



Lance Corporal Hector Bennett (Regimental Number 910), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

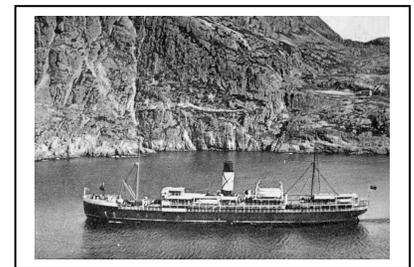


His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *cook* earning a weekly ten-dollar wage, Hector Bennett presented himself for medical examination in the west-coast community of St. George on New Year's Eve, December 31 of 1914. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*fit for Foreign Service*.

Having subsequently travelled by train to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, he was to enlist at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road – engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar plus a ten-cent Field Allowance - on January 5.

It was then to be a further sixteen days before he underwent attestation on the 21st day of the month.

Now there was to be yet a further eight weeks and two days before he would be summoned for *overseas service*. Where Private Bennett, Number 910, was to spend that time, or how he was to be occupied, has however not been recorded. Nor is it documented as to *where* he spent those several weeks: he may of course have returned temporarily to work – or simply to home, but that is only speculation.



(Right above: *The image of the Bowring Brothers' vessel 'Stephano', sister-ship of 'Florizel', passing through 'the Narrows' of St. John's Harbour is from Provincial Archives.*)

Unlike the two previous contingents to have departed Newfoundland (see below) for...*overseas service*, Private Bennett's 'D' Company was not to sail directly to the United Kingdom. On March 20, it embarked onto the Bowring-Brothers' vessel *Stephano* for the short voyage to Halifax, capital city of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, where it was thereupon to board a second vessel, the newly-launched *Orduña* for the trans-Atlantic crossing*.



(Right above: *The image of Orduña is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel was not to be requisitioned during the Great War but would be used by the Cunard Company to operate on its commercial service between Liverpool and New York.*)

Having then sailed from Nova Scotia on March 22 for Liverpool, Private Bennett and his draft landed there eight days later, on the 30th. Once disembarked in Liverpool, the two-hundred fifty men and officers of 'D' Company were thereupon transported on the same date by train directly to Edinburgh, the Scottish capital, to join the Newfoundland Regiment's 'A', 'B' and 'C' Companies.

These units were by this time stationed at the historic Castle, 'A' and 'B' having recently been posted from Fort George and 'C' having arrived directly from home (see further below). After 'D' Company's arrival at the end of that month of March, the Newfoundlanders were now to remain at Edinburgh for the following six weeks.

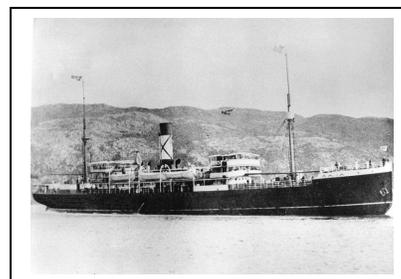


(Right above: *From its vantage point on Castle Hill, the venerable fortress overlooks the city of Edinburgh where in 1915 the Newfoundlanders were to provide the first garrison to be drawn from outside the British Isles. – photograph from 2011*)

* * * * *

Five to six months before that time, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of some five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's for the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits – these to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after a recruit's enlistment and/ or attestation. To become known to history as the *First Five Hundred* and also as the *Blue Puttees*, on that day they had boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.



The ship had sailed for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

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

(Right adjacent: *Fort George, constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, still serves the British Army to this day. – photograph from 2011*)



In the United Kingdom this first Newfoundland contingent was to train in three venues during the late autumn of 1914 and then the winter of 1914-1915: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland at *Fort George* – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; and lastly at Edinburgh Castle – where, as recorded beforehand, it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent* - would arrive directly from Newfoundland.

**This contingent, while a part of the Newfoundland Regiment, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

* * * * *

As seen in a previous paragraph, for the month of April and the first days of May of 1915, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies, now united, were to furnish the garrison – the first troops from outside the British Isles to do so - of the guardian of Scotland's capital city. Then, during the first week of May, 'E' Company was to report there...*to duty*...from home. Seven days later again, on May 11, the Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

On that day, some seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit was dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

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

(Right: *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*)



**This was approximately fifteen hundred, sufficient to furnish 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. This force, now the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



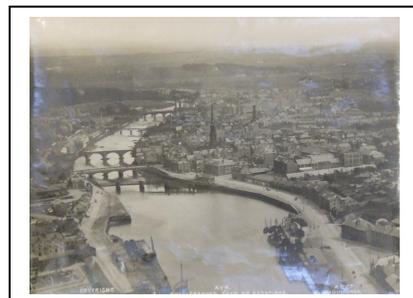
Meanwhile the two junior Companies, 'E' – last arrived at Edinburgh - and the aforementioned 'F', were ordered transferred to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

(Right above: *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 from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)

For reasons which are not apparent – but perhaps a rather full charge sheet against him may have played a role - Private Bennett was not among those who were posted to Aldershot, thence to Turkey, despite being a soldier of ‘D’ Company. Thus he made the short cross-country journey from *Stobs Camp* to *Ayr*.

