



Private Peter Joseph Constantine (Regimental Number 563) is buried in Ayr Cemetery, Ayrshire – Grave reference G.1.2.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a teamster working for *Simon Levitz* of 96, Gower Street in St. John's, for a weekly six dollars – although, elsewhere, seven-hundred fifty dollars per annum is cited - Peter Joseph Constantine presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on September 15 of 1914 – six weeks after the *Declaration of War* on August 4 – for a medical examination. It was an exercise which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.



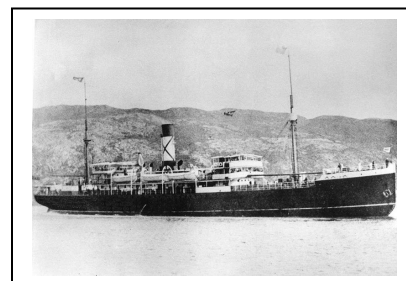
On the morrow, September 16, James Heaney returned to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, on this second occasion for enlistment, whereupon he was engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*. A recruit of the First Draft, he was likely now ordered to the 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*.

At the beginning of the month of October a large number of the new recruits underwent attestation; Private Constantine was one of that number, taking his oath of allegiance on the third 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 Constantine 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.*

(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*)

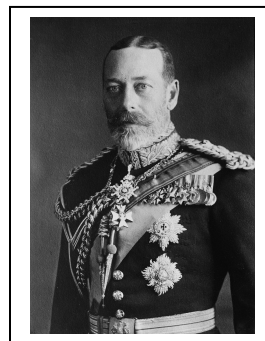


At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ – Private Heaney among their ranks - were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot.

This force, now designated as the 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, 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 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 13 Private Constantine was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion for the *duration of the war*\*.

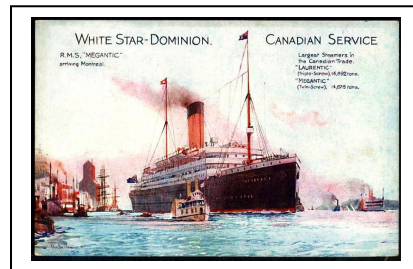
*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was likely to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

(Right: *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.)*





While 'E' and 'F' Companies were beginning their posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr, on August 20 of 1915 the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.



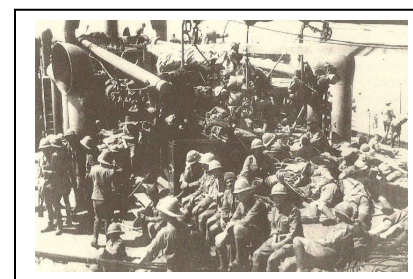
(Right above: *The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *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: 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011*)



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:

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.





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

(Right below: *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*; a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm was to 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 had been the priority.



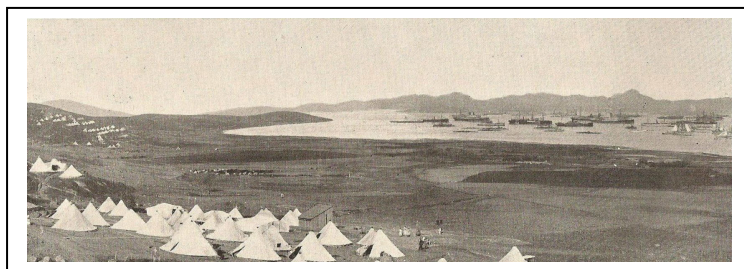
There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

\* \* \* \* \*

Just more than two weeks after the cataclysmic storm, on December 2, Private Constantine was admitted into the 26<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at *Sulva Bay* suffering from frostbite and trench-foot\* and, two days later again, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of the month, was transferred from there to the No. 2 Australian Hospital at Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos some seventy kilometres away.

*\*There appears in his record a single entry which records dysentery, although apparently nothing further was documented.*

(Right: *Allied medical facilities, a great number of them under canvas, almost totally surrounded a busy Mudros Bay and its small harbour in the summer and the autumn of the year 1915. – photograph from Illustration*)



He was then again transferred, on December 10, to the Lowland Convalescent Depot, also on Lemnos, from where he was discharged to *active duty* at Base Depot, Alexandria, on December 28. Private Constantine remained there almost three weeks before he was re-joined his unit on January 16 of the New Year, 1916.

