

Ottawa author honours Newfoundlanders who fought at Gallipoli, 100 years ago



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Ottawa author Chris Morry is visiting Gallipoli this week to mark the 100th anniversary of the battle his grandfather's Newfoundland Regiment fought in. The screech is a tribute to a young soldier who was killed there. Blair Crawford / Ottawa Citizen

Later this week, Ottawa's Chris Morry will place a small bottle of screech on a grave in Gallipoli.

It's a tribute to Newfoundlanders, like Morry's grandfather, who played a key role in the First World War campaign a century ago, and a boy soldier his grandfather couldn't protect.

"I'm there to represent my grandfather and to represent the family," said Morry, a retired scientist with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans who wrote a book about his grandfather's war, *When the Great Red Dawn is Shining*.

The men of the Newfoundland Regiment (they would later be granted a “Royal” title by King George V), landed at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli, the night of Sept. 19-20, 1915, when the campaign was already a lost cause and British commanders were looking for a way to save their devastated army. Among them was Howard Morry, a 30-year-old private — ancient by army standards — who was the son of a fisherman from Ferryland, 80 kilometres south of St. John’s.

“Dad Morry”, as his grandson calls him, would spend a year in action. After Gallipoli, he would survive the slaughter of Beaumont-Hamel at the Battle of the Somme, then be sent to Ypres where, delirious with fever, he convalesced in a flooded, rat-infested basement near the front line. Howard Morry compiled his wartime experience in dozens of journals he began writing in the years after the war.

“They’re the words of an enlisted soldier,” Chris Morry said. “He had no ambition to be an officer. He just told things as the average soldier saw them.”



Pte. Howard Morry (second from right in the back row) was a 30-year-old private in the Newfoundland Regiment who landed at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli on Sept. 19-20, 1915. Blair Crawford / Ottawa Citizen

Howard Morry was already ill with dysentery when he landed at [Gallipoli](#), where the Newfoundlanders were tasked with covering the allied withdrawal. Though not yet part of Canada, the Newfoundlanders were the only North American soldiers involved in the disastrous campaign to attack Turkey, the German Kaiser's Mediterranean ally.

To fool the Turks into thinking they faced a stronger force than they did, the Newfoundlanders set up a hundred rifle positions that were fired by just a handful of men crawling from post to post. Howard Morry was among the last 25 soldiers to withdraw.

Since Howard was so much older than the others in the unit, younger soldiers saw him as a talisman and thought that if they stayed close they would be protected. One of those was 19-year-old private David Carew. According to Howard's journal, he and Carew were digging a trench when Howard was called away.

"He (Carew) said, 'Don't leave me or I'm going to get killed'," Chris Morry said. "Later, he stood up while he was digging and he was shot by a Turkish sniper."

Morry is taking a bottle of screech to place at Carew's grave at Hill 10 Cemetery in Gallipoli.

After the withdrawal from Gallipoli, the Newfoundlanders sailed to Marseilles, France, and were sent into the line for the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. On the morning of July 1, nearly 800 men charged from their trenches at Beaumont-Hamel straight into German machine-gun fire. Within 30 minutes, nearly all were dead, wounded or missing.

Howard Morry — who had married while training in Scotland and had a newborn daughter — was among those kept in reserve to carry supplies forward to the front line. He was one of the 68 men who, famously, were the only ones to answer regimental roll call the next morning.

"They were supposed to carry supplies and ammunition up to the others, but there was really nothing for them to do. There was no one left," Chris Morry said.

Over the next week, Morry and the remaining men would crawl out to the battlefield, collecting identity papers from the dead and pushing bodies into shallow graves. By the time the regiment was sent to its next major battle at Ypres, Howard Morry was too sick to fight. He was sent back to England in September 1916. He eventually returned to Ferryland, fishing and farming until he died, in 1972.

Though Chris Morry remembers his grandfather as "happy-go-lucky," it was clear that the memory of war lingered. As a boy, Chris would walk with 'Dad Morry' along Water Street in St. John's where his grandfather would stop and talk with every derelict down-and-outer in a doorway.

"I was getting pretty embarrassed about it," Chris recalled. "He explained to me that these were all fellow brothers in arms. They all had been affected by the war."

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