



(Above left: The Elliston War Memorial on which – at the time of the photograph – the name of Private Thomas Coles does not appear – photograph from 2014)

Private Thomas Coles (Number 3180025) of “A” Company of the 1st Depot Battalion (Nova Scotia Regiment) is buried in the United Church Cemetery in the community of Elliston (formerly Bird Island Cove), Trinity Bay, Newfoundland.

(continued)

His previous occupations recorded as those of both fisherman and labourer, Thomas Coles was likely the young man documented as arriving on board the SS *Kyle* from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland, at North Sydney, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, on November 22 of 1917. From there, the reason not recorded, he was to go by train to the town of New Glasgow.

Having both enlisted and attested in Halifax on December 18 of that same 1917, he then underwent medical examination on the following day, December 19, and was found to be *fit for service*. He had presumably only recently travelled up to Halifax and solely for the purpose of enlistment, as his address at this time is cited simply as *the Armouries*, Halifax.

On January 21 of 1918, Private Coles was attached to "A" Company of the 1st Depot Battalion of the Nova Scotia Regiment*. His records do not document at which time he was despatched from Halifax to Camp Aldershot, the Army training establishment in the vicinity of Kentville, but they *do* show that he was stationed there at the time of the unfortunate misunderstanding entered below.

**The task of the Depot Battalions was to instil only a minimum of training and discipline in the incoming recruits before despatching them to the Canadian Reserve Battalions in the United Kingdom to complete the job. It is not unlikely that Private Coles was granted leave to home (see below) in anticipation of his departure overseas.*

It was apparently then only a matter of weeks before Private Coles was granted a leave of absence to visit his home, although the exact date seems not to appear on his records. It may well have been in February as he was charged as being *Absent Without Leave* on March 1, 1918. Three weeks later again he was *struck off strength* and further recorded as *thought to be a deserter*. These were both errors, mistakes which were later rectified.

In fact, Private Coles had fallen ill during this period, a victim of the influenza epidemic of that time. His casualty report reads merely: *Elliston, Trinity Bay, Nfld. at his home*. And a further paper reads: *Desertion cancelled soldier died whilst on leave 22/3/18*.

The son of Richard Coles, fisherman, and Jemima Coles of Elliston, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Noah, to Agnes and to Susanna. Private Coles was reported as having *died of sickness* at home on March 22, 1918.

Thomas Coles had enlisted at the *apparent* age of eighteen years and three months: date of birth, March 18, 1899.

Private Coles was likely not entitled to any medal for his service as his record does not suit the necessary criteria*: and his name does not appear on the British medal rolls. Having enlisted in a Canadian unit, he remained in Canada during his period of service – the leave granted back to his home in Newfoundland was unlikely to be counted as *overseas service***.

****On the other hand, those Newfoundlanders in the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment who died of sickness in Nova Scotia while in transit to the United Kingdom were considered to have served on foreign soil as, of course, Newfoundland was an independent Dominion of the British Empire at the time.***

*****This opinion, however, is not confirmed in any of the few papers in Private Cole's file.***

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 27, 2023.