



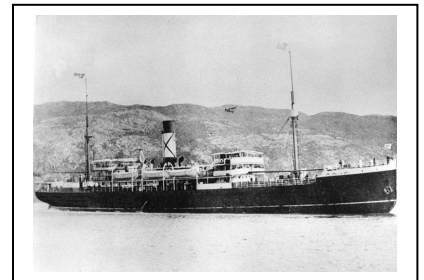
Private Roger John Callahan (Regimental Number 344), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



His occupation prior to his military service recorded as that of an *accountant* working for the weekly sum of twelve dollars, Roger John Callahan was a recruit of the First Draft.

He presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on September 3 of 1914, four weeks plus two days after the *Declaration of War*. This procedure having pronounced him as being...*fit for foreign service...*, Roger John Callahan then enlisted at the same venue – at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 (ten cents of which was a *field allowance*) - a further five days afterwards, on September 8 of 1914.

There was now to be another wait of some three weeks – during which period, however, he would have undergone training – before attestation on October 1. Private Callahan then proceeded on October 3 to embark with the other personnel of the *First Five Hundred* onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting the contingent in St. John's Harbour.



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

The ship sailed on the morrow to its rendezvous off the south coast of the Island where she was to join the convoy transporting the 1st Canadian Division across the Atlantic.

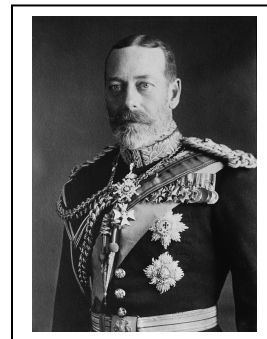
(Right: *Fort George, constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, still serves the British Army to this day. – photograph from 2011*)



In the United Kingdom Private Callahan trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; at Edinburgh Castle – where it provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles; and later again at the tented *Stobs Camp* near the town of Hawick to the south-east of Edinburgh.



(Preceding page: *The Newfoundland Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp and about to be presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915* – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo).



At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, were then sent south to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot; meanwhile the two junior Companies, the later-arrived ‘E’ and ‘F’*, were sent to Scotland’s west coast, to Ayr, where they were 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* – photograph from *Bain News Services* via *Wikipedia*)

**On July 10, 1915, ‘F’ Company had arrived at Stobs Camp from Newfoundland, its personnel raising the numbers of the unit to battalion establishment strength, and thus permitting it to be ordered to active service.*

The 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, comprising those four Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

It had then been during the period spent at Aldershot that Private Callahan of ‘B’ Company – he was not alone in doing so - had been prevailed upon, he on August 13, to re-enlist *for the duration of the war**.

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



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



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

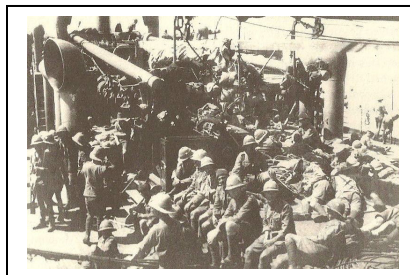
On August 20, 1915, Private Callahan and his comrades-in-arms embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks where, a month later – having spent two weeks billeted in British barracks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, he disembarked with the 1st Battalion at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(continued)

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



(Right below: 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)



Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion was to serve but, even since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire Gallipoli Campaign, including the operation at Suvla Bay, would prove to be little more than a debacle: Flies, dust, disease, the frost-bite and the floods – and of course the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command* had ever anticipated – were eventually to overwhelm the British-led forces and those of the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only Suvla Bay but the entire Gallipoli venture.



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

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



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

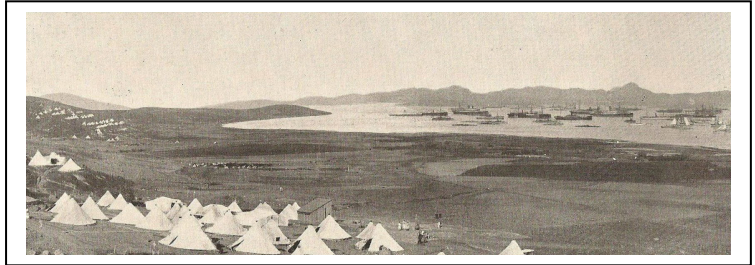
November 25 was to see a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm strike the Suvla Bay area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be the priority.

