



While the above photograph depicts a section of Halifax (*Fort Massey*) Cemetery, for the moment there is unfortunately no image available of the grave of Gunner Stockley.

Gunner Gordon Stockley, Number 476898 of the Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery, of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Halifax (*Fort Massey*) Cemetery: Grave reference S.E.G.30.

(Note: Apart from the RCHA – Royal Canadian Horse Artillery which fought with Canadian Cavalry Brigade in the British Army – apparently the Royal Canadian Field Artillery and Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery of the Permanent Militia were the only Canadian artillery units of the Great War era to officially be designated as Royal – in fact, this had been done as early as 1901; on the Western Front the designations were simply Canadian Field Artillery, Canadian Garrison Artillery and, for the entirety, simply Canadian Artillery.

Only in 1935 was the name ‘Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery’ to take the place of what had been before.

Gunner Stockley appears to have served for four months in the 1st Halifax Regiment, Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery (Militia), before having attested for overseas services, this prohibited to Militia Units. Thus he became a gunner in the Canadian Garrison Artillery being recruited for war-time service overseas: a soldier of the RCGA in the CGA.

The author will submit to the judgement of anyone who can find otherwise as this is a rather convoluted chapter of Canadian Artillery history. He has been hard put to find a concise source, official or otherwise. – A.R.)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a carpenter, Gordon Stockley appears to have left little information behind him a propos his early life in the Dominion of Newfoundland. He was seventh in a family of nine children of whom at least two eventually made their way to the Canadian province of Ontario but in the case of Gordon, Halifax, Nova Scotia, appears to be as far away from home that he was to travel.

All that may be said with any certainty about this is that he was resident there towards the end of the year 1915 for that was when he became a soldier of the Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery, 1st Halifax Regiment, of the Canadian Permanent Militia Force.

His attestation papers record that he served with the with the above-mentioned Militia unit for three or four months after when, on March 6, 1916, in Halifax, he underwent a medical examination which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. On that same day he also attested, his oath witnessed by a local justice of the peace.

It was the Commanding Officer of the R.C.G.A., Halifax, who then brought to a conclusion the formalities of Gunner Stockley's transfer and enlistment into the 6th (*Coastal Defence*) Company of the Canadian Garrison Artillery of the Canadian Expeditionary Force when he declared – on paper – that...*having been finally approved and inspected by me this day, I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this attestation.*

Things now were to proceed quickly for Gunner Stockley who within days was to be despatched overseas to *active service*. However, one is left to wonder whether the direction in which he was almost immediately sent corresponded to his expectations...and one might also wonder if the young man from one outpost of the British Empire would have even heard of the other outpost to which he was now to be delivered.

The Windward Islands are to be found in the eastern approaches to the Caribbean Sea, two of the larger and better known being the French possessions of Guadeloupe and Martinique. Further to the south is Saint Lucia, an island at first also colonized by the French – gained by treaty with the indigenous population in 1660 - who had subsequently relinquished it to - and regained it from – the English (British) a total of fourteen times. It was the latter who finally retained it at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

Both the French and the British had fortified Saint Lucia during their tenures there, latterly to protect the coaling-station, critical for the Royal Navy, from a possible attack by the United States. These installations had been abandoned in 1905 – a second source says 1907 – but the onset of war in 1914 decided the British government to ask Canada to take on the responsibility of a renewed defence of the island.

This request was conceded to in 1915, with Canada sending a small detachment* - comprising nine officers and one-hundred five *other ranks* - which disembarked there in April of 1915, the personnel having come from as far afield as the RCGA units based at Esquimault, Québec and Halifax. Its duties were now to protect the harbour and coaling-station of Castries against any enemy incursions, to sweep the entrance to the harbour at

Castries for mines each week and, a little curiously perhaps, to act as enforcement officers against smuggling.

