



**Private Peter Benoit (Regimental Number 3535) is interred in Oxford Road Cemetery: Grave reference, V. H. 3..**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *furrier/ trapper* earning an annual four-hundred dollars, Peter Benoit was a volunteer of the Fourteenth Recruitment Draft. He presented himself for medical examination on March 12, 1917, at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury\** in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.***

**(continued)**

***\*The building was to serve as the Regimental Headquarters in Newfoundland for the duration of the conflict.***

It was to be on the day of that medical assessment, March 12, and at the same venue, that Peter Benoit would enlist. He was thus engaged...*for the duration of the war\**...at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was to be appended a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

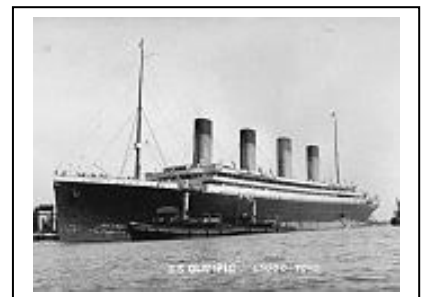
***\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.***

Only some few hours were now to follow before there then came to pass, while still at the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On that same twelfth day of that month of March he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, Peter Benoit became...*a soldier of the King.*

There were now to pass ten weeks less two days after his attestation before Private Benoit, Number 3535, was to leave Newfoundland for *overseas service*. How he was to spend this prolonged interval after his attestation appears not to have been documented. It may be that he was to return temporarily to work and was perhaps to spend time at his home at Conn River, Bay d'Espoir, in the District of Fortune Bay, although of course this is only speculation and he may well have chosen – or more likely *been* chosen - to remain in barracks in St. John's, even though there was apparently little in the way of military training to be undertaken\*.

***\*A number of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the capital city, or those who had no friends or family to offer them board and lodging, were to be quartered in the curling rink in the area of Fort William in St. John's, a building which was at the time to serve as barracks.***

Those ten weeks since attestation having passed, Private Benoit was to be one of a contingent of three officers and one-hundred eighty-two *other ranks* – a draft to which had been appended ninety-nine recruits of the newly-formed Newfoundland Forestry Unit - which sailed from St. John's on May 19 having embarked onto the Bowring Brother's vessel *Florizel*, to reach Halifax some two days afterwards.



From there the Newfoundlanders were to traverse the Atlantic on an unspecified ship\*, although it may well be that the transport in question was to be one of the largest ocean-going vessels of its day: *Olympic*.

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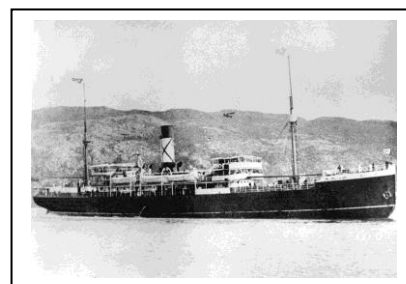
**(Preceding page: *The White Star liner Olympic – sister ship to the ill-starred Titanic and also Britannic which, as a hospital ship had been sunk in November of 1917 – had been requisitioned to serve as a troop transport during the war. She sailed on this occasion on June 2 from Halifax with as many as six-thousand Canadian military personnel on board and there appear to have been no other departures on or about this date, she may have accommodated the Newfoundland contingent.*)**

***\*It could just also have been – both sailed on May 21 – either Tunisian or Missanabie.***

Once having arrived and dis-embarked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on June 9 – this the date on which *Olympic* docked – Private Benoit and his contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland to report there to the Regiment Depot.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some two years and ten months prior to that month of June of 1917 when Private Benoit was to find himself in Scotland, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and were formed into 'A' and 'B' Companies.



During that same period the various authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

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

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 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island. Once having disembarked 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 it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.



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

(continued)

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of 'D' Company to arrive – they via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...to *duty*...at Edinburgh, and then 'E' Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4\*.

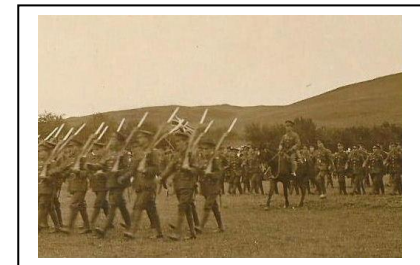
*\*These five Companies, while a contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

*(Right: The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011)*



Seven days after the arrival of 'E' Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent had been ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit had been dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.

*(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 of Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)*



Two months less a day later, on July 10, 'F' Company would march into *Stobs Camp*.

