

No photograph of the last resting-place of Private Collins is as yet available.

Private William Joseph Collins (Regimental Number 82) is interred in Alexandria (*Chatby*) Military and War Memorial Cemetery in Egypt.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *wharf labourer* working with G.M. Barr, fish exporters of 399, Water Street, for \$9.60 per week, William Joseph Collins presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 26 of 1914 – just three weeks and one day after the *Declaration of War* – for a medical examination. It was an exercise which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

Six days later, on September 2, William Collins returned to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, on this second occasion for enlistment, whereupon he was engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*. A recruit of the First Draft, he was likely now ordered to the tented area by that time established on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the East End of St. John's where a four-five week course of training was already under way.

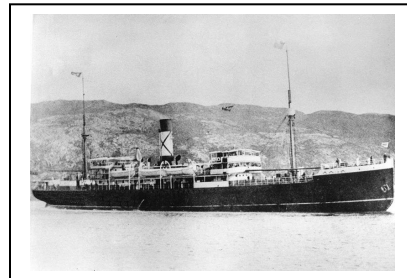
The regimental authorities were *also* busy by now, preparing for the transport of this, the first body of volunteers, to *overseas* - and later to *active – service*.

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At the beginning of the month of October a large number of the new recruits underwent attestation; Private Collins was one of that number, taking his oath of allegiance on the second day of October.

Two days later, after the Newfoundland contingent – it was not as yet a battalion – of ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies had paraded through the city, it embarked onto the Bowring Brothers’ vessel *Florizel* which was awaiting in St. John’s Harbour.

Private Collins and his comrades-in-arms of the *First Five Hundred* – also to be known to history as the *Blue Puttees* – were now to sit on board ship for the best part of a day as it was not to be until the morrow that *Florizel* would sail to the south coast of the Island and to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the Canadian Division to the United Kingdom.



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

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

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



(Right below: *The venerable 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 some seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit – by now ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies re-enforced by ‘C’, ‘D’, and ‘E’ - was ordered moved from the Scottish capital 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 ready to be ordered on ‘active service’.

**The number was about fifteen hundred, sufficient to provide four ‘fighting’ companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

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(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)

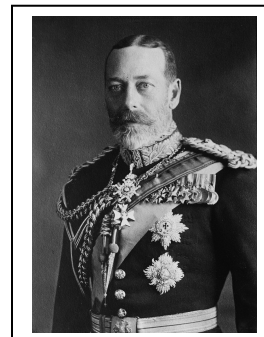


At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' – Private Collins among their ranks - were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot.

This force, now designated as 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 the aforementioned last-arrived 'F', were ordered transferred to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

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



It was also during this period while at Aldershot that on August 14 Private Collins was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion 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 a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was likely to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

It might also be mentioned that upon leaving the United Kingdom he was also to leave behind an impressive (mis-) Conduct Sheet. By that time Private Collins had accumulated a total of seventy-seven days confined to quarters or such-like penalties, and been fined a substantial sum of money in reparation for a goodly number of offences, most of which had been related to the misuse of alcohol.

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



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While ‘E’ and ‘F’ Companies were beginning their posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr, on August 20 of 1915 the 1st Battalion embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Plymouth-Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks.

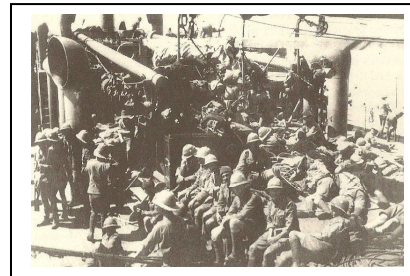


(Right above: *The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a ‘White Star Line’ vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

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 was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *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 adjacent: *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 – Dardanelles to the French, Çanakkale to the Turks. – from Provincial Archives*)



(Right: *A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where the 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*)



When the Newfoundlanders landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* on that September night of 1915 they would disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion was to 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 proved to be little more than a debacle:

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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.

**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.*

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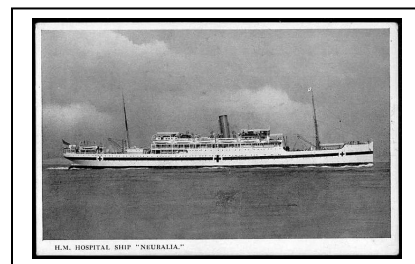
A bare three weeks after the Newfoundland Battalion had set foot on the sand and stone of *Kangaroo Beach*, on October 10 Private Collins was to be evacuated from *Suvla Bay* and placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Neuralia*. There he was diagnosed as inflicted with dysentery.

(Right: This is Kangaroo Beach, at the far end where the sand becomes rock. The caption says that they are evacuating sick and wounded onto those landing-craft - the antenna-like protuberances allowed for the ramp to be lifted and lowered. They also helped give the vessels their nickname: Beetles. – from The Fighting Newfoundlander)



On the 16th day of that same month *Neuralia* docked in the British naval base in the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria. From the harbour, Private Collins was transferred to and admitted into the 19th General Hospital.

(Right: The image of HMHS 'Neuralia' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. A large modern ocean-liner of some nine-thousand tons, she was requisitioned for use as a hospital ship in June of 1915. Able to accommodate over six-hundred sick or wounded, she was used in this capacity or as an ambulance transport until July, 1919. She served in the Second World War until almost the last day of the European conflict until May 1 when she struck a mine in Taranto Harbour and sank. There were apparently no casualties.)



(Right: One of the major thoroughfares in the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)



The only son of Jeremiah (also known as *Jerry*) Collins (former wharf labourer but disabled by a broken arm by the time of enlistment) and of Sarah (also known as *Jessie*) Collins of 1, Flower Hill in St. John's, he had at least two siblings, sisters, one a Mrs. W.F. Finn of Ropewalk Range, to whom were eventually sent his medals in 1921*.

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**In a correspondence of 1916, they were described as being seventeen and fourteen years of age.*

Private Collins was reported as having *died of sickness* – of dysentery, by the Officer Commanding the 19th General Hospital in Alexandria, on October 28 of 1915.

William Joseph Collins had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-two years.



(The above photograph of Private Collins is from the Provincial Archives.)

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



The 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 12, 2023.