace on November 22, 1917 read: *“For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty when in command of his battalion. He went forward under very heavy fire and established a firm defensive flank. He continued in personal command for thirty-six hours, his example and forethought being an inspiration to his battalion and ensuring the success of operations at a critical time.”* At that ceremony, he also received his Military Cross.

In the year and a half that followed Vimy Ridge, he was involved in fighting at Passchendaele, Arras and Cambrai. In a letter to his father dated November 11, 1917, Norsworthy wrote: *“We had a hand in the Passchendaele show but were not in the main attack. We were for thirteen days in the battle area, furnishing working parties most of the time. For three days, just after one of the attacks, we held the front line.”*

In early February 1918, Norsworthy was named Brigade Major to General James H. Elmsley, commanding the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade. As such, he took part in the fighting at Amiens on August 8 to 12, which resulted in a decisive victory for the allied troops. In letter to his father, dated August 13, the day after that victory, he commented: *“On August 8th, we*

attacked in conjunction with French, Australian and British troops, and assisted by British Tanks. It was a surprise attack without any preliminary bombardment. Within 52 hours we had advanced our line 16 kilometers captured numerous machine guns and artillery pieces and, in case of our own Division, the number of prisoners taken exceeded our total casualties by two to one. I think perhaps our showing was exceptional but the whole operation was an outstanding success." At the declaration of the Armistice some three months later, on November 11, 1918, he and his fellow troops were in reserve ten miles west of Mons.

While in London, England in the summer of 1916, Norsworthy married Georgina Maud Sankey of Toronto on July 26, at St. James Church, Paddington. His first child, a son who was named Edward Cuthbert Villiers Norsworthy, was born on August 31, 1917. Stanley and Georgina had two other children, both born in Montreal after they had returned to Canada following the end of the war: Beatrice Mary, on December 01, 1919; and Hugh Hoyles Norsworthy, on October 07, 1921. This third child was named for Lt. Hugh Lewis Hoyles, a member of the Quebec Regiment, who was killed at Amiens on August 12, 1918. Hoyles had two very strong ties to Norsworthy: they were classmates together at Ridley College; and Hoyles was married to Georgina Norsworthy's sister, Elizabeth Grace Sankey. It is quite possible that Georgina and Stanley had met through Hugh Hoyles, who had married Elizabeth in 1910. Hugh Hoyles was a further connection for Norsworthy to Newfoundland, in that his grandfather, also named Hugh Hoyles, was Prime Minister (1861-1865) and later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Newfoundland (1865-1880).

Once he was back in Canada, Norsworthy resumed his career with the Bank of Montreal. By 1922 he was a correspondent at the Bank's branch in New York City and later became Inspector of the Foreign Department of the Bank. Other promotions over the decades that followed resulted in his eventual appointment as Assistant General Manager of the whole of the Bank's operations. He retired in 1945, some 48 years after his first clerkship in London, Ontario, in 1898.

Norsworthy spent his retirement in Montreal. He died there on Christmas Day, December 25, 1966. He was 85. His wife, Georgina, survived him by a decade: she died at age 88 on February 25, 1976. Their three children lived into the 21st century and obviously inherited their parents' longevity genes: Edward died on March 22, 2002, age 84; Beatrice on December 18, 2012, age 93; and Hugh on January 26, 2013, age 91.

Despite his short time in St. John's, Stanley Norsworthy seems to have made a distinct impression on the people of Gower Street Methodist Church. His name was included in the Gower Street Honour Roll, unveiled at the church on November 24, 1918, although it is spelled Noseworthy, a much more common name in Newfoundland. His name also appears on the Roll of Service at Ridley College, along with those of his two younger brothers, Alfred, who was killed in action on March 29, 1917 at Vimy Ridge, and John, who survived the war, and died in Montreal on January 7, 1975.

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 202nd 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.