Private George Hollett (Regimental Number 2304) is buried in the Old United Church Cemetery in the community of Collins Cove, District of Burin.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman* earning an annual three hundred dollars, George Hollett was a volunteer of the Ninth Recruitment Draft. He presented himself for medical examination - at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on March 18 of 1916. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as…*Fit for Foreign Service.***

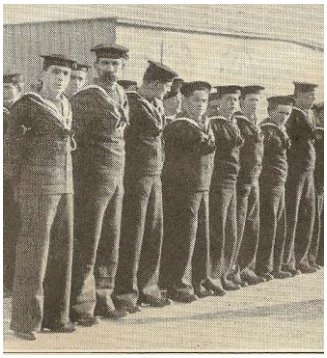
The building was to serve as the Regimental Headquarters in Newfoundland for the duration of the conflict.

It was to be on the day of that medical assessment, March 18, while at the same venue, that George Hollett would enlist. He was thus engaged…*for the duration of the war…at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was to be appended a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.**

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. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.

Only several hours were now to follow before there subsequently came to pass, on this occasion also at the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On the same eighteenth* day of that month of March he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, George Hollett became…*a soldier of the King.*

A single paper in his military record suggests that his attestation was not to take place until March 25, a week later. It may well be so: a first medical examination and enlistment – as happened in other cases – may have been undergone by George Hollett in Burin before he then travelled to St. John's to be attested. This, however, is only suggested, not confirmed.



It appears that some fifteen months previously, however, George Hollet had already enlisted, on December 21, 1914; on that previous occasion he had joined the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve – for a single year as seen further above - and had served therein for fourteen months, until February 6 of 1916.

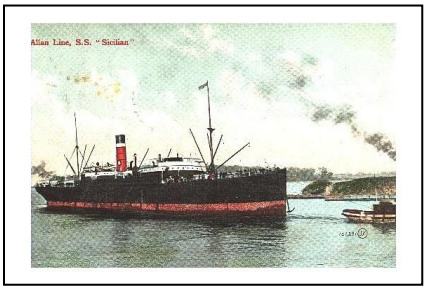
(Right: *Some of the first naval reservists from Newfoundland prepare to leave for overseas service*. – from *The War Illustrated*)

Another source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.

Private Hollett, Number 2304, was now to await for one-hundred twenty-three days before his departure on overseas service. However, where he was to spend this interval appears not to have been documented among his papers. He may have returned temporarily to work or to visit friends and family at or near his declared place of residence, Burin North Side, but this is only speculation and he may have remained to train and to be quartered in the capital city*.

A number of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the capital city, or those who had no friends or family to offer them board and lodging, were in the beginning to be quartered in the curling rink in the area of Fort William in St. John's, a building which was at the time to serve as barracks. It appears to have become the norm for the later recruits to have been lodged there.

Private Hollett sailed from St. John's on July 19 on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*. The ship - refitted some ten years previously to carry well over one thousand passengers - had left the Canadian port of Montreal on July 16, carrying Canadian military personnel.



It is recorded that the Newfoundland re-enforcements disembarked in the English south-coast naval port-city of Plymouth-Devonport. Subsequent to its disembarkation the contingent journeyed northwards by train to western Scotland. Private Hollett and his fellow recruits would have arrived at the Regimental Depot and 2nd (*Reserve*) Battalion Headquarters there during the last days of July or the first days of August.

(Right above: *Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when 'Sicilian' was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War. During the Great War she was apparently requisitioned as a troopship on only one occasion: in October of 1914 she was a vessel of the armada which transported the (1st) Canadian Division overseas to the United Kingdom.*

***She otherwise continued to work commercially between Great Britain and Canada for her owners, the Allan Line and later Canadian Pacific, at times carrying soldiery if and when her schedule allowed.*)**

(Right above: *A no-longer bustling Devonport Harbour, today bereft of its former importance* – photograph from 2012)

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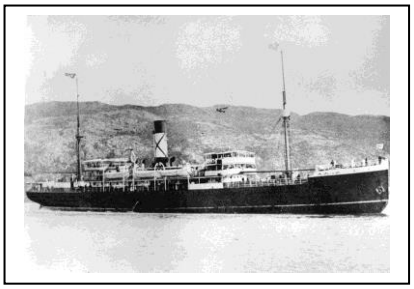


One year and ten months prior to that summer of 1916 when Private Hollett was to find himself in Scotland, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and had been formed into 'A' and 'B' Companies.