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 2nd (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 1st Battalion’s numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.

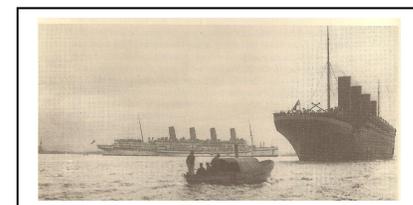


(Right above: An aerial view of *Ayr*, likely from the period between the Wars: *Newton-on Ayr*, where were quartered the ‘other ranks’, is to the left of the *River Ayr* and the *Royal Borough*, where were housed the officers, is to the right. – by courtesy of the *Carnegie Library at Ayr*)



(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*.

On November 14 of 1915, the 1st Re-enforcement Draft from *Ayr*, Private *Bennett* numbered among its ranks, passed through the English south-coast naval port of *Devonport* and boarded His Majesty’s Transport *Olympic*, sister ship of *Britannic* and the ill-starred *Titanic*. Although it was not acknowledged at the time, perhaps logically enough, the draft was being sent to re-enforce the failure of the *Gallipoli Campaign*, and more precisely, that of the *Suvla Bay* landing.

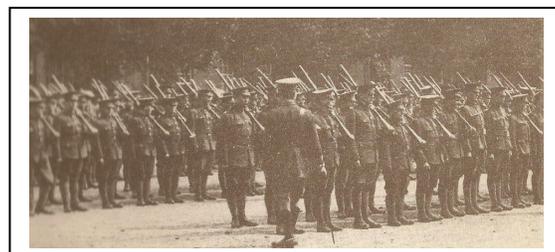


On December 1, having been transferred onto smaller craft at *Mudros Bay* in the Greek island of *Lemnos*, the Newfoundlanders from *Ayr* landed at *Suvla Bay* to report to duty with the Newfoundland Battalion. Some three weeks later, the British evacuated the place.

(Right above: *Olympic* at right with *Aquitania* in the centre of the frame, anchored in *Mudros Bay* in the autumn of 1915 – photograph from the *Imperial War Museum*, London)

* * * * *

(Right: Some of the personnel of ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at *Aldershot* in August of 1915, prior to its departure to active service on the *Gallipoli Peninsula* – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. *Nicholson*, C.D.)



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

(Right below: *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.*



November 26 would see the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; there was to be 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.

This, then, was the situation into which Private Bennett's re-enforcement draft from Ayr had stepped when it set foot, on December 1, onto the sand and stone of *Kangaroo Beach*.

* * * * *

At *Suvla Bay*, the British positions were becoming more and more untenable and thus on the night of December 19-20, the area was abandoned – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.



Some of the Battalion personnel were to be evacuated to the nearby island of *Imbros*, some to *Lemnos*, further away; but in neither case would the respite be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *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*)

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

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

This final operation took place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion to furnish part of the British rear-guard on this second occasion also.

**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: 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in 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 1st Battalion on board.



The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16th, 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.

Once at Suez, the Newfoundlanders were now to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th 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 1st 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)



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

(continued)

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



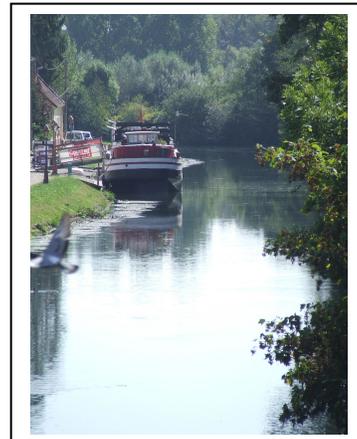
The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.

(Right above: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseille.* – 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.

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 then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.



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

On April 13, the 1st Battalion subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive re-enforcements 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 then 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 2nd 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.*



(Preceding page: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)*)

Having then been withdrawn at the end of that April to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders were soon to be preparing for the upcoming 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.

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*.

(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*)



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



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



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*.

It was to be the largest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage 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 and 2015*)



(continued)

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.

Private Bennett apparently was not to play a role with the Newfoundland Battalion on July 1 at Beaumont Hamel. The record shows that he had already been posted to the Divisional Base Depot at Rouen on July 6, but for how long he had been there before that date is seemingly not to be found among his papers – although others in the same situation are recorded as there by June 30.

