



Sergeant Patrick Edward Timmons (also found as *Timmins* and *Timns*), Number 502118 of the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps Reserve, is buried in Holyrood South Side Cemetery.

(Right: *The image of the cap badge of the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps is from the EMEDALS.COM website.*)



(continued)

His occupations prior to military service recorded as both those of master mariner and machinist, the 1904 Business Directory for Holyrood suggests that he may also have turned his hand to farming – perhaps with his father - at or about that time.

His origins are a little harder to accurately record. His father Lawrence is documented as having been born in Wicklow, Ireland – although this is not entirely clear as Newfoundland Vital Statistics cite Holyrood as his birth-place - and Patrick Edward (or *Edward Patrick* as on his headstone and in his signature) on his attestation papers is recorded as having been born in County Tipperary in 1879 or 1883.

That may not be correct. His parents, Elizabeth – she recorded in Newfoundland Vital Statistics as born in Holyrood - and Lawrence – likewise recorded – have also been documented by a descendant as having had six children: Bridget, Catherine, Patrick-Edward, John-Lawrence, Maud and Lawrence, the first three births found in Harbour Main Parish Records – the last three were written into the new Holyrood Parish Records, only apparently later to be lost in a fire.

By the time of his enlistment however, Patrick Edward Timmons had left the Dominion of Newfoundland behind, having emigrated to the westernmost province of Canada, British Columbia. In the meantime, however, he had served in the Army of the United States of America during the Spanish-American War – that is to say during 1898 – but no further details appear among his papers.

His enlistment into Canadian uniform is documented as having taken place on September 29, 1915, in the community of Prince Rupert, but little else is recorded about the event.

It was three days afterwards, also in Prince Rupert, on October 2, that Patrick Edward Timmons underwent a medical examination, a procedure that pronounced him as...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. Three days later yet again, he attested, still reportedly in Prince Rupert, his oath witnessed by a local magistrate of that area. By the next day he had apparently made the journey from there to the city of Vancouver (see following paragraph). Then on October 9, on this occasion the venue not having been recorded but likely Vancouver*, it was declared by an anonymous authority that...*having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

According to his first pay records, Private Timmons was temporarily *taken on strength* by the 72nd Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Seaforth Highlanders of Canada*) on that October 6, 1915, and was assigned the Regimental Number 129971*. This arrangement lasted for some four weeks before he was transferred on November 4 to the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps Reserve and assigned another Number: 502118**.

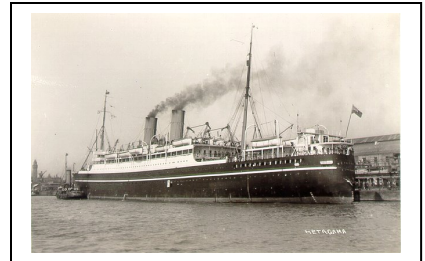
**By this time the Battalion was already undergoing training in Vancouver at Hastings Park.*

***The first three digits of the Regimental Number designate the unit by which the recruit was first taken on strength. Even though a soldier might later be transferred to another formation, his number was usually kept by him during his entire military career. The change of Private Timmon's number to the 502... of the CORCC (Reserve) is one of the very few exceptions to this rule.*

No reasons for this transfer appear among his papers although it may be speculated that his job as a machinist was with a railway company. Whatever the case he was very soon to be on a train to Montreal where during the month of October the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps Reserve had begun to mobilize at the *Peel Street Barracks*.

The Corps Reserve was then divided into two detachments for passage to the United Kingdom: the first, comprising a single officer and one-hundred twenty *other ranks* – including the newly-designated *Sapper Timmons* – boarded the *SS Metagama* on November 20 in the harbour at Montreal to sail later that day; the second contingent, a smaller one comprising one officer and just twenty *other ranks* was to sail three days following from Saint John, New Brunswick on board the *SS California*.

Metagama had not been requisitioned as a troopship but during the course of the Great War was to carry military personnel on her regular commercial routes. Thus Sapper Timmons' Railway Corps Reserve was to travel not only in the company of the 1st Canadian Pioneer Battalion and a draft of the 71st Canadian Infantry Battalion, but also with a number of civilian passengers.



(Right above: *Metagama* was an ocean-liner of the Canadian Pacific fleet, at times employed to carry Canadian forces personnel but as part of her commercial ocean crossings. Her sister ship, *Missanabie*, was requisitioned by the British government to serve as a troop transport and was eventually torpedoed and sunk on September 9, 1918.



The image is from the Great Ships web-site.)