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

Private Callahan was to be one of them.

* * * * *

(Right: A busy Mudros Bay and its minuscule port on the island of Lemnos at some time in 1915, showing only a few of the many Allied medical units established there, many of them under canvas – from Illustration.)



On December 16, 1915, some eleven days after that storm and flood had struck the Gallipoli Peninsula, Private Callahan was evacuated from the forward area to the 24th Casualty Clearing Station at *Suvla Bay* before being admitted into, on December 22* six days later, the 16th Stationary Hospital at *Mudros Bay* on the Greek island of Lemnos some fifty kilometres distant. By that time he had been diagnosed as suffering from frostbite and trench-foot.

**Even if this date is correct, he must have been transferred at least three days prior, as the British abandoned the Suvla Bay area definitively on the night of December 19-20, 1915, having begun the operation days earlier.*

From the island of Lemnos he was invalided on the 26th of December, Boxing Day of 1915, onto the Cunard trans-Atlantic liner – but by now His Majesty’s Hospital Ship - *Aquitania*, which had by that time been requisitioned by the Admiralty and was to serve later as a troop-transport. Private Callahan was on his way back to the United Kingdom.



(Right above: *HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HM Hospital Ship Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London*)



(Right: *Some of the vessel’s peace-time facilities being used as a hospital ward on board Aquitania – from a photograph originally from the Cunard Archives*)

Upon his arrival in England, he was admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the southern Borough of Wandsworth on January 3. After ten days of further treatment and convalescence, Private Callahan was granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded military personnel upon release from hospital – in his case the period of leave was to officially be from January 13 to 22 of the New Year, 1916.



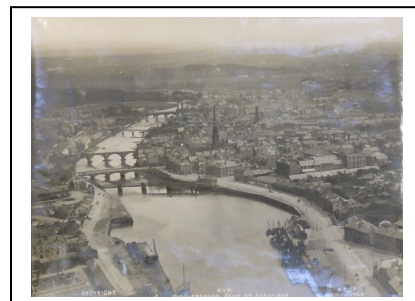
(Right above: *The main building of what was to become the 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War was opened, on July 1st, 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010*)



(Preceding page: *A party of Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing at the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

After treatment and convalescence, Private Callahan was granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded those military personnel released from hospital. His records show this leave was to be from February 24 to March 3, after which time he reported *to duty*, on that same March 3, at the Regimental Depot.

The Depot, at the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, had by then been established for some seven months. It was to be the overseas base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment from where reinforcement drafts were to be despatched to bolster the 1st Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.

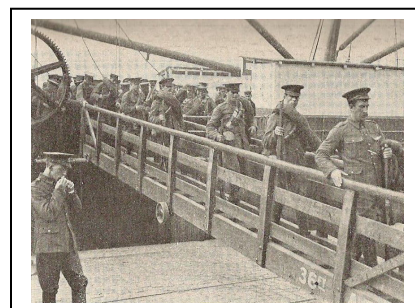


(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr, where the 'other ranks' were quartered, is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

On March 28th the 3rd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Private Callahan among its number - embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Archangel* at the English south-coast port-city of Southampton to sail to the British Expeditionary Force Depot at Rouen, capital city of Normandy. It arrived there on the 30th.



Upon its arrival in France, the contingent was sent to the nearby British Expeditionary Force Depot for final training and organization* before moving onward to rendezvous with the parent unit.



(Right above: *The picture of a troop-laden Archangel is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

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

**Apparently the standard length of time for this final training was 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 to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

It was as one of the draft – mostly personnel from Ayr - of two officers and two-hundred eleven *other ranks* from Rouen that Private Callahan reported *to duty* on that day to the parent 1st Battalion in the small northern French village of Englebelmer, just three kilometres behind the lines, on April 15.

