

Second Lieutenant Henry (*Harold*) George Barrett, MM, (Regimental Number 798\*), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

*\*Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were not considered as enlisted. These officers thus had no Regimental Number allotted to them.*

*And since officers did not enlist, they were not then required to re-enlist 'for the duration', even though, at the beginning, as a private, they had volunteered their services for only a limited time – twelve months.*

Harold Barrett presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on December 3, 1914, a procedure which was to thereupon pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

He enlisted some three weeks later – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10, including a daily ten-cent field allowance - on December 26, Boxing Day, of that same year. Further documents note that this was also the date on which he underwent attestation.

Harold Barrett was a recruit of the Second Draft.

Some six weeks later he embarked via the sealing tender *Neptune* onto His Majesty's Transport *Dominion* – the vessel having anchored off Bay Bulls, a small harbour to the south of St. John's, because of difficult ice conditions. By that time, however, he was no longer a private soldier, having been promoted to the rank of lance corporal, on January 26, of 'C' Company, the first re-enforcement for the Newfoundland contingent which had already sailed for the United Kingdom in early October of 1914\*.



*\*And thereafter to become known to Newfoundland history as the First Five Hundred – and the Blue Puttees.*

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(Preceding page: *The image of the steamer Dominion is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. An older vessel, she was to be requisitioned during the Great War as a store and supply ship. She survived the conflict to be scrapped in 1922.*)

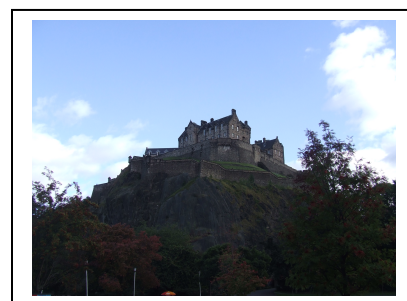
*\*There appears to be some confusion in some sources as to whether these troops were 'C' or 'D' Company. However, 'D' Company was to go overseas some time later on 'Stephano' to Halifax and then on Orduña to Liverpool.*

(Right: *The photograph of personnel of 'C' Company on board the Neptune on the way to the harbour at Bay Bulls is from the Provincial Archives.*)



Having disembarked in mid-month in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool, the Newfoundlanders entrained for Edinburgh, that aforementioned first Newfoundland Regiment contingent of October, 1914, having by this time been posted to the historic Castle in Scotland's capital city. There they were to provide the garrison, thus having been the first overseas unit to do so.

Lance Corporal Barrett's Company reported to duty at Edinburgh Castle on February 16. Some three months later, during the middle of spring, the Newfoundlanders moved to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.



(Right: *Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from its position on the summit of Castle Hill. – photograph from 2011*)

For Lance Corporal Barret, *Stobs Camp* was to be the venue of a further advancement and a second stripe as he was again promoted, on this occasion rising to the rank of corporal on June 14.

(Right below: *The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915. – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent received the re-enforcements from home – 'F' Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - which would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength\*. The now-formed 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered eligible to be sent on 'active service'.



*\*This was approximately fifteen hundred, enough to man four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot in southern England.

This force, now the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

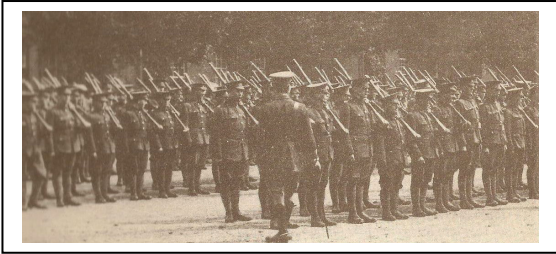


Meanwhile the two junior Companies, the later-arrived ‘E’ and aforesaid ‘F’, were sent to Scotland’s west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion.

(Right: *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* – photograph from *Bain News Services* via *Wikipedia*)

It was also to be during this period spent at Aldershot that Corporal Barrett of ‘C’ Company – he was not alone in doing so – would be prevailed upon, he on August 14, to re-enlist *for the duration of the war*\*.

*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*



(Right above: *Some of the men of ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915* – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)

(Right: *The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a ‘White Star Line’ vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)



On August 20, 1915, Corporal Barrett and his charges of ‘C’ Company embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks where, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, he disembarked with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *Kangaroo Beach, where the officers and men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is to be seen in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on ‘A’ Beach.* – photograph taken in 2011)



Just prior to that voyage, in fact on September 13, the day of his Battalion's embarkation onto *Ausonia* in the harbour at Alexandria, there was to be a third promotion: a further stripe and elevation to the rank of sergeant.

