



Private James Matthew Cron (Regimental Number 1585), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



His occupation prior to military service recorded as being that of a *student*, James Matthew Cron presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on June 4 of 1915. It was a procedure which would pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

On the same day as his medical assignment, June 4, he was then to enlist and to thereupon be engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar to which was added a ten-cent per diem field allowance.

Twenty-four hours later, on June 5, he swore the oath of allegiance, habitually the final formality of enlistment, to George V, whereupon, at that precise moment, James Matthew Cron became...*a soldier of the King*.

**A second source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.*

There thereupon followed a further waiting period of two weeks plus a day before Private Cron, Regimental Number 1585, was to embark onto His Majesty's Transport *Calgarian* on June 20 in St. John's Harbour and sail (*almost**) directly to the United Kingdom. He was one of the two-hundred forty-two personnel of 'F' Company and eighty-five naval reservists to take passage on that day.



(Right above: *Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from The War Illustrated*)

Where Private Cron was to spend the interim between his attestation and his departure on...*overseas service*...is not clear – and is not documented among his papers.

It may be that he was to return temporarily to work and surely likely that he was to spend at least some of that time at his home in the Conception Bay town of Harbour Grace - but this of course is only speculation.



(Preceding page: *The photograph of Newfoundland military personnel in tenders on their way to board 'Calgarian' is from the Provincial Archives. 'Calgarian' was not a requisitioned troop transport but in September of 1914 had been taken over by the British government to serve as an armed merchant-cruiser. She did, however, as on this occasion, at times carry troops and civilian passengers across the Atlantic. She was later torpedoed and sunk by U-19 off the north of Ireland on March 1, 1918.*)

**Apparently the ship took nineteen days to make what was usually the journey of about a week. Not only was Calgarian escorting three submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders apparently even having the time to cross the straits to spend a few hours in North Africa. She reached Liverpool on July 9.*



(Right above: *The British Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-Great War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background beyond the harbour and Royal Navy dockyard. – from a vintage postcard*)

On the day after its arrival in the United Kingdom, 'F' Company travelled from Liverpool by train to Hawick from where the detachment marched and then reported...*to duty...at Stobs Camp* on the evening of July 10. It was an important moment: the Newfoundland Regiment, as of that day counting fifteen hundred personnel*, was now at establishment strength and could be posted on...*active service.*

**A number sufficient to furnish four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*



(Right: *The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles. – original photograph from the Provincial Archives*)

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Almost nine months before that June 20 of 1915, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914, the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, they to become 'A' and 'B' Companies.



During that same period the various authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

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

(continued)

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 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 having disembarked 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.

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of 'D' Company to arrive – they via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty...*at Edinburgh, and then 'E' Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4*.

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

(Right: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011*)



Seven days after the arrival of 'E' Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit was dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.

(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 of Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



Two months less a day later, on July 10, 'F' Company marched into *Stobs Camp*.

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From *Stobs Camp*, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the four senior Companies, having now become the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, were transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before departing to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(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.)

The later arrivals to the United Kingdom, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were eventually to form the nucleus of the soon to be formed 2nd (*Reserve*) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

The Depot was to be Private Cron's home for the more than eight months which were now to follow.

At the end of this summer of 1915, the once-Royal Borough of Ayr on Scotland's west coast was to begin to serve as the overseas base for what was to become the 2nd (*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 1st Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.

(Right: *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)



(Right below: *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.



It was at almost the end of those aforesaid eight months while still at Ayr, on April 5 of 1916, and just three days before his departure to join the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, the unit by then in France, that Private Cron 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 only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

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By that time he had witnessed the departure of the first three re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: the first in mid-November of 1915 which had joined the 1st Battalion on December 1 at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*; the second which had sailed for Egypt only to be ordered back to the French port of *Marseille*; and the third which had left *Scotland* at the end of *March* to go directly to the *Continent*, to *France*.

On April 8, Private Cron, as a private soldier of the 4th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the English south-coast port of *Southampton* on his way to report to the 1st Battalion on the *Continent*. Arriving on that same day, the 8th, in *Rouen*, capital city of *Normandy* and site of the large *British Expeditionary Force Base Depot*, the Draft was posted there for several days of final training and organization* before being dispatched to seek out the parent *Newfoundland Battalion*.



This rendezvous occurred on April 26 while the Newfoundland unit was undertaking its first tour in the trenches of the *Western Front*.

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

**Apparently the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

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While Private Cron's 'F' Company had been beginning its time of training at Ayr in the summer of 1915 the aforementioned four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', of the Newfoundland Regiment, having now become the 1st Battalion, had thereupon been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) *Mediterranean Expeditionary Force* and was soon to be dispatched to...*active service*.



(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, 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 of 1915, the Newfoundland Battalion had 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 was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: ‘*Kangaroo Beach*’, where the officers and men of the 1st Battalion of the 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*, and where the 1st Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* they were to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would now 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 been proving 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 their allies, the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.



