

# GOWER REMEMBERS

## Sergeant Frederick William Smallwood

(1892-1970)



*“My step-son Frederick William (Reg No 1637) has been connected with the Newfoundland Regiment for two and a half years, and has been over seas about two years. // His father’s sudden death, necessitates his return for a time, and if you can obtain leave for him, I shall be extremely obliged to you. // Mr. Blackwood [her solicitor] wishes me to add to his letter, that it is desirable for Frederick to obtain leave for a sufficient time to enable him to spend about two months at home.”* (Roberta Smallwood to Hon. John Bennett, Colonial Secretary, November 01, 1917)

Frederick William Smallwood was born in St. John's on July 20, 1892, the second of three children of Elizabeth Emma Greaves and Frederick Smallwood. He had an older brother, Walter Reginald, who was born on February 24, 1890, and a sister, Reva Greaves, who was born in May 1893, but died on April 13, 1895, of whooping cough, just a month shy of her second birthday. Elizabeth Smallwood died on February 01, 1894, of diphtheria: all three of her children were under the age of four, with Reva being only eight months old. On January 10, 1901, Frederick senior remarried: his new bride was Roberta Henrietta Hyde of Prince Edward Island.

Fred Smallwood junior was a first-cousin of Joseph R. Smallwood (Premier of Newfoundland from 1949-1972), their fathers each being sons of David Smallwood, a Prince Edward Islander who immigrated to Newfoundland in 1861. He is credited with establishing Newfoundland's first steam-powered saw mill near Gambo. Fred's father began operating a factory for making boots and shoes and a retail outlet to sell his wares from sometime around 1890; by 1913 his business included a factory on Duckworth Street and a storefront at 218 Water Street.

Smallwood attended the Methodist College in St. John's. Upon leaving school, he became an apprentice shoemaker in his father's business. He was working there as a clerk when he enlisted in the Newfoundland Regiment on June 17, 1915. On his Attestation Paper he gave his occupation as shoemaker, and his father as his next of kin. He resided at his father's house at 193 Gower Street. He was 5 feet 4 inches tall, with a 33 inch chest, which could expand to 35. He weighed 123 pounds, had black hair, brown eyes and a fair complexion. He was assigned to G Company, with Regimental number 1637.

It did not take the Regimental commanders long to recognize Smallwood's abilities. On October 26, 1915, just a little more than

four months after he had enlisted, he was promoted to Lance Corporal. The following day, October 27, he and the other members of G Company left St. John's by train, and headed for Quebec City, where arrangements had been made with the Government of Canada to have the men transported to England aboard the HMT *Corsican*. They reached Devonport on the south coast of England on November 09, entraining for Scotland immediately upon arrival. Their destination was a military camp at Gailes, a short distance from the Regimental Depot at Ayr where Smallwood spent eleven months undergoing training.

All was not marching, calisthenics and target practice. On February 03, he was raised to the rank of Sergeant. He also managed to get himself into a spot of trouble. Between February 12 and August 30, 1916, he was reprimanded twice and severely reprimanded twice, mainly for being absent from tattoo or parade.

Smallwood was still at the Depot at Ayr on July 01, 1916, the opening day of the Battle of the Somme, although a number of his friends were killed or wounded in the fighting that day. He was not sent to the battle front until October of that year: he left Southampton on the 03<sup>rd</sup>, arrived in Rouen, France, on the 04<sup>th</sup> and joined the Battalion on the 14<sup>th</sup>. He saw action at Lesbœufs in November but on January 10, 1917 was admitted to the 88<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance with orchitis, an inflammation of the testicles. Six days later, on January 16, he was admitted to the 53<sup>rd</sup> Field Ambulance with myalgia, a muscular inflammation, which may have been caused by the orchitis. He remained under medical care until February 01, when he was discharged to duty.

Smallwood was with the Regiment through the Winter and Spring of 1917. On May 07, he was appointed acting Company Sergeant Major with D Company. Then, on June 13, he was back under medical care at the 88<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance suffering from

inflamed connective tissue in his left leg. This was an affliction common to many soldiers and resulted from long periods of marching and standing, especially in wet weather. He was discharged to his unit on June 17.

Frederick Smallwood senior died at St. John's on September 09, 1917. He did not have a will. His lawyer, James P. Blackwood, informed his widow, Roberta Smallwood, that as a result of Fred senior dying intestate, both Fred and his brother Walter were needed in St. John's to deal with matters related to the disposition of the business. Roberta immediately began to contact government and Regimental officials in an attempt to secure extended leave for Fred. She wrote first to the Governor, Sir Alexander Harris, who responded by letter on October 13, that he would do whatever he could to arrange for the requested leave. That same day, Davidson wrote to Captain Timewell, the Regiment's Pay and Records Officer in London, to set the wheels in motion for the leave.