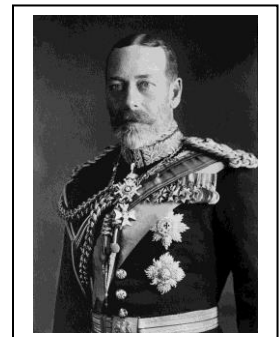
This had been an all-important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength\* of a battalion which could be posted on...*active service*.



*\*A number sufficient for four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

From *Stobs Camp*, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the four senior Companies, having by that time become the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, had been transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England.

*(Right above: The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles. – original photograph from the Provincial Archives)*



There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before the Battalion's departure to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(continued)

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

The later arrivals to the United Kingdom, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were eventually to form the nucleus of the first re-enforcements to be dispatched to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



**(Right: *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*)**

***Ayr was a small town on the west coast of Scotland whose history precedes the year 1205 when it was established as a Royal Burgh (Borough) by the crown of Scotland, an appointment which emphasized the importance of the town as a harbour, market and, later, administrative centre.***

***By the time of the Great War centuries later it was expanding and the River Ayr which had once marked the northern boundary of the place was now flowing through its centre; a new town to the north (Newton-on-Ayr), its population fast-increasing, perhaps encouraged by the coming of the railway, was soon to be housing the majority of the personnel of the Newfoundland Regimental Depot.***



**(Right above: *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.***

That November 15 of 1915 was to see not only the departure of the 1<sup>st</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr to the Middle East and to the fighting of the *Gallipoli Campaign* but also, only five days prior, the arrival from Newfoundland of 'G' Company which would be obliged to take up quarters at *Gailes Camp*, some sixteen kilometres up the coast from Ayr itself – but just over sixty if one went by road.

A further seven weeks plus a day were now to pass before the first one-hundred personnel of 'H' Company, having sailed in mid-December as recorded in an earlier paragraph, were to present themselves at the Regimental Depot on January 4, some of them to be affected, even fatally, by an ongoing measles epidemic of the time.

After that there was then to be an interlude of three months plus several days before the second detachment of 'H' Company reported on April 9, 1916, to the Regimental Depot.

**(continued)**

**Note: *Until as late as the spring of 1916 it had been the intention to form a 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment to fight on the Continent. In fact it would seem that the last-mentioned contingent of one-hundred sixty-three recruits was to form the nucleus of that unit, while the personnel already at the Depot by this time would form a reserve battalion to serve as a re-enforcement pool for both the fighting units.***

***It could not have been long before a change of plan came about as very soon men of that designated contingent (the second half of 'H' Company) were being sent to strengthen the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion already on the Continent – maybe Beaumont-Hamel had something to do with it.***

**A further draft from Newfoundland arrived at Ayr towards mid-summer, this comprising a two-company detachment and some naval reservists, sailors who, having disembarked from *Sicilian* in Devonport, were to remain there in England.**

**Some weeks later again *Sicilian* would sail from Newfoundland once more to arrive in England in the first week in September, 1916, with two-hundred forty-two recruits on board. By the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the month the new-comers, formerly 'C' Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion stationed back in St. John's, had reported to the Regimental Depot.**

**There was now to be a particularly protracted interval before any large numbers re-enforcements were to arrive from Newfoundland – a problem which was later to affect the capabilities of the parent 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion fighting on the Continent.**

**The main cause of the difficulty, as seen further above, would be those troops which had been dispatched from St. John's and had reached Halifax on board *Florizel* at the end of January, 1917, only to be then held there for some three months before they were to arrive in Scotland where the regulation fourteen weeks of training then awaited them – although in the case of most of this draft, this period was to be much shorter than prescribed.**

**Another fifty or so recruits would arrive a week later, perhaps on *Olympic*, from Halifax via Liverpool and yet a further one-hundred eighty-five at the beginning of June, this the draft of which Private Benoit was a soldier - but the number of potential recruits to be found in Newfoundland was by now diminishing.**

***There was to be only a single exception to the above sequence of departures of re-enforcement contingents from Newfoundland and their arrival at the Regimental Depot in Scotland and that was the draft of March 17. Because of the quarantine in Windsor, Nova Scotia, imposed upon those who had sailed from home on January 31 of 1917, this subsequent contingent, comprising for the most part the Eleventh Recruitment Draft, had thus leap-frogged the Windsor Draft to dock in Liverpool and report to Ayr three weeks and two days ahead of it.***

