



Private John Butler (Regimental Number 5811) lies in Plymouth (Efford) Cemetery: Grave reference, C. 4181, General Ground.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman*, John Butler 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 July 18, 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, July 18, and at the same venue, that John Butler 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 eighteenth day of July* he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, John Butler 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. The evidence found among his documents suggests that John Butler had been one of those to be conscripted.*

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 Butler, Number 5811, was to be one of those to receive these several days of leave, his records showing that he was allowed four days from, on or about, August 16 until, on or about, August 20* when he was to report back from his home in the Conception Bay community of Bauline to his quarters in St. John's**, these likely in the *Prince's Skating Rink* in the eastern end of the city.

**The dates in his file are somewhat convoluted.*

***He was allotted a travel allowance of eight dollars in total for the journeys – apparently with the 'mailman' - to and from Bauline.*

Following his enlistment it is likely that Private Butler reported...*to duty*...to be quartered in the temporary barracks apparently established since 1915 in the St. John's curling rink and the Prince's Skating Rink in the eastern end of the city. He surely returned to there following that period of leave.

(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.)*



On September 22, Private Butler was one of the 24th Draft to leave Newfoundland. It took the train from St. John's to Port aux Basques, to North Sydney and on as far as Québec (his files record to Halifax but – if the date of September 22 is correct – and other information makes Québec almost certainly the ultimate Canadian destination – it is likely he travelled *via* Halifax, there changing trains to travel onward to Québec.

In the Port of Québec the Newfoundland troops embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Huntsend* and sailed for the United Kingdom on the 28th day of the month. Unfortunately, the three troopships in the convoy – *Victoria* and the *City of Cairo* the other two - were all infected with the influenza which was soon to engulf the world: about one hundred men in all would die at sea and more were to expire after having arrived in England.



(Right above: *The image is of the former German vessel Lützow which had been seized by the British in 1914 and re-named Huntsend. – the photograph is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site*)

Private Butler's Attestation papers record that during this period he received a promotion on September 29 to the rank of lance corporal. Again according to the same source, on October 11 he reverted to the rank of private soldier for no given reason – although his death three days later may well have been foreseen by the authorities and thus taken into consideration.

Upon his arrival in the English south-coast port harbour and Royal Navy facility of Devonport on or about October 9, Private Butler was not alone in being subsequently evacuated to the nearby *Military Hospital*. There he was diagnosed as suffering from influenza and pneumonia. A medical report reads...*Admitted cyanopsia* (looking bluish), *almost moribund, chest full of secretia but unable to expectorate* (cough). *Cardiac condition grave & did not react to usual stimulants...*



The son of Mathew Butler, fisherman, and of Martha Butler (née *Noseworthy**) to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay – of Bauline in the District of St. John's East, he was also brother to Elizabeth-Jane and Blanche and to William-James and Henry-Charles-Hatcher.

**The couple had married on December 26 of 1887 in the community of Pouch Cove.*

(Right above: *A family memorial commemorating the life and sacrifice of Private John Butler stands in the churchyard in the community of Bauline. – photograph from 2010*)

Private Butler was reported as having...*died of sickness...*- of pneumonia - at hospital in Devonport on October 14, 1918, and was buried in nearby Plymouth*.

(continued)

****He never was to report to Hazely Down Camp, head-quarters of the Regimental Depot and of the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the by-then Royal Newfoundland Regiment, established in the county of Hampshire, but he had been 'on strength' with the unit since landing in Devon. Ironically, having heard of his medical problems, the Regimental authorities were to make a recommendation that he be re-patriated as...unfit for military service..., all a little too late as it transpired.***

John Butler had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-five years. Thus far the exact date of his birth has proved to be elusive (perhaps it was in those missing pages of the Newfoundland Vital Statistics).

Private John Butler 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 Private Leonard Hynes and also Private Charles McCarthy - see elsewhere in these files) 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 on land 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 31, 2023.

