

# GOWER REMEMBERS

## Private Henry Reid

(1892-

1964)



*“The above-named man is discharged in consequence of ‘Being no longer physically fit for war service’.” (from the Proceedings on Discharge for Private Henry Reid, August 28, 1917)*



Henry Reid was born in St. John's, on April 10, 1892, the second son of Frances Burt and William John Reid. The family included five other siblings, three brothers and two sisters: William James (b. 1884), Emma May (b. 1886), Sarah Louise (b. 1888), William Frederick (b. 1894), and Stephen March (b. 1897). His father was a fisherman who relocated from Old Perlican to St. John's sometime around 1890.

Once the family was settled in St. John's, John Reid, as he was commonly known, gained employment first as a labourer, possibly with J & W Stewart, a mercantile establishment involved in the import and export trade. By 1898 he was working as a cabman, a position he continued to hold well into the new century. The family lived at 2 Spencer Street, in a house also known as Bellaire Cottage.

Henry did receive some formal education, and may have attended the Methodist College, as it was near where the family lived. However, little is known of his life before 1913, when his name appears in the St. John's City Directory for 1913. There he is listed as a moulder, employed by the Newfoundland Consolidated Foundry Ltd., on Hamilton Avenue.

Reid's employment with the foundry did not last long. With the outbreak of hostilities in Europe in August 1914, and the decision to establish a Newfoundland Regiment, he was one of the early enlistees. He joined up on September 21, 1914, receiving Regimental number 513; thus his name was enshrined as one of the First Five Hundred, also known as the Blue Puttees.

The Attestation Paper that Reid completed at the time of his enlistment provides details about the young man. He was 5 feet, 5 inches tall and weighed 132 pounds; he had brown hair and blue eyes. He listed his father as his next of kin, and indicated that he earned \$1.75 per day, or about \$450.00 per year.

Private Reid went overseas less than two weeks after he enlisted. He was aboard the SS *Florizel* when it steamed out of St. John's harbour on

October 04, 1914, arriving in Plymouth Sound, England, on October 14. He and his comrades spent the six days that followed on board the ship, anchored in Plymouth Harbour, not being allowed to go ashore until the 20<sup>th</sup>. Once on dry land, they marched to Salisbury Plain in south-central England, where they spent roughly six weeks, living in tents under incredibly inhospitable conditions. Excessive rainfall not only dampened their spirits, but also turned the ground of their tents into mud, made their clothing uncomfortable and caused general havoc. By early December the Regiment was moved north to Scotland, where they would spend the next six-plus months, first at Fort George, then Edinburgh Castle, and finally Stobs Camp, before being transferred back to England in early August 1915.

While at Edinburgh Castle, Reid got himself into a bit of trouble: his infraction is merely listed in his personnel file as “interfering with Garrison”, but whatever he did was serious enough to warrant eight days confinement to the barracks. It would not be his only breach of the rules while in Scotland. On May 24, at Stobs Camp, he was sentenced to another two days confined to barracks for missing church parade the previous day.

Reid and his comrades left Stobs Camp for Aldershot, in England, where they arrived on August 02, 1915. After two-and-one-half weeks of rest and relaxation, they were taken to nearby Devonport, where, on August 20, they boarded the SS *Megantic* for the eastern Mediterranean and the war. Before leaving Aldershot, on August 14, Reid, who had initially joined up for a maximum of one year, re-engaged for the duration of the war.

The 1,000+ members of the Newfoundland Regiment on board the *Megantic* arrived in Alexandria, Egypt, on August 31, and were immediately entrained for Cairo. They spent roughly two weeks there becoming acclimatized to the weather, before being sent back to Alexandria, where, on September 13, they boarded the SS *Ausonia*. It took them north to the Greek island of Lemnos. From there, on the night of September 19-20, they crossed the eastern Aegean Sea to Turkey’s

Gallipoli Peninsula. They did not receive a friendly welcome to Gallipoli, as they were bombarded with Turkish gunfire and shells from the moment they stepped ashore from their landing craft.

During the almost four months that the Newfoundland Regiment spent on the Gallipoli Peninsula, some 45 men were killed; however, several hundred others were evacuated, suffering from a number of ailments brought about by the unsanitary and vermin-infested environment in which they were forced to live. These ailments included a variety of pulmonary, gastro and other invasive diseases. Adding to the discomfort, a freak storm in November, one that started as rain but quickly turned to sleet, then snow and frost, blanketed the area for a number of days, resulting in flooding, which carried clothing, food and munitions away as the swirling waters surged through the muddy trenches. Any remaining food and much of the water became contaminated. Men also suffered from frostbite, so severe that many of them had to be taken to hospital in Malta.

