

Thomas Carroll, No. 274

Born in the 1870s to Thomas and Ellen Carroll of Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, Thomas Carroll was the second youngest of ten children. When the First World War broke out in summer 1914, Thomas was working as a miner in Bell Island, Newfoundland and was raising four children with his wife Elizabeth. He was 6' 1/4"; had light-coloured hair and blue eyes; and weighed 194 pounds.

- Enlisted as a Private in the Newfoundland Regiment (attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> British Division)
- "First Five Hundred"
- "Blue Puttee"

June 29, 1916

We received word that we will be going over the top tomorrow. Although soldiering has hardened me, I would be lying if I said that I am not scared about what awaits us tomorrow, because "going over the top" has become synonymous with "death." So many of "Ours" have already perished at the hand of the Hun that I can no longer expect, or even hope, that my comrades and I will be alive come tomorrow afternoon.

Although fear is only an emotion, I cannot suppress it at present, so I am taking some time now to write in an attempt to forget what awaits us tomorrow. The act of writing is soothing and I need calm tonight, as I must be strong and focused for my men tomorrow. It was an honour to be promoted to Sergeant, but it is also quite a responsibility to be in charge of a Platoon. Men look to me for guidance and hope, so I must always have my wits about me and at least outwardly, demonstrate fortitude.

When I received news of the imminent battle, I thought immediately of Elizabeth and our four wonderful children. I miss them all so much. Not a day passes without me thinking of them. I pray that this ugly war has not deprived my little ones of their childhood. I hope that they are able to go about their lives just as they were when I last saw them.

Whenever I think about my family, I wonder why I ever enlisted. I was 37 when the war broke out, so I was eligible for exemption. Yet, I signed up to fight. Why??? I remember seeing the recruitment posters and feeling a sense of obligation to protect Newfoundland and the rest of the Empire against the Hun. Would I have chosen to remain a miner in Bell Island if I had known the horrors that awaited us in Gallipoli and France? I am missing the prime years of my children's youth and I've left Elizabeth to take care of our four by herself. And all for what??? Thank goodness that Bernard is old enough to help Elizabeth when I am away.

It's hard to believe that my comrades and I actually thought that this war would last for less than one year. How naive we were to think that we'd be home by now. Instead the war is two years in, and there is no end in sight.....

Fortunately, the past two years have not been total horror. I remember the day that I enlisted: September 2, 1914. I was so proud when I received my Regimental No. 274 and was assigned to the regiment's A Company. And was I ever proud to be a member of the Newfoundland Regiment when a month later, we were presented with a silk Union Jack flag with the words "First Newfoundland Regiment" inscribed on it! And then, two days later, on October 3, when we embarked for Europe on the SS *Florizel*, people arrived in droves to see us off. We were so excited to take on Kaiser Bill and what a send-off we received!

It's hard to believe that it was training for war that brought me to the Old Country. What sights we saw during our training on the Salisbury Plains in England and at Fort George, Edinburgh, and Stob's Camp in Scotland. And what experiences we had! It was such an honour for the Newfoundland Regiment to be charged with protecting Edinburgh Castle.

I can't believe that I began training for war almost two years ago! There seemed to be an endless stream of marches, target practice, weapon drills, physical exercises, and skirmishes at Pleasantville in St. John's, and that was just the beginning. Marching, Parading, drilling, exercising, and skirmishing intensified after we – A, B, C, and D Companies – arrived in England. How strong we became and what teamwork and camaraderie we developed by the time we left for the Dardanelles in fall 1915.

And how fortunate we were to meet such wonderful people in the Old Country! Despite confusing us with Canadians (Grrr), the English and Scottish showed us such kindness. They provided us with reading rooms, writing materials, games, and even the papers of home. And how grateful my comrades and I were that they continued to send care packages to us even after we left for the Dardanelles and Gallipoli.

Actually, thinking back, virtually all of the Allies we've met have treated us kindly. For instance, the Australians we met in Cairo in September 1915 while we were en route to Gallipoli were quite taken by us Newfoundlanders. They faced such horrors in Gallipoli earlier that year, yet they were jolly fellows and spent much time with us.

Oh, Gallipoli! What terrible conditions we faced there: scorching days, freezing nights, floods of rain, storms, frostbite, vermin, unchanged clothing. Where were all the socks and underclothing that our women were knitting us when we needed them? Money did nothing, as there were no shops. It's no wonder that many of "Ours" fell ill.

And the shelling—I can't even begin to describe the shelling we received from the Enemy in Gallipoli. So many of "Ours" perished under the Turks' fire, and digging and entrenching became second nature to me. I'll never forget the time that the regiment was in the firing line for 27 days!

Fortunately, not all was wasted at Gallipoli. We brought honour to Newfoundland when we took Caribou Hill. Three of "Ours" even received medals! And then, we once again lived up to our reputation of strength by bringing up the rearguard during the British evacuation of Gallipoli this past December.

I've completely lost track of time, so I must sign off. But before doing so, a quick reflection on how fortunate I am. It was evident when we arrived in France three months ago that France has thrown itself wholeheartedly into the war effort. The country is ravaged and the only military-aged men we see are cripples. Everywhere we go, we see women dressed in black. Cripples and women are responsible for ensuring that work gets done and it's commonplace to see women in the fields working, only a short distance away from the line of fire.

So, how blessed I am to be with my comrades tonight. We've trained hard for tomorrow and I will be proud to advance with them at my side. And, how grateful I am that Elizabeth and our four are far away from this ugly war, in beautiful Terra Nova. I only wish I could tell them how much I love them.

Until next time....

Thomas Carroll was killed in action on 1 July 1916 at Beaumont-Hamel, France during the first day of Battle of the Somme. Elizabeth Carroll received a telegram (dated 31 July 1916) letting her know that Thomas was missing. A few months later, she received a letter (dated 23 November 1916) advising her that her husband had not been taken as a Prisoner of War and as such, was most likely killed in action. In mid-August 1917, she received further correspondence confirming that her husband was killed in action and had since been buried.

In 1920, Elizabeth Carroll received a 1914-15 Star that her husband had been awarded. She also received a Memorial Scroll and Message, which "[had] been forwarded [to her] at the Command of His Majesty the King". The following year, she received a Victory Medal and/or British War Medal that her husband had been awarded.