**Apparently there was to be a total personnel of only four-hundred thirty-nine posted there, not at any one time, but during the entirety of the posting from 1915 into 1919.*

For this purpose the force had the use of two forts – those abandoned as seen above in 1905 or 1907 – four fourteen-centimetre guns sent by the French from Martinique, two six-inch guns transferred by the British from Bermuda, and a seventy-foot steam pinnace - the *Vigilant* – despatched from the British possession of Trinidad. All that had to be done before these orders were to evolve into actions was to clear the ten years or so of tropical growth in, on and about those abandoned facilities.

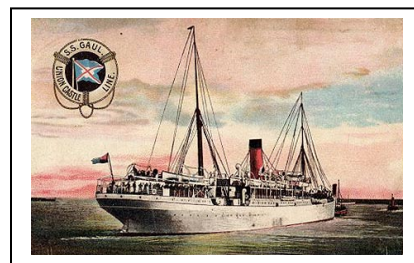
It was as a soldier of the 3rd Reinforcement Draft of the 6th Company (*St. Lucia*) that Gunner Stockley sailed from Halifax on March 10, 1916, only days after his attestation. Likely having travelled via Bermuda, he arrived in Saint Lucia on March 22 to take up his duties – to what exactly it was that he was assigned to do has, unfortunately not been recorded.

There appears to be little to report of the activities of the 6th Company and Gunner Stockley on Saint Lucia: there was no German invasion, not even the smoke of a German raider or the periscope of a U-boat reported; any smuggling undertaken appears to have been of little significance; *Vigilant* apparently performed her weekly mine-sweeping as expected of her; and Gunner Stockley earned his daily dollar plus ten cents field allowance in doing some or all of the above.

As were many of the Canadian contingent stationed there, Gunner Stockley was stricken during his tenure with *chronic malaria* for which he was hospitalized on the island from June 1 until August 22 of 1918*. Two days following this episode, on August 24, he was on his way back to Canada.

**Had he not been in hospital he would have taken ship for Canada on June 4.*

Whether he travelled to Bermuda and then onwards to home on the same ship has not been documented. However a passenger list of the Royal Mail Ship *Chaleur* shows Gunner Stockley as having been one of forty-nine military personnel to have taken passage from Bermuda to Halifax. There he and they disembarked in the harbour there on September 3, 1918.



(Right above: *The image of the SS Gaul, before being sold and re-named as Sabor, Carmartheshire, and finally Chaleur, is from an unidentified web-site.*)

Whether this was to be just a period of leave after having spent more than two years in the Caribbean, or whether it was a definitive return home is not recorded. However, he had seemingly not come back to be de-mobilized as the next report of Gunner Stockley shows him to still be serving with the Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery on October 12 when he entered hospital.

Excerpt from a final medical report issued on October 18, 1918, by the Station Hospital, Halifax: *Four days ill, chill, pain in stomach, pains in chest, cough, yellow phlegm, headache, backache, and pains all over.* – He had by then been diagnosed as suffering from both influenza and pneumonia.

The son of George Stockley, former fisherman deceased January 6, 1917, and of Bathsheba Stockley (née *Gibbs*) of the South Side, Twillingate, Newfoundland – the couple married on October 2, 1873 - he was also brother to Arthur-Stanley, George-Washington, John, Saul, Maud-Elizabeth, Blanche, Gertie and Bessie-May.

Gunner Stockley was reported by the administration of the Station Hospital, Halifax, as having *died of sickness* at a quarter to eight on the evening of October 17, 1918.

Gordon Stockley had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-three years and five months: date of birth at Twillingate, Newfoundland, September 16, 1892 (from attestation papers and parish records).

Private Gunner Stockley was entitled to the British War Medal for his overseas service. (He was eligible for it once he left Canada*.)

**Had Gunner Stockley been a soldier of the Newfoundland Regiment he would have been eligible for the British War Medal when he left Newfoundland, since Canada was a foreign country. However, he had enlisted into a Canadian battalion which meant that he would have had to leave Canada to be eligible for the medal. (Had he been transferred back to serve in Newfoundland as a Canadian soldier, he would also been awarded the decoration.)*



The Caribbean was not recognized as having been a theatre of war, therefore Gunner Stockley was not eligible for the Victory Medal.

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 25, 2023.