***By this time the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment serving on the Continent, particularly after the fighting of April 14 at Monchy-le-Preux (see further below), was becoming critically short of personnel and the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was becoming hard-pressed to find replacements for these losses.***

**(continued)**

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, and was to eventually serve as the base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were despatched in drafts, at first to *Gallipoli* and later to the *Western Front*, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right above: *Wellington Square seen here almost a century after it hosted the officers of the Newfoundland Regiment – photograph from 2012*)

(Right: *The new race-course at Newton-upon-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; part of the present grandstand is original – photograph from 2012*)

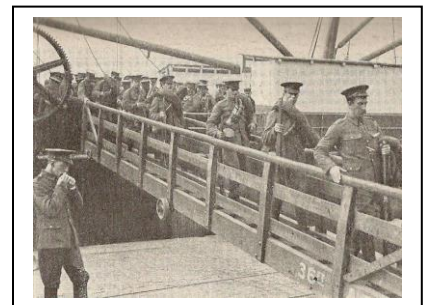


At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to be able to accommodate the number of new arrivals – plus men from other British regiments which were still being billeted in the area...and a measles epidemic which was to claim the life of several Regiment personnel – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in the town-centre of Ayr itself, and the *other ranks* had been billeted at Newton Park School and if not, in the grandstand or a tented camp at the newly-built racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr\*.

*\*Not that Private Benoit was to spend all of time at Ayr. During the summer months of 1917, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

There were now to pass five months, until November 6 of 1917, before Private Benoit was to take ship again; on this occasion he was on his way to...*active service*...on the Continent. passing through the English south-coast port of Southampton as one of the one-hundred eleven *other ranks* of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Draft from Ayr.

The Newfoundlanders disembarked in Rouen on the following day and made their way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot there for a few days of final training and organizing\* before making their way to a rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right: *British troops at an earlier time of the Great War disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

(continued)

*\*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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

It was on November 14 of that year of 1917 that a re-enforcement draft from Rouen of four officers and one-hundred forty-one *other ranks* – Private Benoit one of that number - alighted from a train at the station in Monchy-au-Bois and marched to nearby Berles-au-Bois to report there to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

The unit was by this time in the throes of preparing for the battle now imminent: *Cambrai*.

\* \* \* \* \*

By the time of that November of 1917, the first contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment had already been serving overseas for some three years and a month. The 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been formed – in the spring of 1916 - and multiple drafts had been dispatched from Ayr and Barry to supplement the strength of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment (see immediately below).



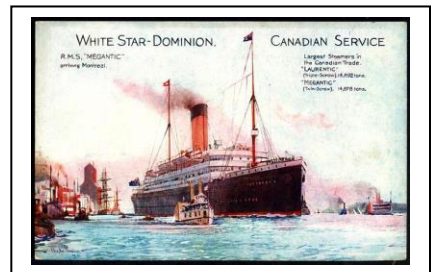
(Right above: *Some of the personnel of ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915, prior to its departure to active service on the Gallipoli Peninsula – from The Fighting Newfoundlander by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)*

As for Peter Benoit, by that November 14, 1917, he had been a soldier of the Newfoundland Regiment for two-hundred forty-seven days.

The four senior companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, had become in the summer of 1915 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment and had thereupon been attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. The force had soon been dispatched from *Camp Aldershot* to...*active service*.

(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 of 1915, the Newfoundland Battalion had 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.





**(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)**

**Having then disembarked in Alexandria and subsequently spent some two weeks billeted in the British Abassia Barracks and an encampment in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, after a further week's journey, was to land at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.**

**(Right: 'Kangaroo Beach', where the officers and men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 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)**



**(Right below: 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)**

**When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at Suvla Bay they were to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.**

**Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would now serve but, even ever since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire Gallipoli Campaign, including the operation at Suvla Bay, had been proving 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: 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)**



**(continued)**

*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 what perhaps was to be 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, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

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



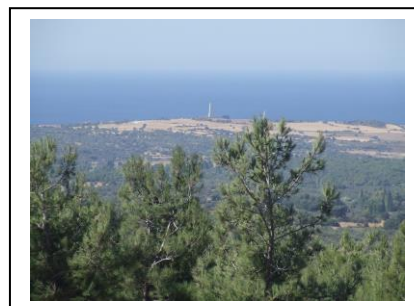
By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.

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



Some of the Battalion personnel had thereupon been 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 would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

*(Right: 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, Indian and *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – had by now simply been marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.