On November 01, Roberta wrote to Newfoundland's Minister of Militia, Hon. John R. Bennett, advising him of the situation and asking for his assistance. The matter was brought to the attention of Major Walter F. Rendell, the officer in charge of the St. John's Depot, who indicated in a letter to Roberta on November 05, that *"I am forwarding a letter to London to represent the case and recommend that furlough be granted this soldier for the purpose of proceeding to Newfoundland to adjust business matters in which he and others are concerned."*

Before any decision was made regarding the requested leave, Smallwood was back in hospital. On November 26, 1917, he was admitted to the 37<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance with scabies, a common nuisance that afflicted many soldiers. Two weeks later he was admitted to No. 5 Casualty Clearing Station suffering from eczema. He was transferred to the 9<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in Rouen that same

day, where he underwent treatment and was moved to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convalescent Depot on the 13<sup>th</sup>. It was early in the New Year, on January 06, 1918, that he was discharged to Rein Base in Rouen. He rejoined his battalion on January 11.

The previous day, January 10, Major Rendell informed Roberta that her step-son had been granted special leave. This leave was governed by a set of regulations, which included:

*“He will travel at his own expense.*

*He will wear uniform at all times whilst absent from the United Kingdom.*

*Sergt. Smallwood must sign a certificate agreeing to forfeit all allowances and family allowances for that period of leave granted in excess of thirty days.*

*If proceeding to England, he should be given a single travelling warrant.*

*He should be warned that he is to exercise the greatest discretion if military matters are referred to in his hearing.*

*On no account is he to carry any written matter on his person, or in his baggage, which might be of military value to the enemy.*

*On arrival in ST. JOHN’S he should report in writing to the local Military Headquarters: stating address, period of leave and authority. This N.C.O. should be instructed to report to the War Office on the expiration of his leave.”*

Smallwood agreed to these conditions and his special leave began on March 12, 1918; it was to last for two months. In preparation, he left the Regiment in France on March 04, reported to the Pay and Records Office in London on March 06, and proceeded to Scotland. On March 12, he reported to the offices of the Canadian

Pacific Ocean Services Ltd. in Liverpool to make arrangements for the trip to St. John's. He left Liverpool a few days later, arriving in St. John's on March 30.

While his initial period of special leave was to be for two months, Smallwood remained in St. John's for another six months after that leave expired on May 13. On this latter date, he was assigned to the regimental Depot in St. John's, where his "*services will be used here for training as soon as his private affairs have been settled.*" Those duties extended through the Summer and into the Fall of 1918. On September 05, he received "*permission to marry Miss Mabel Rowe*" of St. John's. That marriage took place on September 10, at her family's residence at 13 Victoria Street.

The time eventually arrived when Smallwood had to return to England, however. He left St. John's by train on September 22, but did not arrive in Devonport until October 12, in company with a small group of re-inforcements, draft No. 24. Two weeks later, on October 26, the Newfoundland Regiment left the trenches for the last time. The war ended with the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918.

Smallwood spent the months that followed his return to England at the Newfoundland Regiment's new Depot at Hazeley Down. On January 30, 1919, he boarded the SS *Corsican* for repatriation to St. John's, reporting to the Depot there on February 07. He appeared before the Civil Re-establishment Committee on February 27, informing them that he wished to work as a clerk. His discharge was granted and he was demobilized on March 13. He returned to work at F. Smallwood's, 218-220 Water Street, where his older brother, Walter, had been managing the operation since their father's death. He remained there for a relatively short time: by 1924 he was the proprietor of a confectionary shop located at 144 Duckworth Street. Later he became the manager of the Veterans' Club on Water Street.

Fred and Mabel Smallwood were the parents of two girls: Reva (1919-2000); and Helen (1926-2007). Mabel, who had been born in February 1894, died on April 04, 1968, at age 74. Fred died two years later, on February 20, 1970, in his 78<sup>th</sup> year. He died at his residence in Manuels, where the family lived in his later years. His funeral took place from Barrett's Funeral Home, with the Rev. Dr. Arthur E. Kewley of Gower Street United Church officiating, followed by interment at Mount Pleasant Cemetery.



Fred Smallwood's Boot and Shoe retail outlet at 218-220 Water Street, which was next door to Hutton's Music. Note the sign of the boot attached between two windows on the second storey, its shadow reflected on the wall.

*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.*