



Private Jasper Mercer (Regimental Number 5435) lies in Port Albert United Church Cemetery, Newfoundland. There are to be found both a family headstone and a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman*, Jasper Mercer presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury on May 24, 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 on the day of that medical assessment, May 24, and at the same venue, that Jasper Mercer 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.*

A further several 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 twenty-fourth day of May* he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, Jasper Mercer became...*a soldier of the King.*

**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. However, nothing amongst his papers appears to suggest under which circumstances – as a volunteer or a conscripted man – Jasper Mercer was to be taken into service.*

As many were many of his fellow recruits, Private Mercer, Number 5435, was to be granted a ten-day period of home leave – in his case, from June 16 until June 26 (*inclusive*), on which last date he was required to report...*to duty...back in St. John's**.

**In fact it appears that the date of his return was to be June 28 for which delay he apparently had a good reason – perhaps the ship was late - since no consequences appear to have been imposed upon him.*

When he did so, it is likely that Private Mercer 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.*

(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.)*



(continued)

Having presented himself at a sick parade on July 13, he was immediately admitted to the Barracks' Hospital in St. John's, his complaint at that moment classified simply as NYD (*Not Yet Determined*) and it seems to have been not until two weeks afterwards that, on July 27, he was reported as as...*very seriously ill with lung trouble*. When exactly pulmonary tuberculosis was finally diagnosed seems to have been at the earliest on July 29 when his prognosis would be changed to...*dangerously ill*.

The son of William Mercer, fisherman, and of Mary Mercer (née *Abbott**) – to whom he had left a daily allotment of sixty cents from his pay - of Little Beaver Cove (later *Port Albert*), in the District of Twillingate, he was also brother to Jennie, Edith, Lydia, Thomas-Edward, George and Alexander.

**The couple had married in the community of Musgrave Harbour on December 9 of 1888.*

Private Mercer was subsequently reported as having...*died of sickness*...– in hospital of pulmonary tuberculosis (*phthisis*) on August 17, 1918.

His remains having been embalmed and placed in a coffin by Mr. Oke, undertaker, his funeral cortege was escorted to the railway station in St. John's on August 18 to begin the journey home.

Jasper Mercer had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-three years: date of birth in Little Beaver Cove (today *Port Albert*), Newfoundland, February 2, 1896 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).



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

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.