

# GOWER REMEMBERS

**Private John Alfred Ivany**

(1895-1917)



*Dear Sir: I regret to inform you that The Record Office London reports today that No. 3119, Private John A. Ivany, previously reported missing is now reported killed in action, and buried at Seranvilles Cemetery, near Cambrai. Authority: German list forwarded by Geneva Red Cross Society on 14<sup>th</sup> March. (letter to Martin A. Ivany from Walter F. Rendell, Acting Minister of Militia, April 5, 1918)*



John Alfred Ivany was born in St. John's on September 10, 1895, the son of Mary Ann Thistle and Martin A. Ivany. He was baptized by the Rev. A. D. Morton at Gower Street Methodist Church on November 10, 1895. His parents were married at the Gower Street Church parsonage by the Rev. George Boyd on November 08, 1888. By the time John Alfred was born, they had already buried two children: John Chesley, who was born on July 08, 1890 and died on October 15, 1890 of bronchitis at the age of three months and seven days; and Albert, born September 25, 1892, and died on November 22, 1893 of convulsions, at the age of 13 months, 27 days. There were three other children, Rendell (b. 1891), Gordon (b. July 28, 1893), and Elizabeth Victoria, nicknamed Queenie (b. March 20, 1897).

Martin Ivany first appears in St. John's city directories in 1897 as a fisherman, resident at 12 Barter's Hill; he is in the 1898 directory with the same occupation, but now lives next door at 14 Barter's Hill. From there he moved first to Gilbert Street and later to 37 Charlton Street, before spending his later years at 88 Springdale Street. By the 1904 city directory, he is listed as a boiler maker with the Reid Newfoundland Foundry, a subsidiary of the Reid Newfoundland Company, which operated, among other enterprises, the Newfoundland Railway. He appears to have worked as a boiler maker for the remainder of his career.

While there is no mention of John Ivany in the Methodist College records that have survived, his very bold and legible signature on his Attestation Paper when he enlisted in the Newfoundland Regiment indicates that he did have some formal education. The 1913 city directory lists him as an employee of the Horwood Lumber Company in St. John's, while the directory for 1915 has him as a machinist, but does not say where. It is safe to assume that he was still with the Horwood Lumber Company, however, since the following year, when he enlisted, he gave his occupation as a carpenter, making a weekly wage of \$8.40 (roughly \$435.00 per year).

Ivany waited until he had reached his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday before he joined the Newfoundland Regiment. He made that move on September 20, 1916, being assigned Regimental number 3119. According to his Attestation Paper, he was 5 feet 3 inches tall, weighed 118 pounds, and had a 33 inch chest, which could expand another five inches, to 38. He also had a scar on his left arm, the result of a vaccination he had had nine years previous. He received the rank of Private.

After roughly four months training in St. John's, he and 320 colleagues, which comprised the 12<sup>th</sup> draft, left St. John's on January 31, 1917, on board the SS *Florizel*, for Halifax, Nova Scotia. There they were to change ships for the journey across the Atlantic. Upon arriving in Halifax, however, some of the men were discovered to have contracted measles. As a result, they were all placed in quarantine and sent to Windsor, Nova Scotia, arriving there on February 03. Once they were in Windsor, an outbreak of mumps was also detected, which caused an extension of the quarantine. (Ivany was one of those who came down with mumps.) It was not until mid-April that they received the all clear and were able to leave Windsor.

The Windsor Draft, as they became known, finally embarked from Halifax for Liverpool, England, on April 16, 1917. They were divided among three ships, with Ivany being assigned to the SS *Ausonia*, which is the same ship that took the members of the Regiment from Alexandria, Egypt, to Mudros, Greece, in September 1915. They arrived in Liverpool on April 29.

Once they were ashore, the Windsor Draft was taken by train to the Regimental headquarters at Ayr, Scotland. They remained there, undergoing additional training, until the early Fall of 1917, when they were sent to the Western Front. They joined the Regiment in the Field in Belgium on October 12, where they rendezvoused with others from the Regiment who had just returned from the Front Line trenches at 3:00 a.m.

on October 11, after they had spent two days in the thick of fighting at Broembeek.

Five days later, the whole of the Regiment in the Field were sent over the border into northern France, near Berles-au-Bois, a few miles southwest of Arras. It was from there a month later that they took part in the Battle of Cambrai, fighting at Marcoing and at Masnières. The fighting lasted from November 20 until December 07, with 110 members of the Regiment killed and another 352 wounded, losses that equalled the carnage at Beaumont-Hamel in their tragedy if not their numbers. In large part, it was their determination, tenacity and success in fighting at Cambrai, coupled with their losses, and losses sustained in other fighting since Gallipoli, that the Regiment was awarded the designation Royal by King George V on December 17, 1917, the only regiment to receive this designation during the war.

One of the dead at Cambrai was Private John Alfred Ivany. December 03 was the last day that the Newfoundland Regiment was involved in the fighting at Masnières before it was pulled from the Front Line. On that day, Ivany went missing and was later declared to have been killed in action or died of wounds. This was confirmed by a report, dated March 14, 1918, from the Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland; it had been supplied with an Official List of enemy casualties by German authorities, which they forwarded to the Newfoundland Pay and Record Office in London. His remains were interred in the cemetery at Seranvilles, France. His name was also inscribed on the plaque at Beaumont-Hamel that contains the names of hundreds of Newfoundland soldiers, sailors and seamen who were killed in the war but who have no known grave. He was 22 years old at the time of his death.

Ivany's parents had been notified that he was missing in action in a letter dated January 01, 1918, from Newfoundland's Minister of Militia, the Hon. John R. Bennett. Three months would pass before they were formally notified of his death in a letter, dated April 05, 1918, from the

acting Minister of Militia, Col. Walter F. Rendell. In the intervening time, tragedy struck once again. Their son Gordon, who was a waiter on the SS *Florizel*, was on board that ship when it struck the rocks and foundered off Capahayden on the night of February 23, 1918. He was one of those who did not survive the wreck. A death notice that appeared in *The St. John's Daily Star* for February 26, 1918, read: "*He was a young man who possessed many excellent qualities, was much liked on the ship and very popular in the city, where much sorrow is felt from his tragic demise.*" The notice also made reference to his brother "*a member of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment who has been missing since December 3<sup>rd</sup> last.*" Gordon Ivany's body was one of only six that were not recovered.

The loss of two of her three remaining sons in less than three months appears to have taken its toll on Mary Ann Ivany. *The Evening Telegram* for January 31, 1920 reports: "*With deep regret we chronicle the death of Mrs. Martin Ivany, 37 Charlton Street, at the age of 62 years. The deceased had a paralytic stroke just after the drowning of her son, Gordon, on the ill-fated S. S. Florizel, and Private John Alfred, who was killed in Cambrai, France. In August last, she had another attack, and on the 28<sup>th</sup> inst., she had a final stroke. She leaves behind a husband, one son Rendell, at Horwood Lumber Company, one daughter Queenie, and two grandchildren; also two sisters, Mrs. George Noseworthy of this city, and Mrs. John Howell, sr., of Valleyfield, B.B.*"

Martin Ivany did not receive the medals due his son, the Victory Medal and the War Medal, until September 05, 1921; nor did he receive the Memorial Plaque (also known as the Death Penny) until September 06, 1921. His father did remember his son with "In Memoriam" notices in local papers for some years after his death and his passing is recorded on the Ivany family headstone in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John's. Martin Ivany died in 1940.



**Section Group from D Company,  
Newfoundland Regiment, 1917;  
Private John Alfred Ivany  
is on the far right in the third row standing.**

*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.*