(Preceding page: *Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros: either Megantic on August 29, Ausonia on September 18, or Prince Abbas on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on Gallipoli. – from Provincial Archives*)

(Right: *A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011*)



Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion was to serve but, even since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, would prove to be little more than a debacle:

Flies, dust, disease, the frost-bite and the floods – and of course the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command\* had ever anticipated – were eventually to overwhelm the British-led forces and those of their allies, the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.



(Right above: *No-Man's-Land at Suvla Bay as seen from the Newfoundland positions – from Provincial Archives*)

(Right: *An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at Suvla Bay – from Provincial Archives*)

*\*Many of the commanders chosen were second-rate, had been brought out of retirement, and had little idea of how to fight – let alone of how to win. One of the generals at Suvla, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.*



(Right: *This is Anzac Bay in the fore-ground with the Salt Lake in the centre further away. The bottom of Suvla Bay is just to be seen on the left and adjacent to the Salt Lake, and further away again. The hills in the distance and the ones from which this photograph was taken were held by the Turks and formed a horse-shoe around the plain surrounding the Salt Lake - which was where the British and Newfoundlanders were stationed. – photograph from 2011*)



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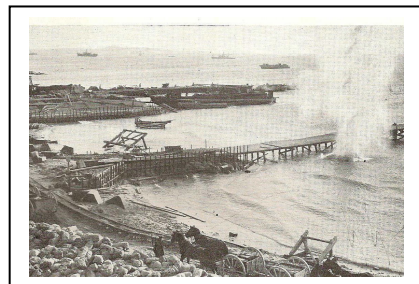
November 26 was to see a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be the priority.

There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

On the night of December 19-20, the British abandoned the area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard. Some of the Battalion personnel were evacuated to the nearby island of *Imbros*, some to *Lemnos*, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Preceding page: *Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed Achi Baba, positions which were never breached. The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011*)



The British and the *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps were also to serve at *Gallipoli* – were now only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* was undertaken.

This final operation would take place on the night of January 8-9, Lance Corporal Gardner and the Newfoundland Battalion to furnish part of the British rear-guard on this second occasion also.

(Right above: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration*)



*\*Lieutenant Owen Steele of St. John's, Newfoundland, is cited as having been the last soldier of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force to step into the final small boat to sail from the Gallipoli Peninsula.*

(Right above: *'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in that January of 1916 and by the Newfoundlanders who were to be the last soldiers off the beach: Vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011*)

Immediately after the British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of *Alexandria*. On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived there with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on board.

The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16<sup>th</sup>, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she arrived on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders landed and marched to their encampment.



There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division had yet to be decided\*.

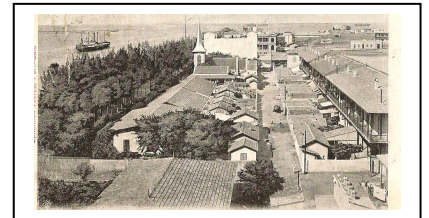
(Right above: *The image of the Blue Funnel Line vessel Nestor is from the Shipspotting.com web-site. The vessel was launched and fitted in 1912-1913 and was to serve much of her commercial life until 1950 plying the routes between Britain and Australia. During the Great War she served mainly in the transport of Australian troops and was requisitioned once again in 1940 for government service in the Second World War. In 1950 she was broken up.*)

*\*Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.*

(Right: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)*



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.



The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille on March 22.

(Right above: *Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card)*

Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.



(Right above: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseille. – from a vintage post-card)*

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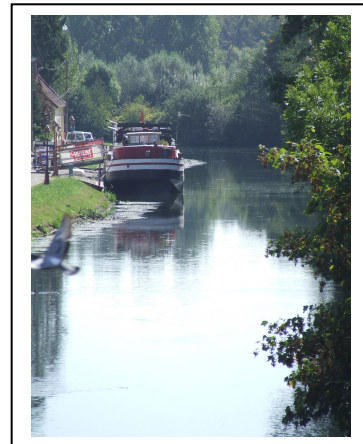
Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they had then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to become a part of their history.