Apparently he and his fellow new-comers immediately went to work, the Regimental War Diary entry of the day recording... *Battalion working all night on communication trenches.*

In fact, the main body of the Newfoundland Battalion itself had only arrived in Englbemer two days prior, on April 13, thus having completed a one-month journey from the Middle East to the *Western Front*.



(Right above: *A part of the re-constructed trench system in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)

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In the meantime, the remaining officers and men of the Newfoundland Battalion, having recovered from the wrath of nature which had precipitated Private Callahan's departure to hospital, were to remain at *Suvla Bay* for only a further few days. By the time of their departure they were to have served there for exactly three months to the day.

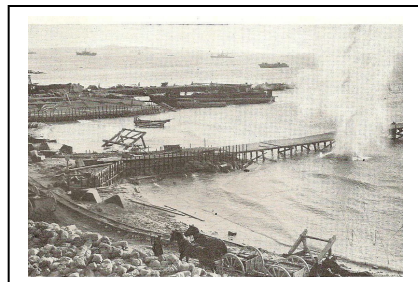
On the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard. Some of the Battalion personnel had been evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion was to 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*)

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

This operation would take place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion providing part of the rear-guard on this second occasion also.



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

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



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(Preceding page: *'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*)

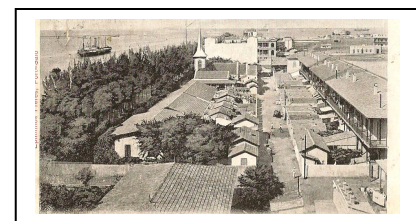
When the British had evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city Alexandria, having arrived there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to Suez, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.



**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.*

(Right above: *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*)

After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1st Battalion had boarded His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq on March 14 to sail up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseilles on March 22.



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

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

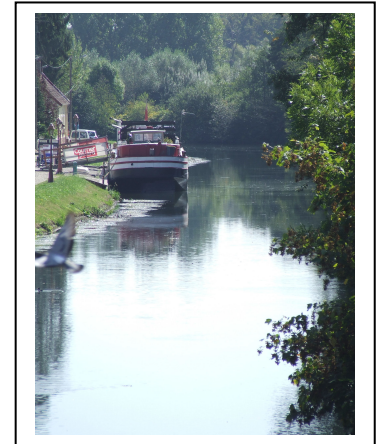
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's had found its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having travelled unused 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 a long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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



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

On April 13, the Newfoundland Battalion had marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where they would be billeted, would receive reinforcements – this was to be Private Callahan’s draft from Ayr via Rouen - and, in two days’ time, would be introduced into those aforementioned communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

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Just days after this draft’s arrival on the *Western Front*, two of the four Companies – ‘A’, and ‘B’, that of Private Callahan – were to take over several support positions from a British unit* before the entire Newfoundland unit was to then be ordered to move further up 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 the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles - true also on the day of the attack on July 1.*

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

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



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

(Right above: *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*)

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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 butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.

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

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



The son of Roger Callahan, tinsmith and general merchant on Water Street in the city, and of Isabella Callahan (née Gosse, deceased October 24, 1909)*, the family home on LeMarchant Road* in St. John’s, he was brother to Isabella-Mary, John-Joseph, Madeleine-Mary, Walter-Francis, William-Samuel, Anne-Mary, William-Joseph, Mary-Mercedes and to William-Mary.

**The couple had married on January 24, 1882. Roger Callahan remarried on August 7, 1918, to Elizabeth Devereaux.*

Private Callahan was reported as *missing in action* on July 1, 1916, while serving with ‘B’ Company during the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel on the first day of *the Somme*.

Some six months later, on December 31, Private Callahan was officially *presumed dead*.

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



Roger John Callahan had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-four years: date of birth in St. John’s, Newfoundland, June 24, 1889 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

Private Roger John Callahan was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 30, 2023.