This final operation would take 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.*



**(Preceding page: 'W' Beach at Cape Helles under shell-fire only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration)**

**(Right: '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 and beyond.

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 had docked early on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders had 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: 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 again in 1940 for government service in the Second World War. In 1950 she was broken up.)**



**(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* and published in *Illustration*)**



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

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 back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.



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

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

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



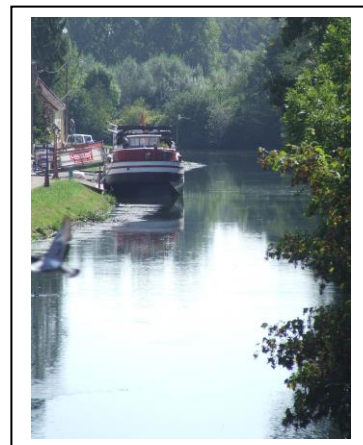
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille.

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 which they had then traversed on their way from the station.

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



But some three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.

On April 13, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had 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*.



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

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 had then been ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.



(Right above: *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 to the right in the photograph – photograph from 2009*)

***\*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.***

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 had soon been 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.



**(Right above: Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park – photograph from 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\*.



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

***\*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.***



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 greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage of the...*First Battle of the Somme...*was to continue for four and a half months.

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

***In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists today – at that 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.***

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 any German counter-assault might well annihilate the shattered survivors 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.



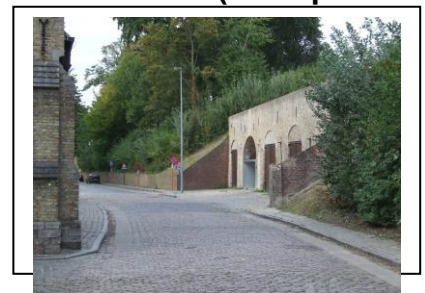
There were then a further two days before the unit had marched further again to the rear area and to billets in the village of Mailly-Maillet.

***(Right above: 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 at Mailly-Maillet 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, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was still to number only... *11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

Of course, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had not been the only unit in the British Army to have incurred horrific losses on July 1, 1916, even though it had indeed been one of the most devastated. But even with its depleted numbers, the Battalion was needed and, after that first re-enforcement, it had almost immediately again been ordered to man the trenches of the front line: as of that July 14, undermanned as seen above, the Newfoundlanders began another tour in the trenches where...*we were shelled heavily by enemy's 5.9 howitzers and a good deal of damage was done to the trenches* (excerpt from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary).

A second re-enforcement draft from Rouen had then arrived days later, on July 21, while the Newfoundland Battalion was at Acheux and then, only three days afterwards – at the very time day that the Prime Minister of Newfoundland had visited the unit – a third draft of sixty other ranks had arrived in Beauval and reported...*to duty*.



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

On July 27-28 of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – maybe even fewer - even after still further re-enforcement – would move north and enter the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

(Right: *The same re-constructed ramparts as shown above, viewed from just outside the city walls and the far side of the moat which still partially surrounds the place – image from 2010*)



The unit 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: *Canadian trenches in Sanctuary Wood, not far removed from the Newfoundland Battalion's positions during August and September of 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 would incur casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

And it was to be there in *the Salient* in the sector of a place called *Railway Wood*, that the Newfoundland Battalion would soon be serving after its transfer from France.



(Right above: *Railway Wood, the Newfoundland positions at the time, almost a century later – a monument to the twelve Royal Engineers buried alive there may just be perceived on the periphery of the trees – photograph from 2014*)

(Right: *The already-battered city of Ypres seen here towards the end of the year 1915 – and some eight months before the Newfoundlanders were to be posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)



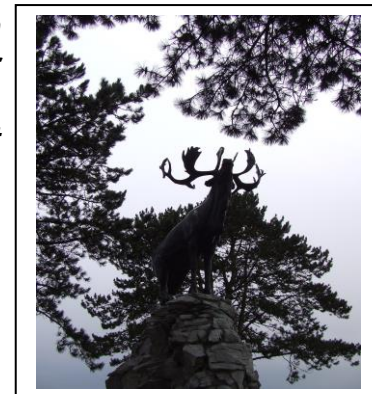
On October 8, 1916, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return southwards.

The unit was thereupon to be transported by train back into France, back into the area of the...*First Battle of – the Somme*.



Just four days after unit's return to France from Belgium, on October 12 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to take 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.

(Preceding page: *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)



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

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

The Newfoundland Battalion was not then to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it had furnished 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 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of which, of course, the Newfoundland unit was a battalion.



(Right above: *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 had 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 retired to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the Battalion had started to wend its way back to the front lines.