(Right below: *A languid River Somme as seen from the bridge at Pont-Rémy – photograph from 2010*)

On April 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where they would be billeted, would receive reinforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front*, two of the four Companies – 'A', and 'B' – were to take over several support positions from a British unit\* before the entire Newfoundland unit was to then be ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.



*\*It should be said that the Newfoundland Battalion and two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles who were serving at the time in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lincolnshire Regiment Battalion, were then the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles - true also on the day of the attack on July 1.*

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, that flowed – and still does so today – through the region.

(Right below: *A part of the reconstituted field in the Newfoundland Park at Beaumont-Hamel: the barbed wire today serves only to prevent the tourists from wandering in the trenches – photograph from 2010(?)*)

Certain documentation – although contradicted by other - to be found among his papers suggests that it was during this period, while the Battalion was establishing itself behind the lines in such villages as Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt, that Sergeant Barrett was admitted into the 24<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in Étaples for treatment to a mild case of scabies. His stay was seemingly soon terminated and he was discharged on May 7 to the Reinforcement Depot in Rouen.

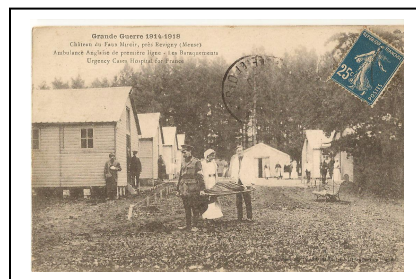


Having returned *to duty* with the Newfoundland Battalion on an unrecorded date at some time before June 28, Sergeant Barrett was wounded in the area of Beaumont-Hamel during

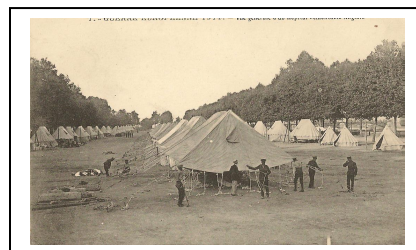
the trench raid of the night of June 27-28, there to incur severe bullet wounds – a second source cites *bomb* (grenade) wounds - to the right leg, to the left ear and to the head.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sergeant Barrett was evacuated almost immediately to the 87<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance for preliminary treatment before being transferred to the 29<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Gezaincourt. From there he was forwarded to the 2<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital at Le Havre on June 30 from where, on July 1, he was invalided back to the United Kingdom on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Asturias*, for further treatment.



(Right above: A *British field ambulance*, this one, in northern France and perhaps later on during the war, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card)



(Right: A *British casualty clearing station* – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War. Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card)



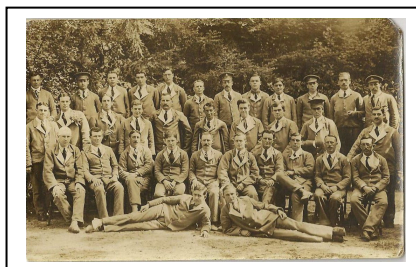
(Right: The image of HMHS *Asturias* is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Torpedoed and almost sunk in 1917, she finished the Great War as an ammunition hulk.)

Upon his arrival back in England, Sergeant Barrett was transferred to and admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. There he was to spend the following twenty-four days – at the time having been deemed to be...*dangerously ill*...before being discharged on or about July 26.



(Right: The main building of what was to become the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital during the Great War was originally opened, on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010)

(Right below: Newfoundland patients, dressed in hospital uniform but otherwise unfortunately unidentified, is seen here convalescing at the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)



There then followed the customary ten-day furlough granted to military personnel upon their release from hospital – in the case of Sergeant Barrett from on or about July 26 until on or about August 4 when he was posted to the Regimental Depot in Scotland.



It was then to be only days after his arrival there that he received an Imperial Commission and promotion to the rank of second lieutenant on August 8.

At the end of this summer of 1915, the once-Royal Borough of Ayr on Scotland's west coast was to begin to serve as the overseas base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment from where – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 - re-enforcement drafts from home were to be despatched to bolster the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.



