



Second Lieutenant* Vincent Cluett lies interred in Étapes Military Cemetery – Grave reference XXVIII. D. 10.

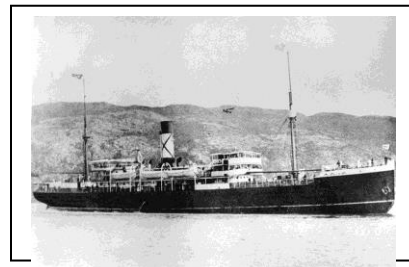
****Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were not considered as enlisted. These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

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

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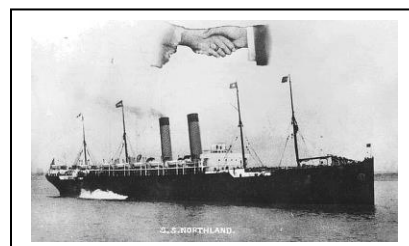
A Regimental Order issued by the office of the Governor of Newfoundland and Commanding Officer of the Newfoundland Regiment, Lieutent Colonel Sir Walter E. Davidson K.C.M.G. shows that Vincent Cluett, having been recommended for an Imperial Commission on August 7, 1916, had then also been appointed to the rank of second lieutenant on the following day, August 8.

Second Lieutenant Cluett sailed from St. John's for overseas service on January 31 of 1917 en route to Nova Scotia, as one of the officers and three-hundred re-enforcements from Newfoundland which were to arrive in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* on February 3, 1917. The detachment was on its way to the Regimental Depot by that time establish at Ayr, on Scotland's west coast.



(Right above: *Florizel* is shown here in St. John's Harbour on October 3, 1914, as she awaits the first Newfoundland contingent for overseas. – by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

However, due to an outbreak and subsequent epidemic of measles and mumps*, the contingent was then quarantined in the military town of Windsor. Months later – less some twenty-five personnel still considered as unfit to travel, and two who had died – the unit finally departed from Halifax on April 18, 1917, to traverse the Atlantic on board three ships, His Majesty's Transport *Northland* being the one on which Second Lieutenant Cluett travelled.



He sailed in the company of Canadian troops: also taking trans-Atlantic passage on the vessel were a detachment of the 210th Canadian Infantry Battalion, the 229th Battalion, a detachment of the 232nd Battalion and the Nova Scotia Company of the 256th Battalion. *Northland* sailed on that April 18 to reach the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on April 29, eleven days later.

**It is to be remembered that these were the days before the advent of anti-biotics, and that these diseases and other infections were often life-threatening.*

(Right above: Originally launched as 'Zeeland', it was felt that the name, although Dutch, was German-sounding enough to warrant her being re-christened as 'Northland'. After the Great War, which she survived, the vessel reverted to 'Zeeland'. - The image of *Northland* is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)



Upon arrival in the United Kingdom the re-enforcements were transported north to the Regimental Depot. The Depot, at the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, had by then been established for just less than two years.

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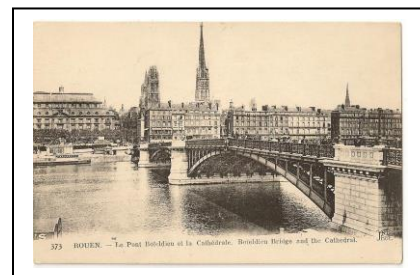
(Preceding page: *An aerial view of Ayr, likely from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr, where were quartered the 'other ranks', is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right.* – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)

Since the summer of 1916, Ayr had been serving as the overseas base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment from where – as of November of 1915 up until January of 1918 - re-enforcement drafts from home were to be despatched to bolster the 1st Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.



(Right above: *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)

Second Lieutenant Cluett was apparently not to spend much time at Ayr. Although no re-enforcement draft was reported as having left Ayr for the Continent during the next month, officers often travelled singly or in small groups, one such to pass through London in early May. A letter written by him proves that, on or about May 9, 2nd Lieutenant Cluett was, by that date, stationed at the 29th Division Base Depot at Rouen.