Back at *the Front* the Newfoundland unit had continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties, almost all likely due to enemy artillery – during the late fall and early winter. It was to be a period interrupted only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas season, 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)

The parent unit had therefore begun to retire in anticipation thereof once again from *the Front* on December 8, although a goodly number of its personnel, two-hundred-sixty *other ranks* - more than fifty per cent of its strength at the time - was to be seconded on December 11 for several days' work at Carnoy and at Fricourt.



The afore-mentioned Christmas festivities – apparently a turkey dinner washed down with...*real English ale*...- having been completed, it was not to be until a further sixteen days had passed that on January 11 the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* to make its way on foot to the town of Airaines.

From the railway station there it had then entrained for the small town of Corbie where it thereupon took over billets which it already occupied for a short period only two months before. Days later again the unit had continued its progress, once again on foot, back up to the forward area and to...*active service*.

That recent six-week Christmas respite spent far to the rear by now a thing of the past, 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 fatalities – of 1917.

And it had been by then the beginning of the winter period. As had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the *Great War* – that of 1916-1917 would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable – there was to be a shortage of fuel and many other things - for most of the combatants of both sides.

It would also be a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were to be kept busy, particularly, so it seems - from at least Canadian medical documentation - with thousands of cases of dental work.

This period had also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and the recent weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion these exercises had been at least partially undertaken from February 4 to 18 in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.



(Right above: *A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, his unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold of the trenches at Sully-Saillisel during the winter of 1916-1917. – from Illustration*)

On February 18 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would begin a five-day trek back from there to the forward area where it was to go back into the firing-line on February 23 to relieve a unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers. It had been at a place called Sully-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans would be both lively – and deadly: after only two days the Battalion had incurred four dead, nine wounded and three gassed without there having been any infantry action. The Newfoundlanders were withdrawn on February 25...to return three days later.



The Battalion had by then been carrying with it orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Sully-Saillisel...to be carried out on March 1.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *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(?))

The aforesaid planned raid of the German positions at Sailly-Saillisel was to go ahead a little later than scheduled as it appears that the enemy had also made plans. The reciprocal and apparently ferocious infantry action(s) had thus continued for the better part of two days, March 2 and 3.

In fact, that sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel was to be the sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during the entire period from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917. The action would also serve to bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.

After the confrontation at Sailly-Saillisel, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered retired to the rear by train, to an encampment at Meaulté. There, and later at *Camps-en-Amienois* – even further behind the lines and where the unit had spent the preceding Christmas period – the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would spend almost the entire remainder of the month.

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March would be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near those 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 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from The War Illustrated*)

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

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had commenced making 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.



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 – 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.

(continued)

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

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

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 had proved to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war: four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone\*.

(Right: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen in 1917 from the western, 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*)

After the debacle of April 14 the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux for but a few days. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, be amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming re-enforcements would allow the two units' strengths to once more resemble those of bona fide battalions.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the vestiges of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed community. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

When the thirty-nine *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen had reported to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 18, they were to be just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers.

There had been by that time only two-hundred twenty *other ranks* in number plus twelve officers serving with some two-hundred personnel of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. Those of the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion would spend the 19<sup>th</sup> salvaging equipment and burying the dead.

They had then remained *in situ* until the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

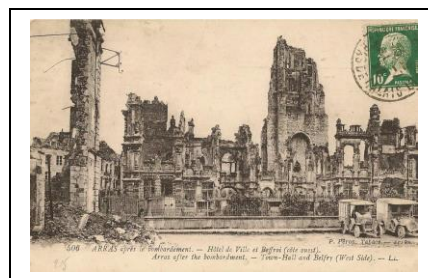
(Right: *Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras.– photograph from 2007*)



The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This had in fact been 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 apparently had not been a particularly successful venture, at least not in the sector 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.

And the Newfoundlanders had also sustained further casualties: ten...*killed in action*, three ...*missing in action*, and forty-eight...*wounded*.

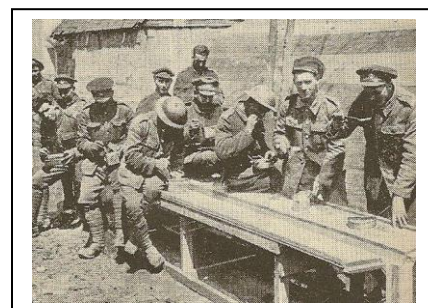


Late on that evening of April 23, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been ordered to retire the dozen or so kilometres to the relative calm of Arras.