During that same period the various authorities on both sides of the ocean 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 in October of 1914 is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum*.)

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. 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.**

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

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*****, 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 would march into ***Stobs Camp*****.**

This had been an all-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 for four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.

(Preceding page: *The men of the Newfoundland Regiment await the distribution of 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 by that time 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 below: *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 taken from the *Bain News Services* as presented by 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 first re-enforcements to be dispatched to the 1st Battalion.

(Right below: *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)

Ayr was a small town on the west coast of Scotland whose history precedes the year 1205 when it was established as a Royal Burgh (Borough) by the crown of Scotland, an appointment which emphasized the importance of the town as a harbour, market and, later, administrative centre.

By the time of the Great War centuries later it was expanding and the River Ayr which had once marked the northern boundary of the place was now flowing through its centre; a new town to the north (Newton-on-Ayr), its population fast-increasing, perhaps encouraged by the coming of the railway, was soon to be housing the majority of the personnel of the Newfoundland Regimental Depot.

(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)

That November 15 of 1915 was to see not only the departure of the 1st Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr to the Middle East and to the fighting of the *Gallipoli Campaign* but also, only five days prior, the arrival from Newfoundland of 'G' Company, the seventh (see below), which would be obliged to take up quarters at *Gailes Camp*, some sixteen kilometres up the coast from Ayr itself – but just over sixty if one went by road.

Since that summer of 1915, recruits from Newfoundland had passed through The Regimental Depot at Ayr, there to undergo the mandatory fourteen weeks of training, and had then been sent on their way to *active service*, a practice which was to continue for the subsequent twenty-nine months.

By the time that the facility would close in January of 1918, Ayr was to have seen the coming and going of eleven drafts from home*.

Private Hollett's detachment arriving in the summer of 1916 was to be the third of these above-mentioned eleven drafts.

The last to do so would be the Seventeenth Draft. The first six – 'A' to 'F' Companies – had already been stationed in the United Kingdom – as seen above - before the establishment of the Regimental facilities at Ayr.

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, and was to eventually serve as the base for the 2nd (*Reserve*) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were despatched in drafts, at first to *Gallipoli* and later to the *Western Front*, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1st Battalion.

(Right above: *Wellington Square seen here almost a century after it hosted the officers of the Newfoundland Regiment* – photograph from 2012)

(Right above: *The new race-course at Newton-upon-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; part of the present grandstand is original* – photograph from 2012)

After those fourteen weeks of training, the soldiers of the 11th Re-enforcement Draft ordered *from* Ayr – Private Hollett one of its number - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 3 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the *Western Front*. It disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, October 4, and spent time at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, in final training and organization*, before making its way to a rendezvous with the parent 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

(Preceding page: *British troops disembark at Rouen at an earlier time of the Great War on their way 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.

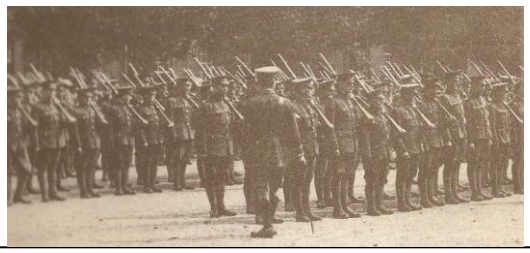
It was a large detachment of two-hundred sixty-six *other ranks* – a number which again included Private Hollett – that reported from Rouen to the 1st Battalion transport lines on October 12*. This was also the day on which 1st Battalion made its attack on the enemy positions at Gueudecourt (to be seen further below), again sustaining heavy casualties – some two-hundred thirty-nine all told – and gaining little in return.