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

(Right: *No-Man’s-Land* at *Suvla Bay* as seen from the Newfoundland positions – 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 what perhaps was to be 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.

(Right: *This is Anzac Bay in the fore-ground with the Salt Lake in the centre further away. The bottom of Suvla Bay is just to be seen on the left and adjacent to the Salt Lake, and further away again. The hills in the distance and the ones from which this photograph was taken were held by the Turks and formed a horse-shoe around the plain surrounding the Salt Lake - which was where the British and Newfoundlanders were stationed. – photograph from 2011*)



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.

By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard. Some of the Battalion personnel had thereupon been evacuated to the nearby island of *Imbros*, some to *Lemnos*, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



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

The British, Indian and *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – had by now simply been 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 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 evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria and beyond and had thus once more taken ship.

On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived at Alexandria with the 1st Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16th, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she had docked early on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders had landed and marched to their encampment.

There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.

(Right: The image of the Blue Funnel Line vessel 'Nestor' is from the Shipspotting.com web-site. The vessel was launched and fitted in 1912-1913 and was to serve much of her commercial life until 1950 plying the routes between Britain and Australia. During the Great War she served mainly in the transport of Australian troops and was requisitioned once again in 1940 for government service in the Second World War. In 1950 she was broken up.)



****Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.***

(Right: 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 were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.

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



The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.

(Right adjacent: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseille. – 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 Marseille.

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 which they had then traversed on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* would 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 entire 1st Battalion – including the 2nd Reinforcement Draft having arrived from Egypt - 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*.



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.*



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And as related in an earlier paragraph, it was during this period of the Newfoundland Battalion's first tour in the trenches of the *Western Front*, that Private Cron's draft arrived from Rouen on April 26 to report...*to duty*.

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

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Having then been withdrawn at the end of that tour 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 upcoming British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, that flowed – and still does so today – through the region.

The only specific record of Private Cron during that entire period concerns him having been hospitalized on the 19th day of May – the hospital itself remains unidentified – and as having returned *to duty* – at the Base Depot at Rouen or directly to the Newfoundland Battalion is not specified - on May 30.

He had been admitted for medical attention to a case of *German measles*.

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*.

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It was to be the greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage of *the Somme* was to continue for four and a half months.

(Right: *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...?)*

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Wounded on that July 1 of 1916 at Beaumont-Hamel during the fighting of the first day of the...*First Battle of the Somme*, Private Cron had been evacuated two days later, July 3, to the 1st Canadian General Hospital at Étaples; he had incurred a gun-shot injury – likely from flying shrapnel - to the right hip. On the following day, July 4, he was embarked for passage back to the United Kingdom onto His Majesty’s Hospital Ship *Dieppe*.



(Right: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)



(Right: *The image of a peace-time ‘Dieppe’ is from the ‘Old Ship Picture Galleries’ web-site. Built in 1905 for the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway Company, the vessel was requisitioned during the Great War for use as a troop-ship before then being converted into a hospital ship. She survived the conflict to be employed variously during the inter-war years, then was requisitioned once more for service in the Second World War. She struck a mine in March of 1941 and sank.*)



On that same July 4, upon his arrival in England, Private Cron was admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth, London. From there he was discharged on July 13 to the *Brooklands* Convalescent Hospital at Weybridge, to remain there for the next four weeks.



(Preceding page: *The main building of what was to become the 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War had originally been opened, on July 1st 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, is seen here convalescing in the grounds of the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



Following his convalescence Private Cron was granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded to military personnel in the United Kingdom upon discharge from hospital – in his case from August 16 to 25. This period of leave was followed by the almost inevitable posting back in Scotland, to the Regimental Depot at Ayr.



(Right: *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*)

It was on February 14-15 of the following year, 1917, that the 18th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to France with Private Cron one of its number. Disembarking on the 15th in Rouen, the detachment subsequently made its way to the same Base Depot to prepare themselves for the return to active duty with the Newfoundland Battalion.

It was a rendezvous that was effected on March 6 when a contingent of a single officer and thirty-one *other ranks* reported...*to duty*...in the village of Meaulté. They were not the only new-comers of the day: the Regimental Band had also made the journey from Scotland.



(Right: *The Regimental Band some six months later, led by its Mascot, Sable Chief, on parade in September of 1917 at the Chelsea Barracks, London – from the Provincial Archives*)

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After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, and Private Cron's evacuation from the field for medical attention, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that any German counter-assault might well annihilate what had managed to survive of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*.

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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 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 was still to number 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 establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – maybe even fewer - 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 above: *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 had incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

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



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

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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 to be at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.



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

(Right above: *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 had begun to wend its way back up to the front lines.



