



(Private) Albert Brenton (Regimental Number 3874) lies buried at Ship Cove, Burin, in the Old Anglican Churchyard Cemetery.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman*, Albert Brenton was a volunteer of the 15th Recruitment Draft who travelled to St. John's to join the Newfoundland Regiment. Whether or not he was to undergo a medical examination prior to leaving home or upon arrival in St. John's – or perhaps both – appears to be unrecorded on any paper to be found among his personal records.

Those records soon become contradictory: his enlistment papers document him enlisting and attesting at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury...*for the duration of the war*...on June 25 of 1917; yet his *War Gratuity* form and the *Medical History of an Invalid* - this dated January 25, 1918, have him having done so on November 18 of 1916, some seven months prior; a third official document, an earlier *Medical History* seemingly from September of 1917, cites July 2 as the day of his enlistment*.

In both cases, nevertheless, it appears that Albert Brenton attested, taking an oath of allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, on the day of his enlistment. Thus Albert Brenton was to become a...*soldier of the King*...on either November 10 or 18, 1916, or on June 25 of 1917.

(Right below: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India* – the photograph is taken from the *Bain News Services* as presented by the *Wikipedia* web-site.)

**The case of Private Brenton was to pass before two separate Medical Boards in the course of the two above-mentioned months. Their findings were not always in agreement.*

A further medical assessment and subsequent opinion was undertaken of Private Brenton on July 4, 1918. It was to recommend his further treatment in a sanatorium for a period of at least a further three months. This document records his military service having been from November 10 of 1916 until that July 4 recorded immediately above, a period of one year and seven months.



Once again, however, the evidence is contradictory: A 'Conduct Sheet' records nothing other than his demobilization on December 7, 1918, and that the total length of his 'Period with Colours' had been 1 and 166/365 years – in other words five-hundred thirty-one days – which in this case shows the date of his enlistment to have been June 25, 1917.

His Regimental Number, 3874, also suggests that June 25 is by far the more likely of the two dates.

His papers* record that Private Brenton did not leave St. John's until August 4 of that year. On that day he apparently marched down to St. John's harbour and boarded the Bowring Brothers vessel, *Florizel* (right)*. The destination was Halifax, Nova Scotia, from where the Newfoundland draft now took ship – thus far un-identified: maybe *Missanabie* but this is far from certain - to cross the Atlantic to the United Kingdom.



(Right above: *The image of 'Florizel' at anchor in the harbour at St. John's in October of 1914 is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.*)

Apparently the voyage went well according to a letter sent from *'The Armouries'* in Halifax by Major Carty, the accompanying officer who had in his charge not only Private Brenton's draft but a detachment of Newfoundland Foresters all of whom were now to await that trans-ocean passage.



His only worry had been Private Brenton (Number 3874) who had come down while on board ship with a medical problem: a case of appendicitis.

(Preceding page: *The Halifax Armoury, its construction begun in 1895, is still an imposing edifice in the city of Halifax to this day.* – photograph from 2019)

**A letter written for Private Brenton – he, like many others, was illiterate – in hospital in Halifax and dated October 15, reads: About 3 months ago I left St. John's and landed at Halifax, where I was put in the Station Military Hospital...(He was asking for pay which, up until that time, he had not received.)*

This is supported by the War Gratuity papers which record him as admitted into hospital in Halifax on July 6.

The hospital in question was, as recorded above, the military hospital in Halifax. While one of his records cites the reason for his admission as being appendicitis, others appear to agree that there was also soon to be the problems of pleurisy and tuberculosis – in the chest and wrist. Some papers appear to postulate the illness as having been at least partially the result of exposure and of having been...*kicked by a horse...*some years before – causes later dispelled by other medical authorities., since the disease is caused by a bacillus.

Curious though that a memo from the office of the Department of Militia in St. John's would state: *That the man was accepted as fit for Active Service is presumptive evidence that he had no Tuberculosis.*

**The same source claims that Private Brenton never saw overseas service. While it is true that he never travelled to France or Belgium to join the British Expeditionary Force on active service, it must be remembered that Canada at the time was foreign soil and thus Private Brenton did serve overseas, however brief that service may have been. The proof is the medal to which he was entitled which is to be seen further below.*

Tuberculosis having subsequently been agreed upon to be his problem, at the beginning of October Private Brenton was transferred from hospital in Halifax to the Nova Scotia Sanatorium in Kentville.

It was at this point that there may have been a little bit of bureaucratic juggling performed. It was arranged for Private Brenton to be discharged – the term *demobilized* is also used, perhaps a distinction without a difference - from the by-then Royal Newfoundland Regiment on December 7, 1918 – while still in Canada* - and to be *taken on strength* by the (Canadian) Department of Soldiers Civil Re-Establishment to ensure his continued treatment since medical advice of November 21 had not been in favour of his return to Newfoundland – although it might be possible later.

Thus Private Brenton was to remain undergoing treatment in the Kentville (*Camp Hill*) Sanatorium.

**Apparently personnel of the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment could not be officially discharged from the unit until such time as they had returned to Newfoundland – see the case of Private George Hollett elsewhere in these files.*

On January 25 of the New Year, 1918, it was recommended by a Medical Board that he continue treatment for at least a further six months and that he also be...*discharged from service* – which as seen above had apparently already, perhaps discreetly, been done.

Private Brenton apparently remained in Nova Scotia for that period of time and then for the months recommended by the July 4, 1918, Medical Board as seen further above. In fact, he was still a patient there by May of the following year, 1919.

What subsequently transpired is suggested by what follows here:

**Excerpts from correspondence sent by the Office of the Commanding Officer of No. 6 District Depot, Hospital Section, Halifax, on August 6, 1919:*

i)...to state that the marginally noted man is in Sanatorium here and has been since May 20, 1919...

ii)...I had the following wire from Halifax on May 10th: ...in hospital here long time still needs treatment but refuses remain Canada...

iii)...to which I replied on May 12th: Please furnish Brenton pass to Saint John's Newfoundland and order him to report to Board of Pension Commissioners on arrival.

Private Brenton subsequently returned to Newfoundland on an apparently unrecorded date. His treatment now continued, according to a letter written by his mother, at the *Escasoni Hospital* in St. John's.

The son of John Brenton (also found as *Brinton*, deceased from tuberculosis on October 25, 1920) and of Frances (*Fanny*) Brenton (*née Clark*) – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Burin North Side, he was also brother to William-James, John-Richard, John-James, George-Richard Richard-Clark, Lydia-Maud, Laura-Mary, Ernest-Albert*, and to Richard who was to serve in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve (Number 1523x) – he survived the conflict.

Albert Brenton was reported as having died in the *Escasoni Hospital* in St. John's on December 9 of 1919.

He had enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years and eight months: date of birth, September 4, 1899 - from his medical history as issued by the Kentville Sanatorium in Nova Scotia .

**According to his mother Ernest-Albert (she says Albert-Ernest) was the Private Albert of this dossier. However the Newfoundland Vital Statistics record his birth on September 21 of the year 1896 which obviously does not correspond with the date given in the preceding paragraph.*

Private Albert Brenton was entitled to the British War Medal for his overseas service.

It was not until November of 1925 that the Commonwealth head-stone for Private Brenton's grave was forwarded from St. John's to Burin by rail and steamer.