Thus it was that the new-comers remained behind the lines until the 14th, two days later, when they were moved up to *Switch Trench* and parcelled out to the Battalion's four depleted fighting companies. Consequently, the date of their arrival is often recorded – as in the Battalion War Diary, not as October 12 but as October 14.

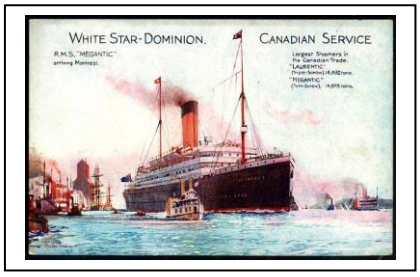
*** * * * ***

By the time of the action of October 12, 1916, at Gueudecourt, the first contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment, as seen above, had already been serving *overseas* for well over two years. The 2nd (*Reserve*) Battalion had been formed – in the spring of 1916 - and multiple drafts had been dispatched from Ayr to supplement the strength of the 1st Battalion (see immediately below).

As for George Hollett, he had by this time been a soldier of the Newfoundland Regiment for two-hundred eight days.



The four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', had become in the summer of 1915 the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment and had thereupon been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. The force had soon been dispatched from *Camp Aldershot* 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*.)

(continued)

(Right below: *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)

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: *'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: *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.

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 Bay, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.

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

(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)

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

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.

(Preceding page: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles under shell-fire 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.

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*.

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

(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*)

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.

(Preceding page: *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: *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.

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

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* was to have become a part of their history.

On April 13, the entire 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 re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front.*

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

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 had then been ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.

(Preceding page: *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)

To note: *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.*

Having then been withdrawn at the end of that April to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders had soon been 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.

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: *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*.

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

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

(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village*. – images 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.

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, 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*.

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.

There were then 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 above: *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 at Mailly-Maillet 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, 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.

Of course, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had not been the only unit in the British Army to have incurred horrific losses on July 1, 1916, even though it had indeed been one of the most devastated. But even with its depleted numbers, the Battalion was needed and, after that first re-enforcement, it had almost immediately again been ordered to man the trenches of the front line: as of that July 14, undermanned as seen above, the Newfoundlanders began another tour in the trenches where…*we were shelled heavily by enemy's 5.9 howitzers and a good deal of damage was done to the trenches* (excerpt from the 1st Battalion War Diary).

A second re-enforcement draft from Rouen had then arrived days later, on July 21, while the Newfoundland Battalion was at Acheux and then, only three days afterwards – at the very time day that the Prime Minister of Newfoundland had visited the unit – a third draft of sixty other ranks had arrived in Beauval and reported…*to duty*.

(Preceding page: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time – sunk in the ramparts of the city of Ypres, when the Newfoundland Battalion was posted there in 1916* – photograph from 2010)

On July 27-28 of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – maybe even fewer - even after still further re-enforcement – would move northwards and enter into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

(Right: *The same re-constructed ramparts as shown further above, here viewed from just outside the city and from the far side of the moat which still partially surrounds it* – image from 2010)

The unit 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: *Canadian trenches in Sanctuary Wood, not far removed from the Newfoundland Battalion's positions during August and September of 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 would incur casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.**

And it was to be there in *the Salient* in the sector of a place called *Railway Wood*, that the parent Newfoundland Battalion would soon be serving after its transfer had been completed from France.

(Right: *Railway Wood, the Newfoundland positions at the time, almost a century later – a monument to the twelve Royal Engineers buried alive there may just be perceived on the periphery of the trees* – photograph from 2014)

(Right: *The already-battered city of Ypres seen here towards the end of the year 1915 – and some eight months before the Newfoundlanders were to be posted there for the first time* – from a vintage post-card)

On October 8, 1916, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return southwards. The unit was thereupon to be transported by train back into France, back into the area of the…*First Battle of – the Somme*.

