

GOWER REMEMBERS

Private Chesley Morton Peet

(1893-1952)



“Chesley Peet, one of the Blue Puttees attached to the Nfld. Regimental band, arrived with the last batch. He came unawares, relatives not having been notified that he was on the way. His visit is none the less pleasing to his friends, however, who are uniting to give him a good time.” (St. John’s Daily Star, August 10, 1918)

Chesley Morton Peet was born in St. John's on December 24, 1893, the son of Christiana F. Clifford and Samuel H. Peet. He was baptized by the Rev. A. D. Morton of Gower Street Methodist Church on March 23, 1894, which explains his middle name. Male children in particular often received the name of the minister who baptized them as a second name.

There were at least four other children, and possibly more, in the family. These included sons William (b. 1881), Charles (b. 1884), and Ernest (b. 1890) and daughter Maud (b. 1892). The family also adopted Albert Peet (b. 1902). The family resided first at 11 Allen's Square and later at 14 Brazil Square. They occupied Pew No. 2 in Aisle C at Gower Street Church.

Samuel Peet was a blacksmith. He operated a forge on George Street, in partnership after 1887 with Joseph Miller. A notice that appeared in *The Evening Telegram* for November 05, 1887 stated "*Their forge is situate in George Street, rear of Duchemin's Block and Pump Factory, where Blacksmithing, Gunsmithing, Horse-Shoeing and all other work in their line will be promptly and satisfactorily executed.*"

Chesley Peet attended the Methodist College on Long's Hill before entering the workplace sometime around the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. The St. John's city directory for 1913 lists him as a salesman at Ayre & Sons Ltd.

Peet was a noted for his musical talent both as an instrumentalist and singer. *The Evening Telegram* for March 03, 1914 reports that he was a member of the band and one of the soloists who performed at an entertainment for sealers at the Seamen's Institute the previous evening. He was also a member of the Methodist Guards Brigade, where he was a member of the Guards rifle team that won the 1911 Montgomerie Cup, awarded to the team from one of the four city brigades that scored highest in competition. He may have been involved in other sports as well. He was

also a member of the Adult Bible Class at George Street Methodist Church.

When war was declared in Europe in the late summer of 1914, Peet was quick to join the newly reformed Newfoundland Regiment. He enlisted on September 04, 1914, and was assigned Regimental number 235, which made him both one of the First 500 and the Blue Puttees. According to his Attestation Paper, Peet had a fair complexion with light hair and grey eyes. He was 5 feet 5 inches tall. He gave his occupation as a clerk earning \$35.00 per month. He lived with his parents at 14 Brazil Square.

Peet left St. John's as one of the First 500 members of the Regiment on board the SS *Florizel* on October 04, 1914, arriving in England later that month. The Regiment spent most of the Fall of 1914 in tents under extremely inhospitable conditions at Pond Farm Camp on England's Salisbury Plain. On December 07, they were sent by train to Fort George, near Inverness, Scotland. They underwent initial training there before being posted to Edinburgh Castle in the Scottish capital on February 19, 1915. They remained there until May 11, the first colonial regiment to serve as defenders of the famed castle.

From Edinburgh Castle they were sent to Stobs Camp, near Hawick, on the east coast of Scotland. There they continued training until early August when they journeyed to Aldersot in the south of England, arriving there on August 02. On the 19th they left Aldershot for Devonport, where they boarded the SS *Megantic*, which took them to the eastern Mediterranean and the war the following day.

It took 11 days for the *Megantic* to reach Alexandria, Egypt. After docking, the men were sent by train to Cairo for acclimatization for several weeks. Then it was back to Alexandria, where, on September 13, they boarded the SS *Ausonia*, which took them north to the Greek island of Lemnos. It was from there on the night of September 19-20 that they were ferried across that portion of the Aegean Sea to Turkey's Gallipoli

Peninsula. They were welcomed by the Turks with a barrage of shells and bullets.

The Newfoundland Regiment spent approximately four months in Gallipoli, during which time 44 of its members were killed as a result of enemy action; however, more than 400 of them fell victim to the unexpected and severe weather conditions that descended on that area during November 1915. The freezing rain, snow and ice caused frost bite, the excessive water in the trenches destroyed supplies of food and played havoc with drinking water, as well as causing various pulmonary and gastric illnesses. Many had to be evacuated to hospitals in Egypt or Malta.