(Right above: *An aerial view of Ayr, likely from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr, where were quartered the 'other ranks', is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)



(Right: *The High Street in Ayr as shown on a postcard of the time, the imposing Wallace Tower – it stands to this day (2017) - dominating the scene – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo.*

There now follows an episode for which there seems to be little explanation, at least not among his files:

Second Lieutenant Barrett is recorded as having been a recipient of the Military Medal: *Sgt. (Later 2nd Lieut.) Barrett, Harold G. Action Date, October 12th, 1916, Gueudecourt - London Gazette, November 9th, 1916 (Appeared in Honours Gazette, and no citation published. Letter from Ministry of Defence, Northumberland House, London. June 11/64.)*



However, according to the Regimental War Diary, Second Lieutenant Henry Barrett did not re-join the Newfoundland Battalion until November 7, 1916, more than three weeks after the action at Gueudecourt; nor was he recorded in the Regimental War Diary as having been one of the officers in action on that October 12\*.

*\*Is it possible that the award was for the operation of July 28 and mis-dated? - he having served in the trench raids of the Somme in the vicinity of Beaumont-Hamel and having been wounded while he was still a sergeant.*

*In a later letter dated February 17, Second Lieutenant Barrett writes about 'my medal' and fears that it may have been mislaid while in transit to Newfoundland – but says nothing more about it.*

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As recounted in an above paragraph, Second Lieutenant Barrett, having been ordered to leave London on October 27, was to join the Newfoundland Battalion on November 7 of 1916 during its seventeen-day withdrawal, the time being spent to the rear in the vicinity of Ville-sous-Corbie, there to re-enforce and reorganize after its efforts at Gueudecourt.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the meantime, during the period of Sergeant Barret’s hospitalization and convalescence, the Newfoundland Battalion had been fighting in the *First Battle of the Somme*. On two occasions some fifteen weeks apart, today each commemorated by a bronze Caribou which stand on the site of each encounter, the sacrifice had been horrendous; the first, of course, was to be the greatest reverse in the Regiment’s history.

(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel: Looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences: The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009*)



If there is one name and date in Newfoundland history which is etched in the collective once-national memory, it is that of Beaumont-Hamel on July 1 of 1916; and if any numbers are remembered they are those of the eight-hundred who went *over the top* in the third wave of the attack on that morning, and of the sixty-eight unwounded present at muster some twenty-four hours later\*.



*\*Perhaps ironically, the majority of the Battalion’s casualties was to be incurred during the advance from the third line of British trenches to the first line from where the attack proper was to be made, and while struggling through British wire laid to protect the British positions from any German attack.*

(Right above: *Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)*)



There are other numbers of course: the fifty-seven thousand British casualties incurred in four hours on that same morning of which nineteen-thousand were recorded as having been *killed in action or died of wounds*.

(Right above: *Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from Le Miroir*)

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It was to be the greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.

(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village. – photographs from 2010 & 2015*)

*In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists today – at the time comprising two communities: Beaumont, a village on the German side of the lines, and Hamel which was behind those of the British. No-Man’s-Land, on which the Newfoundland Memorial Park lies partially today, was on land that separated Beaumont from Hamel.*



(Right: *A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland - dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?*)

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that a German counter-assault might well annihilate what had managed to survive of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*.



The few remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion – and of the other depleted British units - had thus remained in the trenches perhaps fearing the worst, and at night searching for the wounded and burying the dead. It was to be July 6 before the Newfoundlanders were to be relieved from the forward area and to be ordered withdrawn to Englebelmer.

It had then been a further two days before the unit had marched further again to the rear area and to billets in the village of Mailly-Maillet.

(Right: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts to be seen in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John’s East. – photograph from 2009*)

There on July 11, a draft of one-hundred twenty-seven reinforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported to *duty*. They had been the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional manpower having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.



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On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved northwards by train and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of *Beaumont-Hamel*.

(Right: *The entrance to ‘A’ Company’s quarters when it was posted there in 1916 – and obviously renovated since that time: they still exist in the bowels of the medieval ramparts of the city of Ypres. – photograph from 2010*)



(Right: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916: it is described as the ‘Ville morte’.* – from *Illustration*)

*The Salient* – close to the front lines for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict - was to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders’ posting there; yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

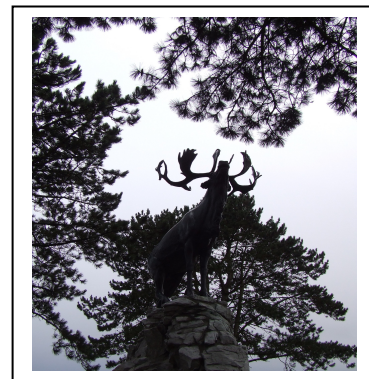
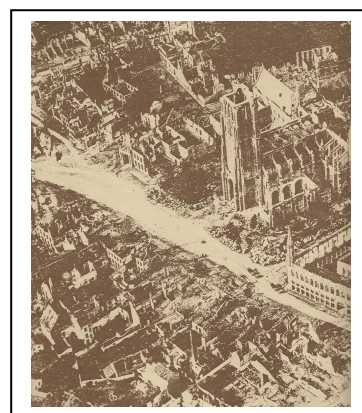
Four days after its return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was at a place called *Gueudecourt*, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of *Beaumont-Hamel*.