(Right above: *The harbour of Plymouth-Devonport as it was almost a century after the Great War: as can be seen, it is a lot less busy nowadays. - photograph from 2013)*

The vessel crossed the Atlantic in nine days and after an uneventful crossing, put into the English south-coast naval port and facility of Plymouth-Devonport. Having then disembarked on the morrow, November 30, the unit was placed on board a train and transported to *Longmoor Camp* in the county of Hampshire.

Three days later the second draft arrived, also via Plymouth, making a unit strength of five officers and one-hundred fifty-nine *other ranks*. For the remainder of that December... *The Reserve was employed partly on Infantry Training and partly in making Camp Roads and loading Mechanical stores for transit to the Corps in the Field* (This is the entire Corps Reserve War Diary entry for December, 1915).

But Sapper Timmons was not to do much training, or road-building, or loading: by December 10 at the latest he was in hospital - where he was to spend most of the following nine months.

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He had begun to experience pains in his legs on November 28 while on board ship. Then...*after a route march noticed swelling about ankle & reported to M.O. Was sent to hospital with Varicose Vs & operated upon Dec 10th, 1915, in both legs above and below knees...(Excerpt from his Medical Case Sheet).*

The hospital was Frensham Hill Military Hospital in the neighbouring county of Surrey, and having been admitted there on December 10, 1915, - one paper suggests the date as early as December 2-3 - he was to remain there for forty-one days, until January 21 of the New Year, 1916. From there he was then forwarded to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Bearwood Park, Wokingham, where he stayed until his *release to duty* on March 30, some ten weeks later, and where, apparently, he began to experience breathing difficulties*.

**There is an official document among Sapper Timmons' papers – Medical History of an Invalid, dated February 10, 1917 - which reports him to have suffered asphyxiation from enemy gas while serving at Ypres in October of 1915 – as also does his grave-stone. It is suggested that this experience was the cause of the asthma which he later was to experience.*

The paper thereupon continues to suggest that this disability was due to exposure on duty...‘Such exposure common to Trench work.’

Sapper Timmons was still in Canada in October of 1915, and was never to set foot near to Ypres, nor even on the Continent of Europe. He had spent time doing manual labour out of doors, but he had served a maximum of just nine days working with his unit in England, and not in trenches in a theatre of war – although apparently during those first days at Longmoor Camp in December of 1915 he had been afflicted with a cough and cold.

The Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps Reserve had, by the time of his release, been working for the North-Eastern Railway in the area of Newcastle-on-Tyne and at the end on March had just begun work on some sidings in the outskirts of the city.

If Sapper Timmons worked at all on this project, it was not to be for very long; within days of his arrival back to his unit, on or about April 2, he was admitted into the Military Hospital Redlands Number 4 at Reading for seven days of sick leave. There, according to a Medical Case Sheet dated a week later, on April 9, he had exacerbated the bronchitis and asthma for which he had been admitted days before.

Cases of infection such as Sapper Timmons' were a serious matter in the days before the advent of anti-biotics and often required a long period of treatment to cure*. Now also diagnosed as with emphysema, he was to remain at Reading until June 1.

**In the cases of wounds, it was often the onset of infection which was the cause of subsequent death rather than the wound itself.*

On June 2 he was sent to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at *Bearwood Park*, Wokingham, where he had convalesced some four months before*. Apart from bronchitis and asthma, Sapper Timmons** was now beginning to have recurring pains in his legs which were also beginning to exhibit signs of ulceration.

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It was thus decided to forward him for specialized massage therapy to the Granville Canadian Special Hospital at Ramsgate; he arrived there on June 9.

**One report says that after treatment at Reading he went to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Woodcote Park, Epsom, but the medical reports of the time appear to confirm that it was to Wokingham that he went on this second occasion.*

***It is at this point that a problem with his rank now commences: on June 9, upon entry into Granville Hospital, his medical history records that of 'Sapper' Timmons; three days later he is identified as 'Acting-Sergeant' Timmons. From this point onwards, while some documents cite 'Sapper', others have 'Acting-Sergeant' or simply 'Sergeant'.*

Likewise with his pay records: most, until and including the last day of his military career, record him drawing the daily dollar plus ten-cent field allowance of a private soldier; but there are others which document him receiving the one dollar, thirty-five cents plus fifteen cents due to a sergeant. And of course, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission – and his headstone – have him as a sergeant.

Yet nowhere on his Active Service Form is there notice of any promotion – in fact, given his medical history, promotion would surely have been highly unlikely – and on that ASF paper he is documented as Private (in lieu of Sapper) until the time of his repatriation.

On June 27, 1916, Sapper/Sergeant Timmons was transferred to yet another medical facility, the *Moore Barracks Hospital* at the Canadian Military complex of *Shorncliffe* in the county of Kent. *Complains of Pain over heart & shortness of breath* (from Medical Case Sheet)...problems which apparently had begun about five months previously. The Granville Hospital in Ramsgate had diagnosed *angina pectoris**.