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

*** * * * ***

On that same July 6, Private Bennett boarded HM Transport *Queen Alexandra* and returned from France to the United Kingdom: his *time* had expired*.



****He had enlisted for a single year as had all of the early recruits to the Regiment. Most of the others had already been prevailed upon to re-enlist for the duration of hostilities, but not Private Bennett. Therefore he was in theory free to return home to Newfoundland – but he got only as far as Ayr.***

(Right: The image of the *Queen Alexandra* is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. She was a new, fast vessel built in 1912 to replace a previous ship of the same name and was requisitioned in 1915 to be a troop-carrier. She operated between England and France and on May 9, 1918, rammed and sank a German U-boat off the French coast near Cherbourg. She survived the Great War, served as an accommodation ship in the Second, and was finally taken out of service in 1958.)



Upon arrival in England he was transferred north to Scotland, to the Regimental Depot at Ayr to await passage home. There the recruiting officers presumably did their job because, on July 17, Private Bennett elected to re-enlist*. He nevertheless did not return immediately to the 1st Battalion, but remained at Ayr for the next eleven weeks.



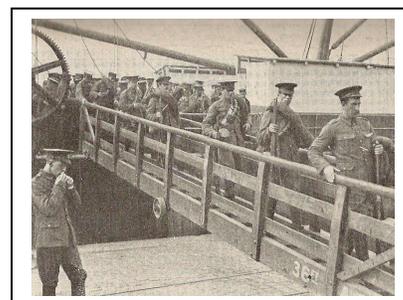
****It was not an easy decision for those in Private Bennett’s position to make. Many of these young soldiers from Newfoundland were irreplaceable fishermen whose families were absolutely dependent on them and whose service in the Army increased hardship on those at home. The position in which the death of one of these men left those dependent on them, is literally beyond description and to judge them as cowards or shirkers, as has been done, shows only an ignorance by these critics of Newfoundland’s history.***

(continued)

(Preceding page: *The new race-course at Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden: a part of the original grandstand survives.* – photo from 2012)

On October 3 of 1916, the 11th Re-enforcement Draft was dispatched from Ayr, Private Bennett for a second time thus embarking in the English south-coast port of Southampton en route back to the large British Expeditionary Base at Rouen, the capital city of Normandy. The contingent disembarked there on the 4th, one day later, and Private Bennett found himself back at a by-now familiar Base Depot, on this occasion for organizing and for final training* before moving on to a rendezvous with the Newfoundland Battalion.

(Right: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front.* – from *Illustration*)



*Apparently the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.

Having been despatched soon after its arrival in Rouen, the main body of Private Bennett's draft from Rouen – a large detachment - was recorded as having...*Joined Battalion...* on October 14. This is only in a sense true as, upon its arrival - in fact on October 12 - it had reported to, and had remained confined to, the Transport Lines to the rear.

The Newfoundland unit had been occupied at the confrontation just eastward of the community of Guedecourt on that earlier date (see further below) and it was not until October 14 that the new arrivals had been parcelled out to the four now-depleted fighting Companies to replace their recent losses.

Private Bennett was back on...*active service.*

* * * * *

In the meantime, early during the period of Private Bennett's absence from the Newfoundland Battalion, it had fought on that catastrophic first day of...*First Somme.*

After those 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.

(Preceding page: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts 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 re-enforcements – 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 man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion had still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1st Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved northwards 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.

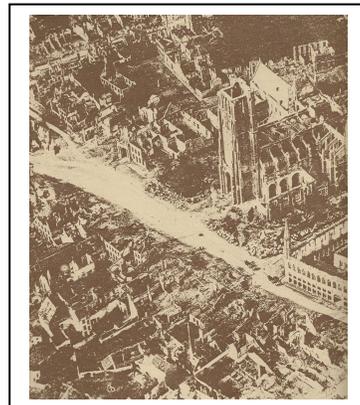
(Right: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



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 Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

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



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

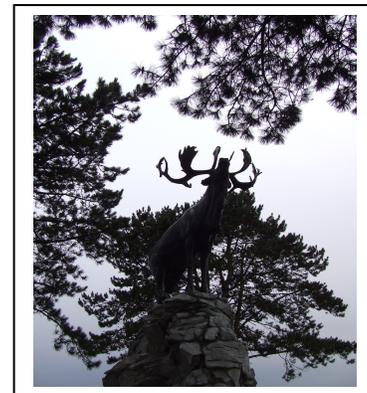
The encounter had proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.



(Preceding page: *This is the ground over which the 1st 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*)

And as seen in an earlier paragraph, it had been at Gueudecourt on October 14, two days after the afore-mentioned encounter, that Private Bennett, as a soldier of that large re-enforcement draft of two-hundred twenty-nine *other ranks* from Rouen, had been recorded as having re-joined the Newfoundland Battalion.