The encounter had proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right above: *This is the ground over which the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon.* – photograph from 2007)

(Right: *The Caribou at Gueudecourt stands at the furthest point of the Newfoundland Battalion’s advance of October 12, 1916.* – photograph from 2012)

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As seen above, it was then a matter of eighteen days before the Newfoundland unit had been withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie where, on November 7, a draft of eight junior officers, one of them Second Lieutenant Barrett, and twenty-four...*other ranks...* was to report *to duty*.

\* \* \* \* \*

After Gueudecourt, the Newfoundland Battalion continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period broken only by several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

(Right: A typical British Army Camp during rather inclement winter conditions somewhere on the Continent – from a vintage post-card)



After that welcome six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve* well to the rear, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to *active service* on January 23, although they had apparently already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

Those casualties, however, were only some of those whom Douglas Haig somewhat cavalierly referred to as *daily wastage*. The only infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during that entire period – from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and beginning of March, an action which would bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.



(Right above: *The fighting during the period of the Battalion's posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time.* - photograph from 2009(?))

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March was to be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They were even to have the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band come from Ayr, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



(Right above: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté* – from *The War Illustrated*)

\* \* \* \* \*

On March 10, before the Prime Minister's visit, Second Lieutenant Barrett was once again hospitalized, on this occasion to be diagnosed as with diphtheria, having been sent to 25<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital in Rouen. He was to remain there until April 20.

On that April 20 he was discharged to convalesce at the *Michelham Home for British Officers*, recorded in his files being at Mentone\*. It is not recorded when he next reported...*to duty*...with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, but apparently he had returned to serve with the parent unit by early May\*\*.

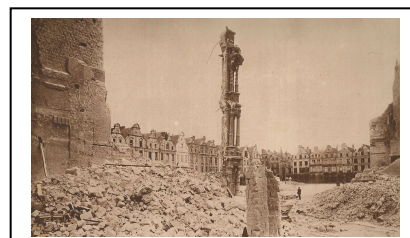
*\*This is likely Menton, on the French Riviera just on the French side of the frontier with Italy, an ally – but not one of the Allies - during much of the War.*

*\*\*A second source dates the scabies incident of the spring of 1916 instead of to this current period. This would thus have had Lieutenant Barret in the 8<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in Rouen in early May, being discharged from there to the Reinforcement Camp, also in or near Rouen, on May 7.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Second Lieutenant Barrett had once more been spared a major confrontation during his absence from his Battalion. The Newfoundland unit was to spend, as related above, much of the remainder of the month of March in the rear area but the campaign to be known as the *First Battle of Arras* was looming and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was soon to be ordered to play its role.

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had begun to make their way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, the march to finish amid the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War, early in 1916 – from Illustration*)

(Right: *The Canadian National Memorial which has stood on Vimy Ridge since 1936 – photograph from 2010*)



On April 9 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a major French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties this attack was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, its only positive episode to be the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday, 1917.



While the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, the French *Bataille du Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

(Preceding page: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community: The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, the ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux was to prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone\*.

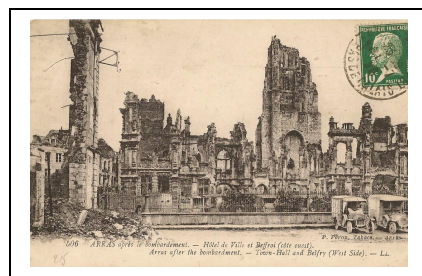


*\*It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

(Right above: *Newfoundland troops taking their ease just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from The War Illustrated*)

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This was in fact an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies. It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

Late on that same evening the Newfoundlanders had retired to the relative calm of Arras where it is not unlikely that Second Lieutenant Barrett was to report...*to duty*...early in the month of that May of 1917.