(Right: *A main thoroughfare, the rue de la Gare de Ramleh, in the port-city of Alexandria at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)





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During the brief interim Private Constantine's absence, the Gallipoli Campaign and the Newfoundland Battalion's role in it had come to its ignominious conclusion. 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 to be evacuated to the nearby island of *Imbros*, some to *Lemnos*, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(Right: *Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed Achi Baba, positions which were never breached: The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture.* – photograph from 2011)



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

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



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

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



(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 evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of *Alexandria*, to arrive there on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then 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 29<sup>th</sup> 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.***

***(Preceding page: The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuations – in December and January - of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The Newfoundlanders, employed as the rear-guard, were, on both occasions, among the last to leave at both Suvla Bay and Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)***

**And it had been in that short period as the Newfoundland unit passed through Alexandria in mid-January, on its way from there to its encampment at Suez, that Private Constantine had reported back...to duty.**

\* \* \* \* \*

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

**After a two-month episode spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage 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.**



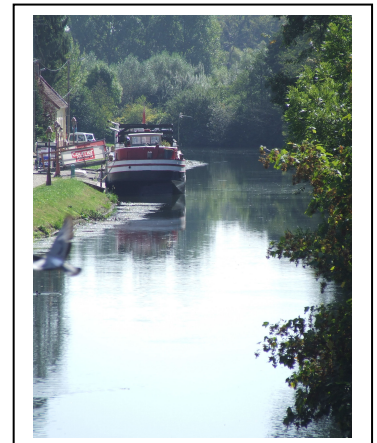
***(Right above: British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles. – from a vintage post-card)***

**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 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)***

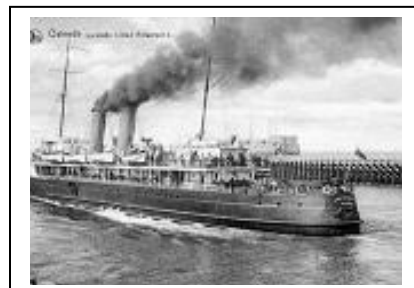


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On April 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days'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

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However, at some point before reaching Englebelmer, Private Constantine had sprained his ankle. It had apparently been deemed to be serious since he was admitted into the 16<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in the coastal town of Le Tréport on or about April 12 and, on the same day, was thereupon almost immediately embarked onto the Belgian hospital ship *Stad Antwerpen* for the cross-Channel passage back to the United Kingdom.



(Right above: *The hospital ship Stad Antwerpen was one of four Belgian ferry-boats to be transformed into hospital vessels during the Great War. The photograph is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Once having arrived in England – on that same April 12 – Private Constantine was transferred from the ship to the south-west London Borough of Wandsworth where he was admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital\*. He remained there receiving further treatment for two weeks.



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



(Right: *A party of Newfoundland patients dressed in hospital uniform, but otherwise unfortunately unidentified, seen here convalescing in the grounds of the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital, Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



On April 26, Private Constantine was granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded to military personnel upon release from hospital. Upon completion of this period of leave, he was posted to the Regimental Depot where he reported to duty on May 6.

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



At the end of the summer of 1915, the once-Royal Borough of Ayr on Scotland's west coast was to begin to serve as the overseas base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment from where – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 - re-enforcement drafts from home were to be despatched to bolster the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.



(Right above: *The new race-course at Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden – photo from 2012*)

At Ayr the record of Private Constantine seems to present a blank – if one overlooks an *overstayed pass* for which he was *confined to barracks* for two days - until March 15 of 1917 when he was promoted to the rank of lance corporal – with its five-cents-a-day increment; then the ledger closes again for more than another ten months\*.

*\*Except that on his War Gratuity Application he claims that he was on active service from March of 1917 until May of 1917, and in France during that period, something which is unconfirmed in the archival documents.*

In early 1918, Lance Corporal Constantine became a married man: the young lady was Lilly Coutts Main – her father's name *David*, of 143, George Street, Ayr - and who was a shop employee of a Mr. James Milroy, *Fruit and Vegetable Merchant*. The date of the ceremony was February 1, 1918 and thus the wedding was a *fait accompli* by the 16<sup>th</sup> of that month when Lance Corporal Constantine applied to transfer a daily allotment of seventy cents to her from his pay\*.



