



**Private Ronald Colbert (Regimental Number 5188) is buried in the Roman Catholic Cemetery in the community of Bay de Verde.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman*, Ronald Colbert presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury\** in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on May 18\*\* of 1918. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.**

**(continued)**

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

***\*\*This was the month during which the Newfoundland Military Service Act (conscription) came into effect. From May 11 through to the end of the War, the Department of Militia called a total of 1,470 men into active service – although there appears to be no evidence among his papers to suggest that Private Colbert was one of those draftees.***

**It was to be on the day of that medical assessment, May 18, while at the same venue, that Ronald Colbert would enlist. He was thus 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 some few hours were now to follow before there subsequently came to pass, while still at the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On the same eighteenth day of that month of May he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, Ronald Colbert became...a soldier of the King.**

**Ronald Colbert was now to begin what would have been a lengthy waiting-period of nine weeks and three days before his departure on...overseas service\*. In fact, during the early days of this interval he was to be granted a ten-day period of home-leave from May 21 until May 28 (inclusive), a furlough which it may be presumed he was to spend in his home community of Red Head Cove in the District of Bay de Verde.**

**Following his enlistment it is likely that Private Colbert had 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. It may also be that he reported there for a second occasion following his home 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.)***



**However, on June 3, only days following his return to St. John's after the afore-mentioned leave and not quite three weeks after his enlistment, Private Colbert was admitted into the *Barracks Hospital* in the capital, there to be diagnosed as suffering from *La Grippe* –**

influenza. Forty-eight hours afterwards he was then transferred into the General Hospital on June 5, having by then contracted pneumonia and was reported to be...*spitting blood every morning*.

The son of John Colbert, fisherman, and Catherine Colbert (née *Hatch\**), also of Red Head Cove, Bay de Verde, he was as well brother to William, John-Francis, Richard, Leo, Anne and Joseph\*.

*\*The couple had been married in the community of Northern Bay, Bay de Verde, on November 4, 1884.*

Private Colbert was reported as having...*died of sickness...*, of *Left Lobar Pneumonia accompanied with marked exhaustion and Toxemia*, in the same General Hospital only two days later, on June 7, 1918.

*\*This last found in the Northern Bay Corpus Christi Parish Records, the others in Bay de Verde Parish Records.*

His remains having been embalmed and coffined by Mr. A. Carnell, undertaker, they left St. John's for the journey home on the express train of the evening of June 8.

The Commonwealth War Grave headstone was not shipped and delivered until June of 1923 – apparently it had been promised for 1921 - at which time the work on Private Colbert's grave was completed.

Ronald Colbert had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-one years: date of birth in Red Head Cove, Newfoundland, September 20, 1896 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register and also a copy of Newfoundland Vital Statistics.

(Right: *The sacrifice of Private Colbert is honoured on the Screen Wall in the Military Plot, Mount Pleasant Cemetery, St. John's. – photograph from 2011*)



(continued on following page)

D O Mía  
St. John's N.F.L.D.

Red Head Cove  
Jan 9<sup>th</sup> 1919

Dear Sir

I reply to your request of 2<sup>nd</sup> Inst. and give you particulars of Pte  
Ronald Colbert No 5788

1 Location of grave

Roman Catholic Cemetery Bay de Verd

2<sup>nd</sup> Just temporarily marked with small wood cross that is no headstone  
erected yet parents not in position to do so that's they particulars of they  
2<sup>nd</sup> Inst

From they father  
of Pte. Ronald Colbert  
5788

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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca).  
Last updated – January 31, 2023.