Just four days after unit's return to France from Belgium, on October 12 of 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to take to the offensive; it was 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: *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. This is also the area of the positions into which the re-enforcements of October 12-14 were to be posted.* – photograph from 2007)

October 12 of that 1916 was of course to be the day on which Private Hollett and his draft had reported…*to duty*…at the Battalion's Transport Lines.

*** * * * ***

After the attack at Gueudecourt he Newfoundland Battalion was not then to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area although, on October 18, it would furnish 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 Infantry Brigade of which, of course, the Newfoundland unit was a battalion.

The entry for October 18 of the *Regimental War Diary* records that*…2nd Hants and 4th Worcesters made a successful attack from N. of Gueudecourt. This unit supplied 250 men as stretcher-bearers.* As usual some of those stretcher-bearers were to be numbered among the casualties although whether Private Hollett was to serve in that capacity is not to be found recorded among his files.

(Right above: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battlefield with their armed comrades, but often spent more time in exposed positions than did the ordinary soldi*er. – from *Illustration*)

On October 30, the Newfoundland unit was on its way towards rear positions away from the Gueudecourt area where the Newfoundlanders were to spend two weeks in the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing.

By that penultimate day of October, the Battalion had been serving almost continuously in front-line and support positions – with a few days spent undertaking road-building and repair - for three weeks less a day. It was now not to be until November 15 that the Newfoundlanders were to commence wending their way back to the front lines.

(continued)

Back in the forward area on or about November 17, the Newfoundland unit continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the next few weeks of the late autumn.

Towards the end of this period, from November 29 until December 3, when he returned…*to duty*…, Private Hollett was reported to be in the 14th Corps Rest Station where he was recovering from exposure.

(Right: *A British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some: The Field Ambulances were often responsible for the operation of the Rest Stations, the above establishment perhaps being one.* – from a vintage post-card)

These last weeks served in the trenches and forward area by the Newfoundland Battalion were now to be followed by a month spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas season. Thus after a withdrawal by foot and by train on December 11-12, Private Hollett's unit was to be encamped well behind the lines, in close proximity to - and south-west of - 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)

The Christmas festivities of 1916 having been completed – turkey dinner washed down – apparently - with…*real ale*…, and the welcoming of the New Year – a quieter event in those far-off days except among Scottish troops – the Newfoundlanders were to officially return to…*active service*…in late January of 1917, but not Private Hollett.

By then, on January 10, he had been admitted into the New Zealand Stationary Hospital at nearby Amiens for treatment to a case of myalgia.

*** * * * ***

On the 16th day of that January he boarded Ambulance Train Number 5 and from Amiens was forwarded to the 5th General Hospital at Rouen for further treatment. There Private Hollett arrived on the following day.

Discharged…*to duty…*to the Base Depot on February 8, he was back serving with the Newfoundland Battalion on February 24 some two weeks later, one of a draft from Rouen of forty *other ranks* which arrived and joined *base details* at Bronfay on that day.

(Right above: *The River Seine flowing through the centre of the French city of Rouen – with the spires of it gothic cathedral showing – at or about the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

*** * * * ***

On January 11, the day after Private Hollett's departure for medical attention in the New Zealand Hospital at Amiens, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* to make its way on foot to the town of Airaines.

From the railway station there it had then entrained for the small town of Corbie where it thereupon took over billets which it already occupied for a short period only two months before. Days later again the unit had continued its progress, once again on foot, back up to the forward area and to…*active service*.

That recent six-week Christmas respite spent far to the rear by now a thing of the past, 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 fatalities – of 1917.

And it had been by then the beginning of the winter period. As had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the *Great War* – that of 1916-1917 would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable – there was to be a shortage of fuel and many other things - for most of the combatants of both sides.

It would also be a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were to be kept busy, particularly, so it seems - from at least Canadian medical documentation - with thousands of cases of dental work.

This period had also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and the recent weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion these exercises had been at least partially undertaken from February 4 to 18 in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.