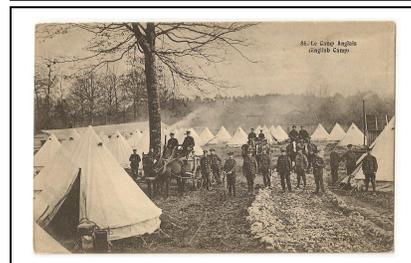
* * * * *

The Newfoundland Battalion was not to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it would supply two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the *Hampshires* and the *Worcestershires*, of the 88th Brigade.

(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme. – from Illustration*)

On October 30, the Newfoundland unit eventually retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving continuously in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1st Battalion began to wend its way back up to the front lines.



There it 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 another 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 above: *A typical British Army Camp during rather inclement winter conditions somewhere on the Continent – from a vintage post-card*)

By the time of that withdrawal, however, there had been a change in Private Bennett's status: on December 3 he had received promotion to the rank of lance corporal and had put up a first stripe.

It had not been until January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* - and also out of its lodgings at... *Camps en Amienois* - from where it would make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it was to entrain for the small town of Corbie where it had thereupon taken over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

After that recent six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve* far to the rear, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to *active service* on January 23, although they apparently had 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 everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig somewhat cavalierly referred to as *wastage* as the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches.

In fact, the sole 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 the 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: A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, their unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold and ice of the trenches at Sailly-Saillisel during the winter of 1916-1917. – from *Illustration*)

(Right: 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 had been a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events. They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, 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 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.

(continued)

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

On April 9 the British Army was to launch 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 – just over four thousand - 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.



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

And while the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, the French *Bataille du Chemin des Dames* had been yet a further disaster.

(Right: *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 1st 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 would 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 .*

The son of Luke Bennett (also found as *Benoit*), lumberman, and of Josephine Bennett (née *Gaudet*)* of Stephenville Crossing – then of Regent Street, North Sydney, Nova Scotia to where they had moved on April 2, 1916, before moving back to Newfoundland later again - he was also brother to Hilda, William**, Margaret-Bella, Mary and to Rose (later Mrs. L. White of North Sydney).



**The couple had married on December 26, 1885.*

(continued)

(Preceding page: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands in the middle of the village on top of the vestiges of a German strong-point.* – photograph from 2012)

*****His brother, William (Willie) Bennett, Lance Corporal, DCM, Number 1071, was also reported as...missing...at Monchy-le-Preux (see elsewhere in these files). Later, on or about June 6, his remains were to be reported as found and buried. His record was thus amended to read...killed in action.***

His grave, however, was surely either later destroyed in subsequent fighting or its whereabouts forgotten as he is commemorated under the Caribou at Beaumont-Hamel with those who have no known last resting-place.



Lance Corporal Hector Bennett was reported as *missing in action* on April 14, 1917, while serving with 'D' Company during fighting at Monchy-le-Preux.

Some thirty weeks later, on or about November 22 – this the date on a letter sent to his sister living in Ayr - he was officially *presumed dead**.

Hector Bennett had enlisted at a *declared* twenty years of age: date of birth in Stephenville, Newfoundland, November 24, 1896 (from the *Geneanet* web-site as is some of the other family information).

****The official date of presumption of death for those missing on April 14, 1917, was November 17 of the same year.***

He had allotted an allowance of fifty cents a day to his sister, Mrs. Rose L. White, of North Sidney – maybe she was the reason for the parents moving – and had willed all his possessions to her. One of his other two sisters was to become a Mrs. Taylor and to live in South Harbour Street, Ayr.



(Right: *The few remaining buildings which date from the time of the Great War awaiting demolition a century later in South Harbour Street, Ayr, where Private Bennet's sister resided – photograph from 2012*)

Lance Corporal Hector Bennett 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).

(continued on following page)



Lieut. J. M. Howley
January 1918
Dpty. Paymaster 1st Nfld Rgt
St. John's Nfld
Dear Sir:-

North Sydney, NS

Re Hector Bennett:

Mrs Josephine and Luke Bennett her husband of Stephenville Crossing, Bay St. George Nfld, now of North Sydney, Cape Breton, NS, have just been informed their son Hector Bennett enlisted with his brother #1071 Corp Wm Bennett and has been reported missing since April 13, 1917. Both were reported missing same day. Have not heard anything since. Please let me know if they are reported dead. If no, send us the necessary papers (you know the kind required) and I will have them filled out and returned to you. Our health is not very good and we are really in great need of the money.

I remain yours truly
B. LeBetter
Magistrate (for) J & L Bennett)

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 – February 6, 2023.