(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*)

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

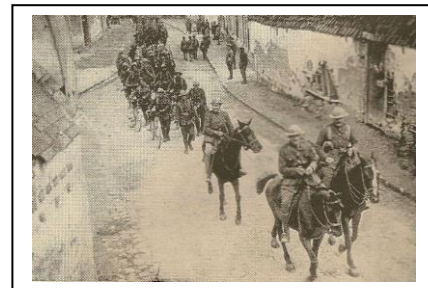
The *Battle of Arras* had by that time been proceeding to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-month – May 15 - but the Newfoundland unit was not to be further involved in any coordinated offensive action – it had been too exhausted; this now would be a period when the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to be posted in a nondescript fashion on the *Arras Front*, in and out of the quieter trenches.



On May 7 it had been on the move once again and marching to different billets in Berneville where it was to be the subject of a war journalist and photographer.

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – as cited immediately above - in early May, perhaps the 7<sup>th</sup>, of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)

At the outset of June, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and in 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 days to be spent at *Caribou Camp*, where for the next few days – and nights – the Newfoundland Battalion, apart from being re-enforced, was to supply working parties for road-mending and for building infantry tracks.

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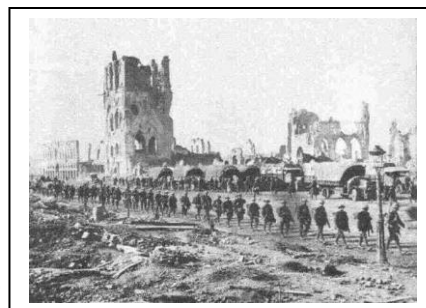
The unit's next posting, on July 5, had been to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city where the Battalion would remain for a week before its withdrawal to prepare for the upcoming summer offensive, it to commence on July 31.

(Right: *The Yser Canal to the north of the city of Ypres (today Ieper): In July of 1917 the Newfoundlanders were stationed in the vicinity of this spot, 'A', 'C' and 'D' Companies to serve in the front lines and also in the immediate reserve on the east bank of the waterway (to the right in the photograph), with 'B' Company and HQ remaining on the western side. – photograph from 2013)*



The low-lying area of Belgian *Flanders*, in which the Newfoundland Battalion was stationed in that July of 1917 - the only part of that country unoccupied by German forces - had been selected by the High Command as 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 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 principal objectives.

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. This had been or was also to be the case with the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians, all of whose troops had floundered or would soon flounder their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Belgian Flanders.



(Right above: *An unidentified – perhaps almost unidentifiable – Passchendaele field in the fall of 1917 – from Illustration)*

Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and the *Broembeek* (see 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*.



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

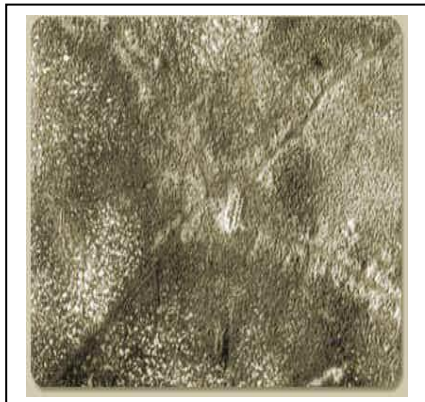
(Right: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010*)



A week and a day following the mid-August engagement at the *Steenbeek* there had then been four weeks of relative calm for the Newfoundland Battalion. This period had begun on August 24 with a four-day withdrawal from the fighting and the forward area to *Penton Camp* situated to the north-west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe.

The reprieve had continued while the British forces were to re-enforce and re-organize after a month of fighting that had not been proceeding as well as the British High Command had optimistically anticipated.

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



The Newfoundland unit was to go back to war during the last days of what had been a fine month of September. The weather of that month had been in contrast to what had gone before – but, as the fighting at *Passchendaele* had started once more...so also had the rains.

Once back in their trenches in late September and early October the personnel of the Newfoundland unit had prepared for their next concerted attack on German positions. It would come some two weeks later, on October 9, and it would come about at the *Broembeek*,

(Right below: *This innocuous, placid stream, the Broembeek, was in 1917 a torrent which flooded the surrounding terrain, transforming it into a quagmire. – photograph from 2009*)

On October 11, two days following the affair at the *Broembeek* the Newfoundland Battalion, having by then been relieved, had marched to the railway station at not-distant Elverdinghe to be transported to *Swindon Camp* near Proven. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit was once more to board a train.

By ten-thirty on the evening of that above-mentioned October 17 the Newfoundland Battalion had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and was then to march the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.



