



Private Gordon Etheridge (Regimental Number 1858), 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 that of a *teacher*, Gordon Etheridge was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on September 27 of 1915 for a medical examination. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being...*fit for Foreign Service*.



On the day following that medical assessment, September 28, he returned to the same venue, the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, on this occasion to enlist. Gordon Etheridge was thereupon to be engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar, to which was to be added a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

And it was then to be only hours afterwards again that there then came the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. Still on the same September 28, he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, at which moment Gordon Etheridge thereupon became...*a soldier of the King*.

A prolonged waiting-period was now in store for the recruits of this draft, designated as 'G' Company, before they were to depart from Newfoundland for...*overseas service*.

Private Etheridge, Regimental Number 1858, was not to be again called upon until October 27, after a period of exactly four weeks plus a day. Where he was to spend this intervening time appears not to have been recorded although he may have returned temporarily to his work and even possibly travelled to spend time with family and friends at his home in the Trinity Bay community of Champneys East (called *Salmon Cove East* at or about that time) - but, of course, this is only speculation*.

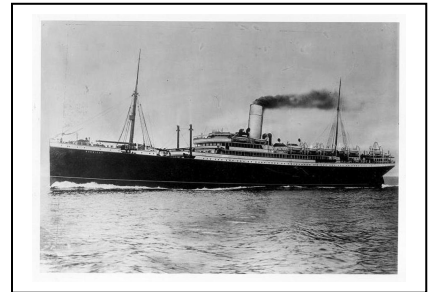
**It is likely that some of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the city, or those who had no friends or family to offer board and lodging, were quartered in the curling rink at Fort William in St. John's, a building which at that time was to serve as a barracks.*

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On the above-mentioned October 27, 'G' Company left St. John's by train to cross the island to Port aux Basques, the other passengers on board reportedly having included several naval reservists and also some German prisoners-of-war. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry – documented as having been the *Kyle* - and afterwards proceeded again by train from North Sydney as far as Québec City.

There the Newfoundlanders joined His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* for the trans-Atlantic voyage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9. The vessel had departed Montreal on October 30 with Canadian troops on board before stopping at Québec: the 55th Canadian Infantry Battalion and the Second Draft of the (1st?) Divisional Signals Company.

(Right: *The image of Corsican is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Launched in 1907 for the Allan Line, one of the largest private shipping companies of the time, she spent much of her early career chartered to the Canadian Pacific Line which in 1917 was to purchase the entire Allan Line business. She was employed as a troop-ship during much of the Great War which she survived – only to be wrecked near Cape Race on May 21, 1923.*)



By the morning of November 10, Private Etheridge's 'G' Company had again travelled by train, to Scotland where it had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gailles, not far removed from the evolving Newfoundland Regimental Depot at Ayr where accommodation for the new arrivals was as yet not available.

(Right: *The once-busy Royal Navy facility and harbour of Devonport almost a century after the Great War – photograph from 2012(?)*)

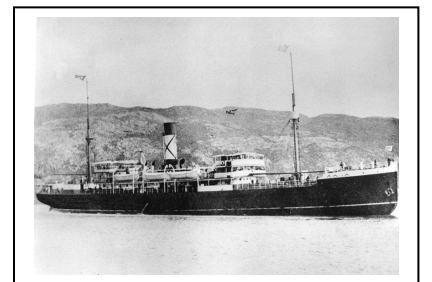


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More than a year prior to that November 10 of 1915, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914, the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and were formed into '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 below: *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.



**It was to do so at Devonport through which 'G' Company was to pass eleven months later.*

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 above: *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 had been ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit had been dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.



(Right above: *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)

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

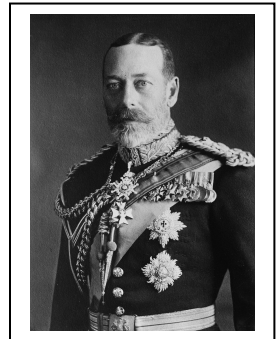
This had been an important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength* of a battalion which could be posted on...active service.



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

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

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, had been transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before the Battalion's departure to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(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.*)

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.



(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*)

(Right: *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.*



(continued)

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer and the early autumn of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 – that the new-comers were sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion*.

**The first such draft was, in fact, to depart from Ayr for service in the fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula, only days after the arrival in Scotland of Private Etheridge's 'G' Company, on November 15.*

This then had been the situation at the time of Private Etheridge's arrival there: the new Regimental Depot had still been in the throes of its establishment when he and his comrades-in-arms of 'G' Company were to finish their journey to Scotland on November 10 of 1915; thus, as related in a preceding paragraph, the new-comers were required to be quartered at Gailes, some sixteen kilometres further up the coast – but apparently more than sixty kilometres distant by road.

Then, almost twenty weeks after having reported to Gailes during the second week of that November of 1915, on March 27 of the following spring - and but a single day before his eventual departure on...active service... – he was prevailed upon to re-enlist...for the duration of the War*.

**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that this would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits were required to enlist for a limited period of a single year. As the War progressed, however, this would likely cause problems and they were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.*

By the time that he, Private Etheridge, was eventually to sail from the United Kingdom to...active service...he had witnessed the departure of two re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: In mid-November the First – already cited in an earlier paragraph - had sailed for the Middle East to serve at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula; the Second had been a convoluted adventure – the draft had taken ship in mid-March for Egypt but upon arrival there had been obliged to turn around for a return voyage as far as the French Mediterranean port-city of Marseille.