Peet was one of those who was afflicted with frostbite in both feet. It was judged severe enough to warrant his evacuation, on December 06, 1915, from Gallipoli on the hospital ship *Delta*. He was subsequently admitted to the 21st General Hospital in Alexandria on December 10. He remained there until January 15, 1916, when he was transported to England on board the HS *Silta*. Once there he was admitted to Wandsworth Hospital, where he spent the next six weeks, before release at the end of February. Permanent damage to the arches in the soles of both feet as a result of this frostbite would torment him for the rest of his life.

Upon his release from hospital, Peet was granted a short furlough before having to report to the Regimental depot at Ayr, Scotland. While there he managed to get himself into a bit of trouble by “*breaking into canteen at 10:00 p.m.*”, which occurred on June 23 and for which he received an admonishment and 168 hours (seven days) detention.

Peet was attached to the Ayr depot until March 01, 1917, when he left with the Regimental band to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front. However, he was not away for long. On April 18, he returned to the Scotland and was reattached to the depot. It may have been restlessness or resentment at not being part of or able to be part of the main fighting force, but whatever the reason, he got himself into hot water once again. On September 22, 1917, he was arrested for being found

drunk in Dundee and sentenced to another seven days confined to barracks.

Peet remained at the Ayr depot until July 01, 1918, when he again accompanied the Regimental band to France. He joined the Battalion in the field on July 10 but was sent back to England two weeks later, where he was to be struck off the strength of the Regiment. Three days later he embarked from Southampton on board the SS *Olympia* for Blue Puttee leave in Newfoundland. He arrived in St. John's on August 08. His name was one of many members of the Regiment attached to a letter that appeared in *The Evening Telegram* on August 12, thanking the Hon. John R. Bennett, the Minister of Militia, for making this leave possible.

His leave lasted until the end of September. Peet reported to Regimental Headquarters in St. John's on October 01, 1918. After he underwent the requisite medical assessments, on November 23, the Standing Medical Board recommended that he be discharged from the Regiment for medical reasons. Two days later he appeared before the Civil Re-establishment Committee and informed them that "I intend to resume my old work at Smallwood's." This would be Frederick Smallwood, Boot and Shoe Manufacturer, who had a retail outlet at 218-220 Water Street and a factory and office on Duckworth Street. Peet received his medical discharge on December 07, 1918, after four years, 94 days of service. His discharge was accompanied by a clothing allowance of \$60.00.

Following his discharge, Peet did return to work at Smallwood's. On at least one occasion, he made a buying trip to New York for his employer, travelling on the SS *Rosalind*, arriving in New York on March 22, 1922. It appears he was employed there for the remainder of his working life.

Peet was also involved with the George Street Methodist Church Sunday School and the St. John's branch of the fraternal organization the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF). He was one of the chaperones at the annual Sunday School Picnic held at Glendenning Farm on July 16, 1919. Ten days previous, on July 07, he had been installed as Financial

Secretary of the IOOF's Atlantic Lodge No. 1 in St. John's, a position he held for a number of years.

According to the 1935 Newfoundland Census, Peet had married sometime around 1924 a woman whose first name was Tryphena. She was twelve years younger than her husband. In the decade leading up to that Census, they had had three sons: Chesley (junior) (b. c. 1925); Roland (b. c. 1930); and Albert (b. 1935). His mother, Christiana, by then 82, lived with the family, at 261 Hamilton Avenue. She died on May 24, 1940, of myocarditis, at age 87. Her husband, Chesley's father, Samuel, had died on June 08, 1922, of heart failure, at age 68. His death took place while shopping at T. J. Duley's & Company's jewelry store on Water Street.

Chesley Peet died on December 09, 1952, 15 days before his 59th birthday. Tryphena outlived him by 35 years; she died in 1987. His grave in the General Protestant Cemetery is marked with a simple stone bearing his name the year of his birth (listed erroneously as 1894, instead of 1893), his year of death and the words Royal Nfld. Regiment.



The Methodists Guards Brigade Team which won the Montgomerie Cup 1911, awarded to the team that scored highest in the annual shooting competition among the four brigades in St. John's at that time. The other teams represented the Church Lads Brigade, the Catholic Cadet Corps and the Presbyterian Highlanders. The Guards also won the competition in 1907, 1908 and 1909. Peet is seated on the floor on the right.

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 or at 726-6169.