The Newfoundlanders had still been there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks later when, on November 14 and as recorded in an earlier paragraph, the train carrying Private Benoit and his re-enforcement draft from Rouen had drawn into the station at Monchy-au-Bois.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three days later again, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to be ordered onto yet another train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it began to move further eastward, by this time on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while on the move, the Battalion would be issued as it went with...*war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of the night it marched to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, moved up into its forming-up area.



From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten that morning, and with bugles blowing, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced to the fray.

(Right above: *The Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

This new offensive – apparently initially conceived to be no more than a large-scale raid - the so-called *Battle of Cambrai*, was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders to be directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle was to begin well for the British who had used tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities were again be squandered. There had been no troops available to exploit what was, admittedly, a hoped-for yet unexpected success, and by the close of the battle, the Germans had counter-attacked and the British had relinquished as much – more in places - territory as they had originally gained.

The Newfoundland Battalion thus once again had been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of the communities of Marcoing and Masnières where a Caribou stands today and in the area of the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who had advanced into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day\*.

(Right: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on November 20; however, whether its capture was ever achieved is at best controversial.* – photograph from 2012)



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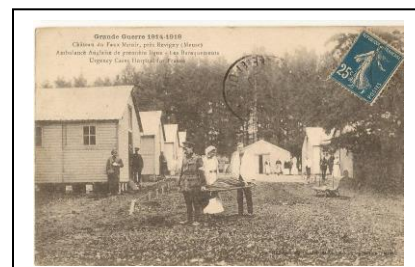
**\*At five-hundred fifty-three all ranks – not counting the aforementioned ten per cent reserve – the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment even at the outset of the operation was operating at just over fifty per cent of establishment strength: not that it would have been any consolation had it been known, but a goodly number of battalions in all the British and Dominion forces – with perhaps the exception of the Canadians – were encountering the same problem.**



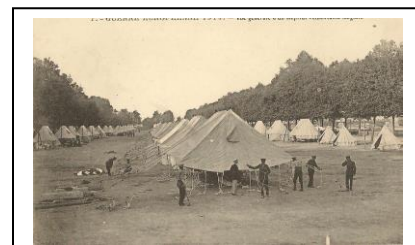
**(Right above: A number of graves of soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery. Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, has identified them as being Canadian. – photograph from 2010)**

\* \* \* \* \*

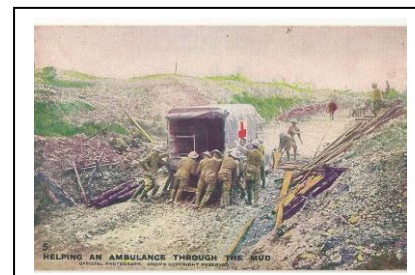
**On the first day of the fighting, in or in the close vicinity of Masnières, Private Benoit was wounded. At first evacuated to the 89<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, he was from there transferred by the following day, November 21, to the 48<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Ytres for further treatment to severe gun-shot injuries to the neck and shoulder.**



**(Right above: A British field ambulance, of perhaps a more permanent nature than some: The Field Ambulances were often responsible for the Rest Stations, the establishment pictured here perhaps being one of those. – from a vintage post-card)**



**(Right: A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card)**



**(Right: Transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card)**

**From there, it was apparently not until November 27 that Private Benoit was forwarded to the 4<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers from where, on that same November 27, he was sent to the 6<sup>th</sup> Convalescent Depot, and thence to the 13<sup>th</sup> Convalescent Depot on December 2.**



**He was finally released to duty at Base Depot and to the Re-enforcement Camp there in Rouen, on January 27 of the New Year, 1918.**

**(continued)**



(Preceding page: *The railway station of the conjoint centres of Dannes and Camiers, though which many thousands of sick or wounded – or convalescing – military personnel passed during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Private Benoit is recorded as having re-joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on February 15. On that day a detachment of one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Rouen – Private Benoit among that number – reported...*to duty*...with the Newfoundland unit at Steenvoorde, just on the French side of the frontier with Belgium.

February 15 was the day prior to an inspection of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion by Major-General Beauvoir de Lisle, the Officer Commanding the 29<sup>th</sup> Division, a parade to be complete with the presentation of decorations, and also a further confirmation – perhaps it was as yet unknown to the new arrivals - that the *Newfoundland Regiment* had by that time been granted the honour of being designated as the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* (also see below).