(Right above: *The River Seine flowing through the centre of the city of Rouen – the spires of its historic gothic cathedral dominating – at or about the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

During the period that now followed, according to the 1st Battalion War Diarist, there were several occasions on which incoming officers were to report to the unit, and also times on which special duties were also allocated to certain officers. It is to be regretted, however, that for the most part these officers have not been identified. Thus the precise date of Second Lieutenant Cluett's arrival from Rouen to the Newfoundland Battalion...*in the field*...remains unclear.

The first occasion on which his name is to be found documented is August 16, the day of the action at the *Steenbeek* (see further below).

* * * * *

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

This first Newfoundland contingent – not yet a battalion - was to embark on October 3, in the case of some soldiers only days after enlistment and/ or attestation.

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

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



Once 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 – and where the first re-enforcements would arrive from Newfoundland on February 16 of 1915.

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



Some three months later, on May 11, and three weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundlanders unit was ordered moved to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

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

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

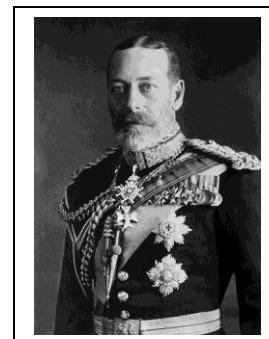
(Right: *The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915. – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



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

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This force, having become the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



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

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



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

On August 20, 1915, the Newfoundland unit 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. There, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, the 1st Battalion landed at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *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.*)



(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: *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*)

(continued)

(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)



Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would 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*, was to 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: An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at Suvla Bay – from Provincial Archives)

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

November 26 would see the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; there was to be a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be the priority.

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

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

(continued)

The British and the *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – were now only 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.

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

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



(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 had evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of *Alexandria*, arriving there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to the vicinity of *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 was to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at *Port Tewfiq*, on March 14 to begin the voyage through the *Suez Canal* en route to *France*. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of *Marseilles*, on March 22.



(Preceding page: *Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal as it was 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*)



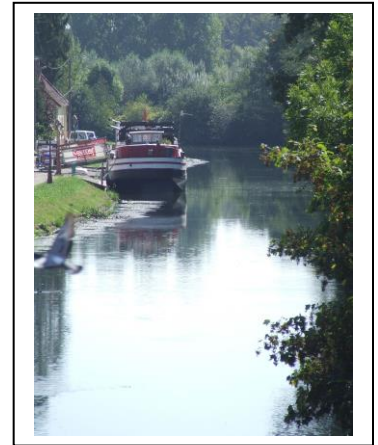
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



(continued)

Having then been withdrawn, at the end of that April after the completion of their first tour in the trenches to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders were soon to be preparing for the now-impending British campaign of that summer, this to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, that flowed – and still does so today – through the region.

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



(Right 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)*

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



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

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 above: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village. – photographs from 2010 and 2015)*

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1st Battalion - still under battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

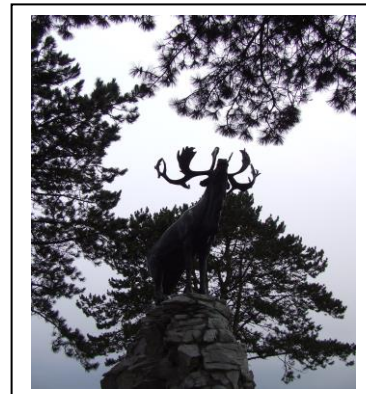
(Right: *The Caribou at Gueudecourt stands at the furthest point of the Newfoundland Battalion’s advance of October 12, 1916.* – photograph from 2012)

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

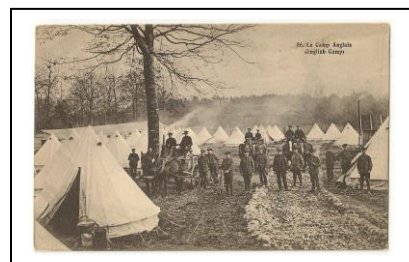
(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme.* – from *Illustration*)

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

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



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



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

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

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



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

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



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



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

(continued)

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



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

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

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



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

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



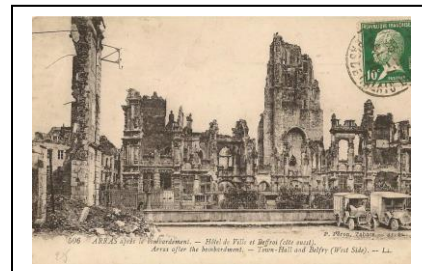
The 1st Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After *Beaumont-Hamel*, the ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux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

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

In the short period following the forlorn attack and then the resolute defence of April 14, the remnants of the 1st Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, to amalgamate 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.