There it had 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 above: *A typical British Army Camp during rather inclement winter conditions somewhere on the Continent – from a vintage post-card*)

It had been on January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of Corps Reserve and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* to make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it was to entrain for the small town of Corbie where it had thereupon taken over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

After that recent 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 apparently had already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

Those casualties, however, were to be only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig somewhat cavalierly referred to as *wastage* since the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches during those several days.

However, that winter period – as had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the Great War – would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable for most of the combatants of both sides. It had been a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were kept busy, particularly, so it seems - from at least Canadian medical documentation - with thousands of cases of dental work.

And as has been related in an earlier paragraph, this period also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion this had at least partially been undertaken in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.

On February 18 the 1st Battalion began a five-day trek back from Coisy to the forward area where it went back into the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. It was at a place called Sailly-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans was lively: after only two days the Battalion had incurred four dead, nine wounded and three gassed without there having been any infantry action. The Newfoundlanders were withdrawn on February 25 to return three days later.



They carried with them orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Sailly-Saillisel...to be carried out on March 1.

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

In fact, 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 that 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.



(Preceding page: *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 had been a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events. They had even had 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 above: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from The War Illustrated*)

And it was, as recorded in a previous paragraph, during this period of relative calm spent in the rear area, that Private Cron, on March 6 after an absence of some eight months, reported back to the Newfoundland Battalion.

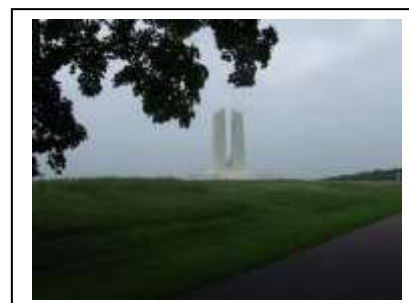
* * * * *

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had begun 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, in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

(Right: *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 – just over four thousand - 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.



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

(continued)

(Preceding page: *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 .*

'...the only information he gained was to the effect that Private Cron was last seen entering the village of Monchy on the day of the attack with the rest of the Battalion...'

(Extract from the response to a letter from home making enquiries of Private Cron)



(Right above: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux today stands in the centre of the re-built community on top of the remains of a German strongpoint. – photograph from 2009*)

The son of James Cron, *General Manager, Importer and Exporter*, and of Emma Cron (née *Martin*) – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Harbour Grace, he was also step-brother* to Catherine Frances (later Mrs. James Beveridge) who was nursing at the time in the United Kingdom and who was soon to make her way to Salonika, to nurse the troops in that particular theatre of war.

**James Cron's first wife was Frances (née Ross) who died in 1888. She was mother to John-Maxwell*, to Charles, to Margaret-Isabel (died young) and to Catherine-Frances. His second wife was Emma (née Martin), mother of Private James-Matthew, of Mary-Stewart, of Lilian-Maria, of Alice, of Frederick-Robert and of Emma.*

**Private John-Maxwell Cron of the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment, Number 2090, survived the Great War.*

Private Cron was at first reported as...*missing in action*...on April 14, 1917, while serving with 'B' Company at Monchy-le-Preux during the fighting of the day.



(continued)

However, based on later evidence, perhaps the memo cited below, his record was amended, as early as May 13, 1917, so as to read...*killed in action*. At home, it was the Reverend G.S. Coffin who was requested to bear the news to his family.

(Preceding page: *This monument, to be found in Harbour Grace Presbyterian Cemetery, records the sacrifice of Private Cron of the Newfoundland Regiment and also of Sergeant Graham Duff of the Canadian Garrison Artillery (see elsewhere in the 'Died in Service' files.)*

James Matthew Cron was eighteen years of age at the time of his death according to Newfoundland Vital Statistics – his birthdate August 1, 1898. (A second source, his army record, has him *enlisting* at the *declared* age of nineteen years and two months.)



(Right: *The photograph of Private Cron is from the 'Find a Grave' website.*)

No. 2489, J. Mahon, states that Pte. Cron was wounded on Ap. 14 and that while making his way back 2 shells pitched quite close to him and he disappeared. I do not know through what channel his papers were forwarded, but you might ask the Graves Registration if they have any trace of his grave

A L Hadow

(Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Lovell Hadow, CMG, was Battalion C.O. at the time.)

Private James Matthew Cron was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

(continued on following page)



2M Military Hospital
Whalley
Lancs 17/5/17

Dear Mr. Anderson

I received your letter this morning. The news of Jim's death came as a great shock to me, even yet I cannot realize it.

Thanks for letting me know as otherwise I might have read it in the 'Times'. I am under orders for Salonika, may be leaving at any time. The sooner now, the better, as I shall have less time to fret. I know you will overlook the way this is written, as I hardly know what I have been doing all day.

I am

Yours sincerely

Frances Cron (sister)

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 - December 28, 2022.