\* \* \* \* \*

In early December, after the exertions of *Cambrai* and Private Benoit's departure for medical attention, the Newfoundlanders were withdrawn from the line, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment by that time numbering the strength of only a single company – whereas a full battalion comprises four. The unit then remained in the vicinity of Humbercourt, to the west of Arras, until December 18 when it was to march to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There the unit would spend both Christmas and the arrival of the New Year.

The weather was now to oblige during those later days at Fressin where the Newfoundland Battalion were to be posted for sixteen days; there the *gods* would allow the Newfoundlanders a reminder of home: snow – perhaps a bit too much at times apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, after that snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion returned to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time. There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.



The eight-day respite at *Brake Camp*, Vlamertinghe from February 4 to 11 (*inclusive*) was to be an example of the last-mentioned: work-parties, inspections by...*the Brass...*, the awarding of decorations and the announcement to the troops that the Newfoundland Regiment had been designated, as of January 25 of that 1918, to be the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment*, had been some of the highlights of that particular period.

*\*The title had been granted on January 25, 1918, in a War Office Letter (Number 058/4282 (AG 10)) – Document Collection 145.2R21 (D6).*

Steenvoorde had been the next stop on the Newfoundland Battalion's itinerary although once there the agenda for the following weeks was to be much the same as it had been before: inspections by the upper echelons, working-parties on nearby defences and others in forward areas for which a train journey was necessary, training, route marches and the arrival of several re-enforcement drafts, the one of February 15 in which had marched Private Benoit already having been noted.

\* \* \* \* \*

During the late autumn of 1917 and the early part of the winter that followed, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the *Great War*: the Allies were at the time exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - whereas the Germans had had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians on the *Eastern Front* had by then allowed them.

It had been expected that they, the Germans, would launch a spring offensive - which they were to do – in fact they were to unleash a number of them\*.

*\*There were to be several assaults by the Germans on French forces during that spring. They all met with varying degrees of success at the outset, but eventually they would be thwarted by Petain's divisions, aided at times by the newly-arriving Americans.*



(Right above: *Some of the countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders had built a tram-line in January and had been stationed for a week and then five days in March and likewise for five days in early April – photograph from 2011*)

In early March the Newfoundland unit was rotated once more taking a train as far as Wieltje and thence *Haslar Camp* to the north-east of Ypres, and from there up to the forward positions in the vicinity the ruins of the villages of Zonnebeke and Paschendaele.

There were now once again to be casualties.

(continued)



(Preceding page: *Oxford Road Cemetery is adjacent to the community of Wieltje, where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion detrained en route to the posting of the last days of March, 1918. The spires of Ypres may be perceived on what is the western horizon. – photograph from 2013*)

On March 26 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary documents the unit's second tour of that period in the trenches: that the...*Battalion moved to Line relieving 2<sup>nd</sup>. Hampshire Regt. in Right Battalion Sector.* On March 31, the Newfoundlanders were still in those same positions at the front preparing for a retirement on the morrow; on this last day of the month the Battalion Diarist saw fit to note: *Total Casualties to-date:- Killed in Action = 5 Other Ranks. Missing b. Killed 2 do. Wounded = 1 Officer, 11 Other Ranks.*

The son of George Benoit, labourer, and of Jane Drew Benoit (née *Drew*, she later to become *Mrs. Jeannie Hinks*) of Conn River, Bay d'Espoir, he, also of Conn River, was brother to at Henry, Ellen, Andrew, George, Mary, Paul and Lawrence (names from the *Family Search* web-site). He was also father to son Matthew\*, born in November of 1912, to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay.

Private Benoit was reported as having been...*killed in action...while serving with 'A' Company on March 29, 1918* (but see below).

Peter Benoit had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-eight years: date of **baptism** in Conn River, Newfoundland, May 31, 1887 (from a copy of Roman Catholic Parish Records).

*\*There seems to be no mention of a marriage or relationship in the files; however the 1921 Census counts him as the adopted son of Matthew and Katherine Burke (she née Benoit).*

Private Peter Benoit was eligible for the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The following is from a report in the file of Regimental Number 3560, Private James Whelan:

**In arrest awaiting trial, 29-3-18. Tried by F.G.C.M. 26-6-18 and found Guilty of:-  
“When on Active Service, committing the offence of manslaughter, in that, he when in the trenches on 29-3-18 shot Pte. P. Benoit and therefore unlawfully killed him.” Sentenced to 6 months I.H.L.**

**Auth. Col. B. Dunsterville, Comdg. G.H.Q. Troops 26-3-18**

**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 1, 2023.**