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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 was in fact an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies. It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1st Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.



Late on that same evening the Newfoundlanders had retired to the relative calm of Arras.

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

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

At the outset of June, the 1st Battalion retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.



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

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



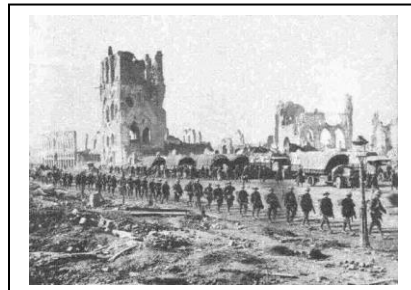
(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right – photograph from 2014*)

As seen in an earlier paragraph it was at or about this time, although the exact date is uncertain, that Second Lieutenant Cluett reported *to duty* with the Newfoundland Battalion.

* * * * *

Belgian *Flanders*, this low-lying area from, and including, the city of Ypres and westward to the coast, and *this* the only part of the country unoccupied by German forces – an occupation dating back to the early days of the *Great War* in the late summer of 1914 - had long before been selected by the British High Command to be the theatre of its summer offensive of 1917.

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



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

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



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

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



Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* would fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9. At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost would be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

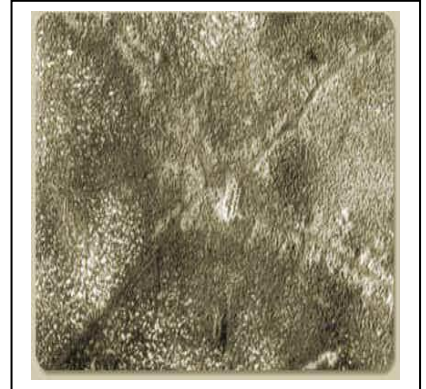
(Right: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010)*



On August 16, Second Lieutenant Cluett played his role at the former of the two named actions. He was as an officer of 'D' Company which was to advance on the left of the third and fourth waves, through 'C' Company, towards the second major objective of the day; in doing so, he and his unit apparently captured two enemy machine-guns. Second Lieutenant Cluett survived the action unscathed.

(continued)

There is no record as to whether or not 2nd Lieutenant Cluett was present at the *Broembek*. The only clue as to where he might have been at or about this time is a copy of a telegram sent from London on November 8 – well after the Battalion's withdrawal. He must almost certainly have soon been on his way back to the Continent, and any furlough back to the United Kingdom from France and Belgium was usually of a two-week duration, but this really leaves any conclusion about his whereabouts on October 9 no clearer-cut than before.



It was to be only two days after this last-mentioned confrontation, on October 11, that the 1st Battalion had marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe from there to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of 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 that same evening, the Battalion had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and would now march the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.

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

(Right: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



The Newfoundlanders were still there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and two days later when, on November 17 the Battalion was once again to travel by train, on this occasion in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it began to move further eastward on foot towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while on the move once more, the unit was issued as it went with... *war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of that night it marched to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – Zero Hour – the Newfoundland 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, bugles blowing, the 1st Battalion advanced to the fray.

This new offensive – apparently initially conceived to be no more than a large-scale raid - the so-called *Battle of Cambrai* would 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 used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered, there were 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 1st Battalion was again dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing, Masnières - where a Caribou stands today - and the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who went into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day*.



(Right: *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*)

(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 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether its capture was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012*)



**At five-hundred fifty-three all ranks – not counting the aforementioned ten per cent reserve - the 1st 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.*

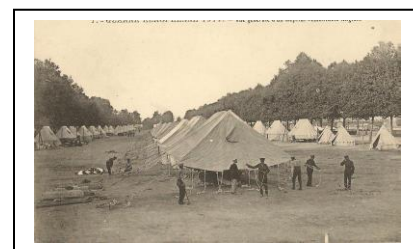


(Right above: *A number of graves of soldiers from the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery. Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has identified them as being Canadian. – photograph from 2010*)

The son of Walter Cluett (merchant fisherman, deceased December 22, 1920) and of Sarah Cluett (née *Grandy*)* – to whom he eventually had allotted a daily dollar from his pay of two dollars plus a small Field Allowance of sixty cents per diem - of Belleoram, Fortune Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Harvey, Maria-Grandy, John and to Reginald-Arthur.