Reid was one of the lucky ones. He received no wounds, nor did he succumb to any of the illnesses or frostbite. He was one of the men who was there until the bitter end, finally leaving with the wholesale evacuation of the area by British troops in early January 1916. From Gallipoli, it was back to Egypt, where the Regiment spent several months recuperating and performing duties at Suez.

On March 14, 1916, Reid and his comrades left Port Suez, Egypt, on the HMT *Alaunia* for the trek back across the Mediterranean. This time their destination was France. They landed at Marseilles, on the south coast, on March 22, and were put aboard train cars to take them north to Pont Remy, on the Western Front. There they became part of a planned major attack on German front-line positions, the aim being to break through the German defenses and remove this part of France from enemy hands.

It was there, on the morning of July 01, 1916, that approximately 800 members of the Newfoundland Regiment went over the top, near the area known as Beaumont-Hamel. With minutes well over half of them were

dead or wounded, with less than 100 able to answer the next roll call. Reid was one of those injured: he received gunshot wounds to his right shoulder and to his back. He made it back to the British lines, where, he was admitted to the 87<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance. After receiving attention there for his wounds, on July 03, he was transferred to a Casualty Clearing Station, and two days after that was invalided to England. Once there, on July 07, he was admitted to the First Western General Hospital, Fazakeley, Liverpool. Reid spent the next three plus months in hospital, although not all of that time at Fazakerley. His last stay was at the Ystrad Isaf Red Cross Hospital in Denbigh, Wales, being discharged from there on October 19.

Once out of hospital, Reid was granted a short period of furlough before being assigned to the staff of the Regimental Depot at Ayr, Scotland. After what he had been through, this new assignment may have been somewhat dull and boring, as he managed to run afoul of the authorities on three separate occasions while there. The first occurred on January 16, 1917, when he was absent from tattoo; his sentence was two days confined to barracks. On February 10, he wandered off into the town of Ayr, without a pass. This must not have been a very serious offence, since he received only an admonishment from his commanding officer. His third infraction occurred on March 23, when he overslept and missed Reveille, which resulted in another two days confined to barracks.

His time in Scotland was drawing to a close, however. On May 18, 1917, he embarked from Liverpool for St. John's, arriving there on June 01. He appeared before a Medical Board in August 14, which recommended that he receive a medical discharge from the Regiment. It found that he was suffering from neurasthenia, with no improvement in his symptoms, and that he had an estimated disability of 20%. His discharge took effect on August 28, after two years, 342 days of service. Curiously, the personal information contained in his discharge proceedings indicated that he was 5 feet, 7½ inches tall, 2½ taller than he had been when he enlisted.

Not long after his return to St. John's, Reid returned to his former job at the now renamed United Hail and Foundry Company Limited. On October 08, 1917, he was married to Marion S. Field, by the Rev. Harry Royle, then minister at Wesley Methodist Church, on the corner of Hamilton Avenue and Patrick Street, just across the street from the foundry where Reid worked. Nine-teen years of age at the time of their marriage, Marion was six years Reid's junior.

Reid appears to have worked at the foundry for the remainder of his working life. He and Marion were the parents of six children: Fred, Lorraine, Audrey, William, Frances and Robert. Undoubtedly, Fred was named for Reid's brother, Newfoundland Regiment # 1696, who died on October 06, 1918, of wounds received in the war. Another of Reid's brothers, Stephen, also joined the Regiment and survived the war.

Reid was a life-long member of first, the Great War Veterans Association, and after Confederation 1949, its successor, the Royal Canadian Legion. He attended the first reunion of the Blue Puttees, held at Smithville, on the northern outskirts of St. John's, on November 18, 1920, and was a frequent attendee at reunions that followed.

Henry Reid died at the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Pavilion in St. John's, on July 12, 1964, at the age of 74. His funeral took place on July 14, from Barrett's Funeral Home, with interment at Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

The Gower Street Methodist Church baptismal register for 1892 records Reid as receiving only one Christian name at the time he was baptized: Henry. However, in the death notice that appeared in *The Daily News* on July 14, 1965, it states that his name was "J. Henry Potter (Harry) Reid". Where these additional names came from is a mystery, but might he have been an inspiration for the name of J. K. Rowling's famous character? After all, they both, in their own way, proved to be heroes.

*On Sunday, November 16, 2014, Gower Street United Church initiated a program of commemoration that will last for approximately four to five 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 203rd 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.*



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