

A photograph of his grave is not yet available.

*(The photograph of Private Columbus is from the Provincial Archives.)*



Private Fred Columbus (Regimental Number 912), is buried in Alexandria (*Chatby*) Military and War Memorial Cemetery in Egypt.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as being that of a *fisherman-farmer* working with his father and earning an annual six-hundred dollars, Fred Columbus 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 the final day of December – and of the year - of 1914. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

It was to be another six days following this medical assessment that on January 6 Fred Columbus returned to the *C.L.B. Armoury* to thereupon be enlisted – engaged at the private soldier's rate of a single dollar per diem plus a daily ten-cent *Field Allowance*.

However, whereas attestation for others had come about on the day of enlistment, Fred Columbus was now to await yet a further two weeks plus a day, until January 21, before *that* final formality would come to pass.

(continued)

Now for Private Columbus, Number 912, there was now to be a further eight-week waiting period. How he occupied himself during that time is not recorded among his papers; he may, of course, have temporarily returned to work – or simply just to his home on the west coast of the island, but this is only speculation.



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

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



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

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

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

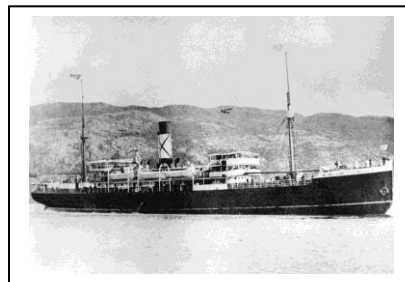


(Right above: *From its vantage point on Castle Hill, the venerable fortress overlooks the city of Edinburgh where in 1915 the Newfoundlanders were to provide the first garrison to be drawn from outside the British Isles. – photograph from 2011)*

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

\* \* \* \* \*

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

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

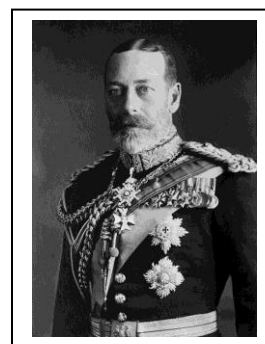
It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent would eventually receive the re-enforcements from home – 'F' Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength\*. The now-formed 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the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

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



*\*This was approximately fifteen hundred, sufficient to furnish two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot. This force, now the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



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

It was while the Newfoundland Battalion was in training during those weeks at Aldershot, on August 15 that Private Columbus would be prevailed upon to enlist for the duration of the conflict.

*\*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 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.)*



(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.*)

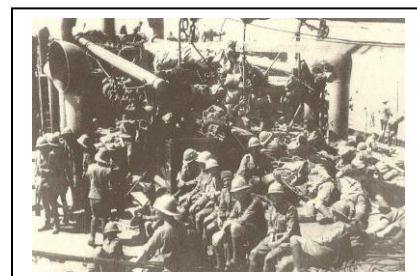
On August 20, 1915, Private Columbus and his Newfoundland unit embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks.



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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 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, 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)

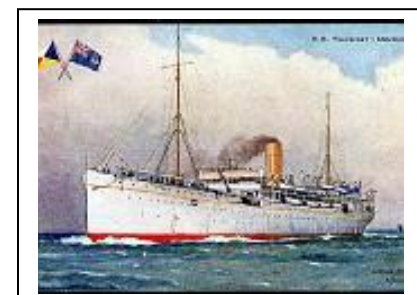


(Right: Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at *Mudros*: either *Megantic* on August 29, *Ausonia* on September 18, or *Prince Abbas* on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on *Gallipoli*. – from Provincial Archives)

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



Private *Columbus* had hardly set foot on the sand and stone – mostly the latter – of *Kangaroo Beach* before he fell victim to Turkish gun-fire. Only three days after having disembarked at *Suvla Bay*, while serving in the trenches with Number 6 Platoon of ‘D’ Company, he was wounded during an enemy artillery barrage; he was one of the several casualties, some fatal, of that day, September 29.



Having suffered gun-shot injuries to the thigh and to his scrotum, he was admitted, to be deemed *dangerously wounded*, into the 26<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at *Suvla Bay* before being further evacuated on the following day onto His Majesty’s Hospital Ship *Soudan*.

(Right above: The image of a peace-time ‘*Soudan*’ is from the *Old Ship Picture Galleries* web-site. Built in 1901 for the *P&O (Peninsula and Orient) Steam Navigation Company*, she was hired by the British in 1914 to serve as a hospital ship and then as a troop carrier, roles that she played until 1919.)



He was thereupon shipped back to Egypt, arriving in Alexandria on October 1, to be admitted into the 21<sup>st</sup> General Hospital on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. There the medical staff was obliged to amputate his left leg.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *Turkish artillery still keeps the vigil at Suvla Bay to this day.* – photograph from 2011)

The son of Frank Columbus, fisherman (deceased on June 9, 1921), and of Susan Columbus (née *Benoit*\*) – to whom he had allotted a forty cent per day allowance from his pay – of Shallop Cove in the District of St. George – he was brother of fifteen siblings: Joseph, Mary-Elizabeth, Peter, Francis (*Frank*\*), David, Nancy, Alice, Louis, Delia, Richard, Mercy, Stolia, Genevieve, Cecelia and to Isabelle.

*\*The couple had been married in the community of Sandy Point on January 20, 1891 (from Genealogy.com).*

Private Columbus was reported as having...*died of wounds*...on October 9, 1915, in hospital at Alexandria. At home it was the Right Reverend Bishop Power who was requested to bear the news to his family.

Fred Columbus (still the French *Colombe*\* in the 1911 census and in the Newfoundland Vital Statistics) had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-one years: date of birth in St George('s), in the district of the same name, Newfoundland, April 24, 1893 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

*\*At the time, conscious efforts were being made by the various authorities to anglicize the francophone population of the District.*

Private Fred Columbus 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).



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*\*His brother Francis (known as Frank) Columbus, Private, Regimental Number 2296 - a more complete account of his all-too-brief military career to be found elsewhere in these files – attested on March 24, 1916. Some four months later he sailed directly to England on board 'Sicilian' and reported to the Regimental Depot in Scotland at the end of that July.*

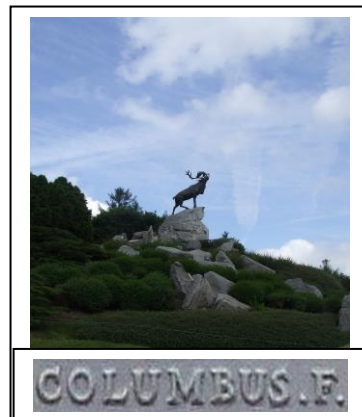
*Dispatched from Ayr to the Continent on October 3, Private Columbus and a large draft reported to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at an inopportune time, the day of the action at Guedecourt in which none of the newcomers was to serve. But it was not to be long before he was a casualty of that First Battle of the Somme: Wounded – albeit mildly – by shell-fire in late November, he returned to his unit after having received medical attention for two weeks.*

***During that Spring of 1917 Private Columbus was once again to be hospitalized – on this occasion – from February 17 up until June 7 - having been laid low by sickness: both tonsillitis and diphtheria.***

***He re-joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in time to serve in the holocaust of Passchendaele and survived his unit's first major action at the Steenbeek on August 16. But at the Broembeek on October 9 he was reported as...missing in action.***

***Three weeks afterwards, on October 31 there came the report that the remains of Private Columbus had been found, identified and subsequently buried. His grave was then either destroyed in later fighting or its location lost or forgotten.***

***Thus he is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou at Beaumont-Hamel.***



**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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 31, 2023.**