(Right above: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card*)

\* \* \* \* \*

That same month of May was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders would be moved hither and thither on the *Arras Front*, marching into and out of the trenches. While there was to be the ever-present artillery-fire, concerted infantry activity, particularly after May 15 – the end of the *Battle of Arras* - apart from the marching was limited.



(Right: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – not Bonneville - in early May, perhaps the 7<sup>th</sup>, of 1917 – from The War Illustrated*)

At the outset of June, the Newfoundland Battalion retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

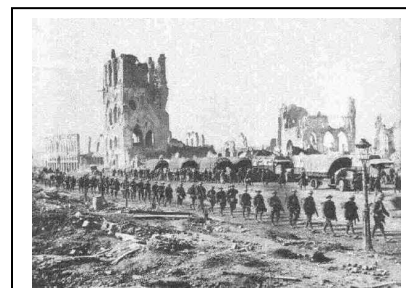
The Newfoundlanders had then soon once again been moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.

(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right* – photograph from 2014)



This low-lying area, Belgian *Flanders*, the only part of the country unoccupied by German forces, had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917.

(Right: *Troops arriving from the railway station in single file, march past the vestiges of the historic Cloth Hall and through the rubble of the medieval city centre of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer or early autumn of 1917.* – from *Illustration*)



Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917* – from *Illustration*)

(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war* – from *Illustration*)



The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army – as were to be by then the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians – all of whose troops had floundered their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Flanders.

Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9.



At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost would be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

Second Lieutenant Barrett was to play a role at only the former.

(Right above: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore close to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *The once-village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

The son\* of George Henry Barrett, former fisherman but by 1913 weighmaster at *Crosbie & Co.* – to whom as of February 1 of 1915 he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay and also to whom, on February 11, 1916, he had willed his all - of 50, Freshwater Road, St. John's, he was reported as having been *killed in action* while serving with 'C' Company on August 16, 1917, in fighting at the *Steenbeek*.

*\*His mother's Christian name was possibly Matilda.*

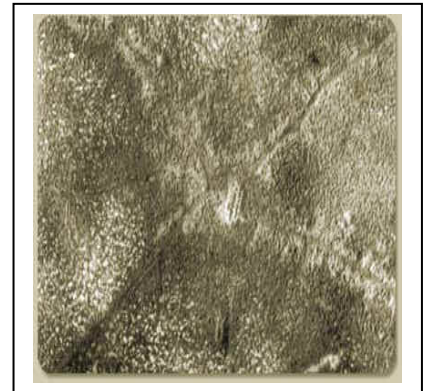
The body of Second Lieutenant Barrett was reported as having been found on the field of battle whereupon it was taken immediately to Artillery Wood Cemetery to the north-east of Ypres for burial. However, subsequent fighting was to result in his grave being destroyed and his remains being unidentified for some three years after the cessation of hostilities.

Not long after that time, a further telegram was received by the Royal Newfoundland Regiment's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Rendell, in St. John's on August 8 of 1921, which partially reads: *We have found the body of Lieut. H.G. Barrett, M.M., and have had it re-interred in Artillery Wood Cemetery\**.

(Right above: *Artillery Wood Cemetery on the Yser Canal to the north-east of Ypres – photograph from 2010*)

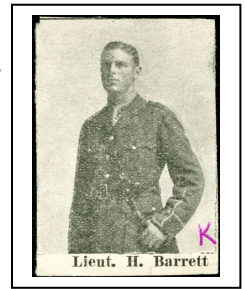
Harold Barrett had been a *declared* twenty-two years of age at the time of his enlistment: possible date of birth in the community of Old Perlican in the District of Bay de Verde, Newfoundland, September 1, 1892.

(continued)



(Preceding page: *This monument to the memory of Second Lieutenant Harold George Barrett MM stands in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John's, Newfoundland. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *The photograph of Second Lieutenant Barrett is by courtesy of the Provincial Archives.*)



Second Lieutenant Harold George Barrett MM was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



*\*The author and friends spent a fruitless – and miserable - forty-five minutes on a rainy day at the end of September, 2019, in a search for the grave. It was not to be found, nor did it appear to be in either the Artillery Wood Cemetery Register on site, or the CWGC records - Not the only mistake that the aforesaid author has made!*

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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 6, 2023.