**The couple married on November 26, 1885.*

***Second Lieutenant Cluett's cousin Frances (Fannie) was a nurse at the time, serving with the 10th General Hospital in Rouen. Apprised of Vincent's death, she requested that his effects be distributed among the Battalion. She was the author of a series of war-time letters which have recently been researched and published, and made public on the internet by Memorial University. (Your Daughter Fannie – Flanker Press Ltd., 2006)*



(continued)

Second Lieutenant Cluett was admitted to the 48th Casualty Clearing Station near the ruined village of Ytres on November 21, 1917.

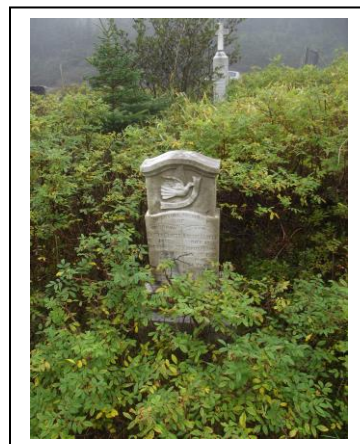
(Preceding page: A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War. Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature. -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

Having incurred...*dangerous*...gunshot wounds to the thigh - complicated by multiple fractures – incurred on that same 21st day of November (but also see below) in the fighting near the French villages of Marcoing and Masnières* - he was eventually transferred, on November 25 (see below) to the St. John's Ambulance Brigade Hospital at Étaples.

Despite having been operated on twice, on the 21st (see below) and again on the 24th, Second Lieutenant Cluett was reported as having *died of wounds* in that same hospital on November 26, 1917.

**Some of his papers record the November 21, but November 20 is found elsewhere (see doctor's report below). Nor is the date of the first operation necessarily exact (also see doctor's report) as a further document has him... 'Admitted 21st/22nd to 48 CCS'...*

(Right: A family monument commemorating the life of Vincent Cluett and also of his father, Walter, stands in the brush of St. Lawrence Anglican Cemetery, Belleoram, Newfoundland. – photograph from 2016 (?))



The following are excerpts from a doctor's report – J.E.(?) Barnes of the Royal Army Medical Corps – in response to a request from the Commanding Officer of the Newfoundland Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel A.L. Hadow:

1) ...I was asked to see the officer at about 2.0 pm on Nov. 20th by one of the men of the Nfld. Regt. who informed me that he was wounded and in urgent need of attention. Guided by the man & accompanied by 2 SBs (stretcher-bearers) and a stretcher...I went round to the right or Southern side of MARCOING COPSE following the line of light railway.

I found 2/Lt. Cluett lying partially submerged in a ditch of water close to the bridge carrying the light railway across Canal on the left hand side of the railway.

2nd Lt. Cluett who was in a very collapsed state had a G.S.W. (gun-shot wound) of the right thigh. The bullet had...shattered the femur...and passed out on the inner side of the thigh leaving a large wound of exit which was hæmorrhaging profusely. I immediately dressed the wound...and by the aid of a rifle as a splint...to render the fractured limb immobile.

While attending to 2/Lt Cluett one of the two SBs with me was wounded by a bullet through the thigh. I finished attending to 2/Lt Cluett and placed him on a stretcher, saw rthe wounded SB was dressed, tabbed them both & then went in search of SBs to have them removed immediately.

I did not see 2/Lt Cluett again. When attending this officer I registered a mental impression of his wound & general condition which caused me to entertain little or no hope of his recovery...

2) ...to the 48th CCS. He was operated on by the Surgical Specialist on the date of admission and again on November 24th. Though his condition was considered serious, it improved sufficiently to allow him to be evacuated to the Base on the 25th...



Lieutenant Cluett was twenty-one years of age at the time of his passing: date of birth at Belleoram, Newfoundland, December 12, 1895 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

(The above photograph of Second Lieutenant Cluett is from the Provincial Archives.)

Second Lieutenant Vincent Cluett was entitled to the British War Medal and to 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 – November 29, 2023.