(Right: *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*)

On February 18 the 1st Battalion would begin a five-day trek back from there to the forward area where it was to go back into the firing-line on February 23 to relieve a unit of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. It had been at a place called Sailly-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans would be both lively – and deadly: 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 to be withdrawn on February 25…to return just three days later.

The Battalion had by then been carrying with it orders for a…*bombing raid*…on the enemy positions at Sailly-Saillisel…to be carried out on March 1.

(continued)

Of course, on the day preceding that return to the forward area and to the upcoming skirmish, Private Hollett had returned…*to duty*…, but to *base details*, behind the lines. Whether or not he was to advance on the morrow and to fight at Sailly-Saillisel appears not to have been documented.

*** * * * ***

(Right: *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(?))

The aforesaid planned raid of the German positions at Sailly-Saillisel was to go ahead a little later than scheduled as it appears that the enemy had also made plans. The reciprocal infantry action(s) continued for the better part of two days, March 2 and 3.

In fact, that sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel was to be the sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during the entire period from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917. The action would also serve to bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.

After the confrontation at Sailly-Saillisel, the Newfoundland Battalion was ordered retired to the rear by train, to an encampment at Meaulté. There, and later at *Camps-en-Amienois* – even further behind the lines and where the unit had spent the preceding Christmas period – the 1st Battalion would spend almost the entire remainder of the month.

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March would be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near those communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events.

(Right: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté* – from *The War Illustrated*)

They even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band come from Ayr, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.

(Right: *The remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War, in early 1916* – from *Illustration*)

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders commenced making 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.

On April 9 the British Army launched 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.

(Right: *The Canadian National Memorial which has stood atop Vimy Ridge since its inauguration in 1936* – photograph from 2010)

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

(Right below: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen in 1917, from the western, 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 proved to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war: four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone*.

After the debacle of April 14 the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux for but a few days. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, be amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming re-enforcements would allow the two units' strengths to once more resemble those of bona fide battalions.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the vestiges of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed community*. – photograph from 2009(?)

When the thirty-nine *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen reported to the 1st Battalion on April 18, they were to be just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers.

(continued)

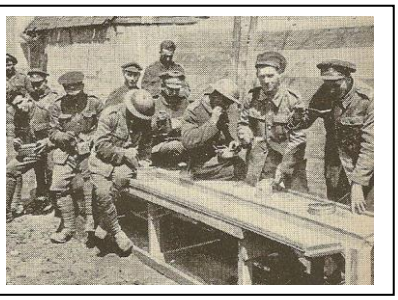
There were by that time only two-hundred twenty *other ranks* in number plus twelve officers serving with some two-hundred personnel of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. Those of the 1st Newfoundland Battalion would spend the 19th salvaging equipment and burying the dead.

They then remained *in situ* until the 23rd.

(Right: *Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras.*– photograph from 2007)

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This was in fact an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies.

(Right below: *Newfoundland troops just after Monchy-le-Preux* – from *The War Illustrated*)



It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the sector of the Newfoundland Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

And the Newfoundlanders were also to sustain further casualties: ten…*killed in action*, three …*missing in action*, and forty-eight…*wounded*.

Late on that evening of April 23, the 1st Battalion was ordered to retire the dozen or so kilometres to the relative calm of Arras.

(Right below: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery* – from a vintage post-card)

The *Battle of Arras* had by that time been proceeding to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-month – May 15 - but the Newfoundland unit was not to be further involved in any co-ordinated offensive action – it was simply too exhausted; this now would be a period when the 1st Battalion was to be posted in a nondescript fashion on the *Arras Front*, in and out of the quieter trenches.

Then on May 7 it was on the move once again and marching to different billets in Berneville where it would be the subject of a war journalist and photographer.