(Right: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)



**This condition occurs when the demand by the heart for blood is not met, often due to a partial blockage of the arteries: it often results in a pains in the chest, pains which may spread to the arms and the area of the jaws.*

He had also lost a considerable amount of weight, his skin had become deeply pigmented and his abdomen was swollen in certain areas. His legs, however, appear to have responded to treatment and, although discoloured – ranging from dark bronze to dark blue - had healed. By June 29 he was sick enough for the medical staff to classify him as *seriously ill*.

On August 12, 1916, the Officer Commanding the *Moore Barracks Hospital* recommended that Sapper/Sergeant Timmons be...*discharged as medically unfit*. Nine days later, on August 21, he was removed from the *seriously ill* category and discharged from hospital.

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The subsequent *Opinion of the Medical Board* reached the following conclusions and recommendation: That the disability was permanent; that his capacity for earning a full livelihood in the general labour market was nil; that he should be discharged as permanently unfit.

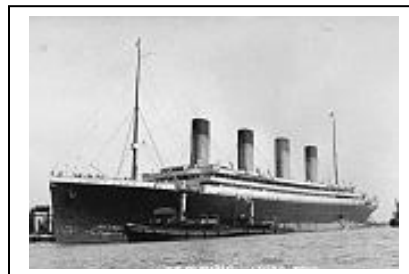
The following *Remarks* were also added: *We are unable to say that any service conditions are responsible for this trouble; but he claims that he was in first-class health when he enlisted, He will not live long, and we believe should be dealt with liberally by the Board. – Shorncliffe, August 22, 1916*

On that August 21, out of hospital, he was *struck off strength* by the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps Reserve to be immediately *taken on strength* by the Canadian Casualty Assemble Centre at nearby Folkestone* where he remained for three days.

**Obviously he made the journey to Liverpool for repatriation to Canada but whether the following interim transfers were physically undertaken by Sapper/Sergeant Timmons or if they were simply done bureaucratically – on paper – is not clear. It would have involved much travelling for someone considered to be an invalid.*

On August 24 Sapper/Sergeant Timmons was transferred to *the strength* of the Canadian Command Depot at Bath, in the West Country, this office responsible for the arrangements for discharge from the United Kingdom and for repatriation. The process was to take eleven days after which time, on September 4, he and/ or his papers were transferred to a further CCAC department, this one located on England's south coast, at Shoreham-on-Sea.

If indeed he were there, Sapper/Sergeant Timmons stay was to be short. Two days later, on September 6, His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* sailed from Liverpool en route to Halifax with him on board and where it arrived on September 11.



(Right: Olympic – one of the largest ships afloat at the time - was the sister ship of Britannic, sunk in the Mediterranean in November of 1916, and of the ill-starred Titanic. The image is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

The months following Sapper/Sergeant Timmons' return to Canada are much more sparse than those of his *overseas service*. He was apparently kept *on strength*, perhaps on the Military Hospital *strength* in Halifax where he was registered as an out-patient*, until the final day of April of 1917, as this was the date on which his pay records come to a close and he began to draw from a pension of five-hundred ten dollars.

**Once again perhaps only a bureaucratic posting*

By that time he had been home in Newfoundland for at least two months as he had appeared before a Medical Board at the St. John's General Hospital on February 12, 1917. In May, still in Newfoundland, he had signalled to the military authorities his intention to reside in Holyrood and on the same document had requested further assistance from them: *I would like to reserve the right to receive medical treatment free off (sic) charge. As I have to pay a nurse to wait on me. - Serg. E.P. Timmons*

The son of Lawrence Timmons, fisherman and farmer (deceased 1921), and of Elizabeth Timmons (née *Lewis*) of Holyrood, Newfoundland, he is recorded as having been one of six children (see further above). His dossier also suggests him as having a son, P.R. Timmons, of Holyrood, whom he at times has recorded as his next of kin.

Former Sapper/Sergeant Timmons is recorded as having died in Holyrood on August 17 of 1917. There appear to be no further details of his passing.

Patrick Edward (*Edward Patrick*) Timmons had enlisted at the *apparent* age of thirty-eight years: date of birth - recorded on his attestation papers and other papers - at Clonmell, County Tipperary, Ireland, October 5, 1879 or 1883 or even 1877; but also date of birth – recorded on Harbour Main Parish Records – at Holyrood, Newfoundland, October 6, 1882*.

**His headstone cites his death at age thirty-four years and ten months which, logically, makes the date of October 1882 the correct date.*

Sapper/Sergeant Patrick Edward Timmons was entitled to the British War Medal for his overseas service.



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 24, 2023.