(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.*

*\*Apparently the permission of the Officer Commanding was requested later again, and not until February 28. It was granted and back-dated to February 1. It is perhaps only a coincidence that Lance Corporal Constantine reverted to the rank of private on that same February 28.*

In the meantime there was a further complication: by the end of 1917, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion was about to move its headquarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to *Hazely Down Camp*, Hampshire, not far distant from the venerable cathedral city of Winchester.



(Right above: *Troops on the march through a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from The War Illustrated*)

The 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion's transfer to Hazely Down had been finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, so it is unsure what arrangements were made on Private Constantine's behalf, one paper suggesting that he returned – or was posted for the first time – to Hazely only in June of that year.

As one of the surviving *Blue Puttees* who by that time had been away from home for the best part of four years, Private Constantine was to be granted a special, extended leave to Newfoundland and he departed from the Tilbury Docks, East London, on the River Thames on July 22 of that same year – the ship possibly *Gloucestershire* - arriving in Sydney on August 2, then in Newfoundland on the *Kyle* from Sydney on August 4\*.

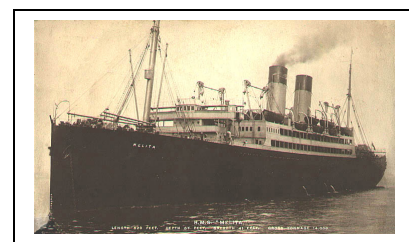


(Right above: '*Gloucestershire*' served during the Great War as an armed merchant cruiser from February of 1916 until January of 1919. Beginning on July 22 of 1918 she began convoy escort duty at London to sail to Sydney, Nova Scotia, with one-hundred forty-seven troops on board returning to Canada. – image from the *Naval History.org* web-site)

There he was given a posting at Headquarters in St. John's until he requested...*conditional leave...from December 18...until recalled...to commence employment with J.C. Oke, Undertakers, subject to...Field, subsistence & separation allowance cancelled during period of leave.*

*\*There must have been at least two ships for this Blue Puttee Leave as another source has an embarkation at Southampton on July 27 with the returnees reporting to duty on August 8. Given the length of time taken for the passage, it is likely that they also travelled via a Canadian port.*

Discharged definitively in St. John's, Newfoundland, on February 15 of 1919, he returned to the United Kingdom via the *Kyle* to Louisburg on or about March 3, then from St. John, New Brunswick, having sailed on the newly-built *Melita* of the Canadian Pacific Steamship Company on March 7.



(Right above: *The image of the passenger-vessel Melita at some time in 1918 – perhaps her maiden voyage in January of that year – is from the Ships' Lists web-site.)*

His intention at the time had been to arrange for passage to Newfoundland for his wife and their young family, daughters Jessie, born August 29, 1918, and later, Jane Main, born December 4 of 1919.

In the meantime however, conditions were to change for the Constantine couple, but not for the better. His imminent demobilization having been confirmed on February 13, 1919, Private Constantine was diagnosed about a week later as suffering from tuberculosis. Once having arrived back in Scotland, his condition began to deteriorate rapidly.

(continued)



He was admitted to *Heathfield* Sanatorium at Ayr, on November 12, 1919, his condition there considered to be...*critical*...and where he was to remain until his death.

The son of Peter (*Paul?*) Constantine, ship's baker and employee of *Bowring Brothers*, and of Hannah Constantine (*née Dunphy*)\*, of 20, McFarlane Street, St. John's; brother of Leo-Francis, Madeline-Joseph, Mary-Elizabeth, James-Joseph and Philip(?); husband of Lilly (*Lillian*) and father of Jessie and Jane, he passed away at fifteen minutes past ten on the evening of April 8, 1920.



*\*The couple married on October 30, 1889.*

Peter Joseph Constantine had enlisted at a *declared* twenty-four years of age: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, April 27, 1896 (from a copy of Roman Catholic Parish Records)\*.

*\*A second source appears to suggest May 22, 1890, but this was the birth-date of his sister Mary Elizabeth.*

(Right above: *A further view of the Newfoundland Plot in Ayr Cemetery, Ayrshire*)

Private Peter Joseph Constantine 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 10, 2023.