(continued)

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – as cited immediately above - in early May, perhaps the 7th, of 1917* – from *The War Illustrated*)

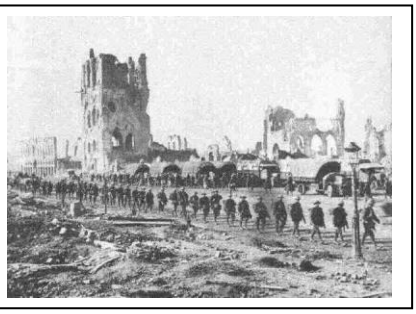
At the outset of June, the 1st Battalion retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and in training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it eventually transpired, much of the autumn as well.

The Newfoundlanders was then soon once again moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and…*the Salient*, their first days to be spent at *Caribou Camp*, where they were to be employed for the seventy-two hours or so – day and night – in repairing, in strengthening and in the construction of the various defences of the area.

To that end a goodly number of them were to be temporarily transferred to the Royal Engineers under whose collective watchful eye they were now to labour.

The unit's next posting, on July 5, was to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city. The Battalion remained in the area for a week before being withdrawn to prepare for the upcoming offensive to commence on July 31.

(Right above: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right* – photograph from 2014)



The low-lying area, Belgian *Flanders*, in which the 1st Battalion now was - the only part of the country unoccupied by German forces - had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917.

(Right above: *Troops arriving from the railway station in single file, march past the vestiges of the historic Cloth Hall and through the rubble of the medieval city centre of Ypres on the way to the Front during the late summer or early autumn of 1917*. – from *Illustration*)

Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – Passchendaele field in the fall of 1917* – from *Illustration*)

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army. This had been or was also to be the case with the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians, all of whose troops had floundered or would soon flounder their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Belgian Flanders.

(Right above: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war* – from *Illustration*)

Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9.

At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost would be higher: forty-eight *killed* or *died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

(Right above: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele*. – photograph from 2010)

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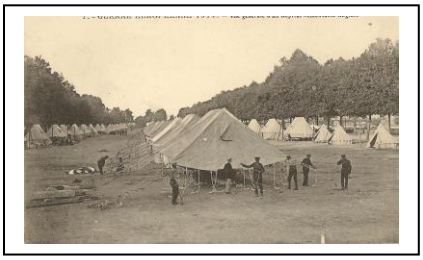
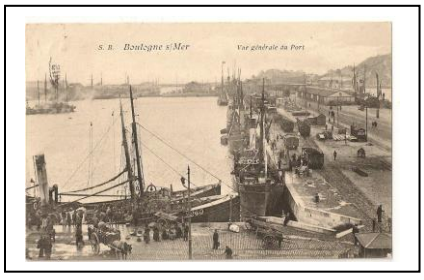


Private Hollett was to play a role only at the former of those two actions. On August 16, at the *Steenbeek*, he was wounded and subsequently evacuated to the 47th Casualty Clearing Station at Mendinghem. He had incurred an injury from shell fire to his left foot. From there he was transferred to the 53rd General Hospital in Boulogne where it was decided to send him back to the United Kingdom.

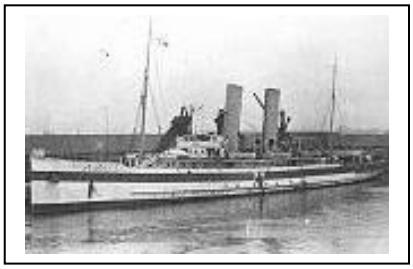


(Right above: *A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War* – from a vintage post-card)

(Right: *An image of the French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

(continued)

Several names such as Mendinghem, Bandaghem and Dozinghem were invented by the British troops as they resembled the Belgian and northern-French fashion of naming villages. These sites were occupied by medical facilities only – and the inevitable cemeteries which today remain. But one of these centres, by the name of Lozinghem, is an exception in that it is a real place which has existed for centuries – however much the name might lend itself to the morbid spirit of the British soldier.