It was on March 28 of the year 1916 that the large Third Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – a detachment with Private Etheridge among its rank and file - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton, the first such contingent to embark directly for the Continent.

(Right: The image of a troop-laden 'Archangel' leaving port is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)



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Two days afterwards, on the 30th, His Majesty's Transport *Archangel* docked in the river-port of Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot where the draft was now to spend some days in final training and organization before moving on to its rendezvous with the parent Newfoundland Battalion.



(Right: *British troops disembark at an earlier time of the War 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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

On April 15, a detachment from Rouen of two-hundred eleven *other ranks* – accompanied by two officers – reported...to duty...with the Newfoundland Battalion already billeted in the village of Englebelmer some three kilometres behind the lines of the *Western Front*. Private Etheridge is documented as having been among that number sent from Rouen, a contingent which included not only personnel from Ayr, but also others from *Gallipoli* and Egypt whose departure from there for various reasons had been delayed.

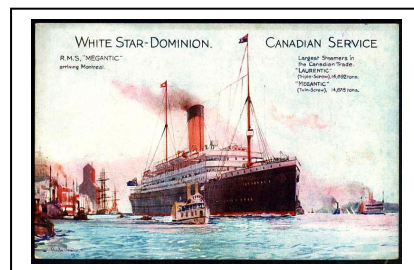
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A year prior to this juncture, in the summer of 1915, the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both 'E' and 'F' Companies had only then been beginning their time of training at Ayr; as for Gordon Etheridge, he had still been at home awaiting enlistment and attestation after which he would have some four weeks to wait before the call was to come to sail overseas to the United Kingdom.

The four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', of the Newfoundland Regiment – aforementioned on an earlier page - having now become the 1st Battalion had at this same time been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been 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 adjacent: *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.)*

(continued)

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, 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 above: *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.

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



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: *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 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.

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.

(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)



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: 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: 'W' Beach at Cape Helles under shell-fire as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration)



(continued)

****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 below: '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. On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived there 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.)

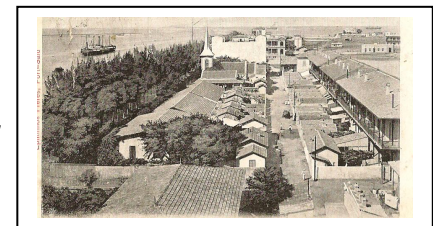


(Right: The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)



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

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



(continued)

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



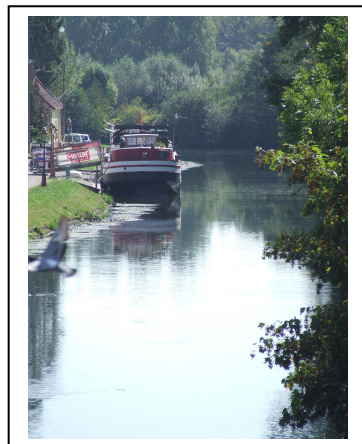
(Right adjacent: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseille.* – from a vintage post-card)

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 three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.

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



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

Those above-cited...*re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen*...had, as seen in an earlier paragraph, included among its soldiery a certain Private Etheridge who was now to report...*to duty*...with the Newfoundland Battalion.

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Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front* in mid-April, 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.

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

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



Having then been withdrawn at the beginning of that month of May 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.

It was at Louvencourt, where the 1st Battalion was billeted at the time of his offence, that Private Etheridge stained an otherwise spotless military record. Being found...*deficient of cap...*, he was obliged to pay for its replacement.

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 front lines down the hill towards the Y Ravine Cemetery visible in the distance and which today stands atop a part of the German front-line defences of the time: 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(?))



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

****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.***



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There are other numbers of course: the fifty-seven thousand British casualties incurred in four hours on that same morning of which nineteen-thousand were recorded as having been...*killed in action...or...died of wounds*.

It was to be the 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.



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

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



(Right: *The Somme as it still flows today between the town of Albert and the city of Amiens* – photograph from 2009)

The son of John Etheridge, fisherman – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of fifty cents from his pay - and of Priscilla Etheridge (née *Batson**, deceased from tuberculosis on February 2 or 5 of 1906) of Champneys East (*Salmon Cove East*) in the District of Trinity, he was also brother to Susannah-Jane, James, Margaret (*Maggie*), Mabel, Patience, Donald, William (died an infant - was there also a John who died young?), to John-Charles - and was step-brother to Edith**.

**The couple had been married on November 27, 1887.*

Private Etheridge was reported as...*missing in action...*at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'A' Company, during the fighting on the first day of *the Somme*. Some six months later, on December 31, he was officially...*presumed dead*.

Gordon Etheridge had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-three years and three months: date of birth at Champney's East (*Salmon Cove East*), Newfoundland, June 2, 1892 (from – and with thanks to – the *Terry's Tree Fort* web-site).

***After Priscilla's passing, John Etheridge re-married Joanna Hart (widow, née Walters).*

Private Gordon Etheridge was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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 4, 2023.