

BOUTCHER J.

Private John Wilson Boutcher (Regimental Number 5940), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, John Wilson Boutcher was a recruit of the 15th(?) Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury**, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 8, 1918. It was a procedure which found him...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

**The building was to serve as the Regimental Headquarters in Newfoundland for the duration of the conflict.*



It was to be on the day of that medical assessment, August 8, and at the same venue, that John Wilson Boutcher was now to be enlisted. He was engaged...*for the duration of the war**...at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was to be appended a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.*

Only a further few hours were then to go by before there came to pass, while still at the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On that same eighth day of that August* he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, John Wilson Boutcher became...*a soldier of the King.*

**It had been two months prior to this that the Newfoundland Military Service Act (conscription had come into effect. From May 11 through to the end of the Great War, the Department of Militia was to call a total of 1,470 men into active service. No evidence found among his documents suggests that John Wilson Boutcher was or was not one of those to be conscripted.*

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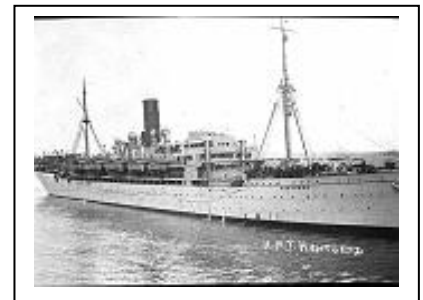
Many of the recruits during this period are recorded as having been granted several days of a final furlough before departure for *overseas service*. Private Boutcher, Number 5940, was to be one of those to receive these several days of leave, his records showing that following some initial training he was granted home leave to the Placentia Bay community of Mussel Harbour Arm from August 17 to 28 before returning to St. John's and accordingly reporting...*to duty*...with the 3rd Battalion, but not, however, until the 12th day of the month of September – no reason appears for this among his papers and he was apparently to suffer no consequences because of the delay.

Following his enlistment and again upon his return from the aforementioned leave, it is likely that Private Boutcher, Number 5940, was ordered to report...*to duty*...and thereupon to be quartered in the temporary barracks apparently established since 1915 in the St. John's curling rink and the Prince's Skating Rink, both in the eastern end of the city.

(Right: This photograph of the Prince's Rink in St. John's with military personnel, apparently attired in uniforms of Great War vintage, on parade is from the Ice Hockey Wiki web-site. There appears to be no further information a propos.)



Some two weeks after his return to the capital, on September 22 Private Boutcher was one of the 24th Draft to leave Newfoundland. It was to take the train from St. John's to Québec (his files say Halifax but – if the date of September 22 is correct - other information makes Québec almost certain – he likely travelled *via* Halifax). There the troops embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Huntsend* and sailed for the United Kingdom on the 28th.



The three troopships in the convoy, *Victoria* and *City of Cairo* the two others, were infected with influenza: about one hundred men in all would die at sea and more were to expire after having arrived in England.

(Right above: The former German ship *Lützow*, seized by the British in 1914 and re-named *Huntsend*. – from *Old Ship Photos*)

Private Boutcher was one of those who became sick while travelling on *Huntsend*. He reported for treatment and was admitted into the ship's hospital on October 5, there to be diagnosed as suffering from pneumonia.

The son of Reuben Boutcher, fisherman, and of Emma Boutcher – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Mussel Harbour then later of nearby Mussel Harbour Arm (the name by 1921 had been changed to *Kingwell*), Placentia Bay, he was also brother to Emma-May, Arthur-Lewis, William-Henry and to Sandy.

Private Boutcher was reported as having...*died of sickness...of pneumonia...*- on board HMT *Huntsend* on October 9, 1918, and as having subsequently been...*buried at sea*.

John Wilson Boutcher had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-four years: date of birth in Mussel Harbour Arm, Newfoundland, August 21, 1894 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

Private John Boutcher was entitled to the British War Medal for his overseas service.

Note: *The Wikipedia web-site has the ship carrying six-hundred forty-nine Canadians and continues to claim the following...five percent of the Canadians died before the troopship disembarked on October 11, 1918. Some, if not all, of these men were buried at Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial, a memorial site...*



Much of this is blatantly incorrect, of course: Firstly - any Newfoundlanders on board the ship were not Canadians; secondly – of those who died on board ship during the passage (such as the above Private Leonard Hynes and also Private Charles McCarthy) at least some, likely all of them, given the contagious and lethal nature of the disease, were buried at sea; thirdly – those sick while on board but who died after having disembarked were quickly buried for the same reason.*

Their clothing and bed-linen was usually burned as soon as possible.

**The vessel docked in Plymouth, England, while Beaumont-Hamel is, of course, in France. The memorial does, however, commemorate those whose bodies were committed to the waves.*

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 30, 2023.