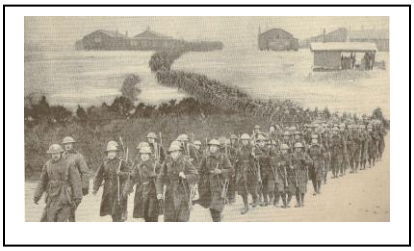


On August 24, having been embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. Andrew*, Private Hollett made the short cross-Channel journey to England where, upon arrival, he was sent to the 5th Southern Hospital in Portsmouth. Apparently still having a piece of shrapnel in his big toe, he was again moved, on this occasion on September 10 to the Alverstoke (VAD) Relief Hospital where the metal was eventually removed before his discharge on October 19.

(Right above: *The image of St Andrew clad in her war-time garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The ship had been built as a ferry for the Great Western Railways to service one of its routes between Wales and Ireland but when the Great Wat came, she was one of the first ships to be requisitioned by the Admiralty and to be converted for hospital work. When in service – mostly between the Continent and the United Kingdom - she was capable of accommodating one-hundred ninety-four sick and wounded. Having survived the conflict St. Andrew returned to her pre-War role, eventually to be scrapped in 1933*.)

After leaving hospital, Private Hollett was granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded to service personnel released from medical care in the United Kingdom and was subsequently to report back…*to duty*…, on October 30, to the Regimental Depot and 2nd (Reserve) Battalion in Scotland.

He remained there until the end of January, 1918, when he and the entire establishment moved southward to England (see immediately below).



In the New Year of 1918, both the Regimental Depot and the 2nd (*Reserve*) Battalion Headquarters moved quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down Camp in the southern English county of Hampshire, not far distant from the venerable cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was to finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was to there that Private Hollett was transferred at that time.

(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*)

It was not to be until on or about July 25 that Private Hollett was on his way from *Hazely Down Camp* as a soldier of the 48th or 49th Re-enforcement Draft, across the English

Channel, through Southampton and Rouen where the new-comers spent less time than usual at the Base Depot in their final preparations.

His personal records document him as having reported…*to duty*…with the 1st Battalion of the Royal (see further below) Newfoundland Regiment on July 31 at the small French coastal community of Équihen*.

Only a single other rank, un-named, was reported by the Battalion War Diarist – on July 30 – as having re-joined the Newfoundland unit at this time.

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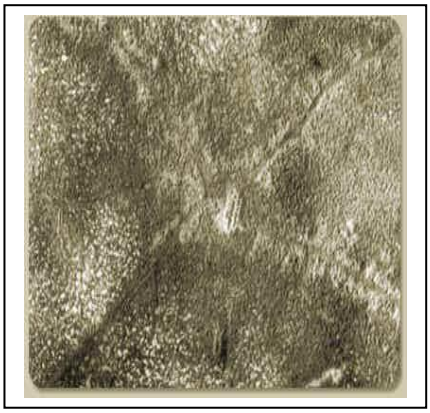
During the time of Private Hollett's absence, of course, the *Battle of Passchendaele* had continued on its murderous course.

A week and a day following the engagement at the *Steenbeek* there had then been four weeks of relative calm which were, for the Newfoundland Battalion, to begin on August 24 with a four-day withdrawal from the forward area to *Penton Camp* to the north-west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe.



(Right: *The once-village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name* – from *Illustration*)

This reprieve would continue while the British forces re-enforced and re-organized after a month of fighting that had not gone as well as the British High Command had optimistically anticipated.

The Newfoundland unit was to go back to war during the last days of what had been a fine month of September. The weather of that month had been in contrast to what had gone before – but, as the fighting at *Passchendaele* had started once more…so had those infamous rains.

Once back in their trenches the personnel of the Newfoundland unit had prepared for the next concerted attack on German positions. It would come some two weeks later and it would come at the *Broembeek*,

(Right: *An innocuous, placid stream shown here, in 1917 the Broembeek was a torrent which would flood the surrounding terrain, transforming it into a quagmire*. – photograph from 2009)

Two days following the affair at the *Broembeek*, having been relieved, the Newfoundlanders had then marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe to be transported to *Swindon Camp* near Proven. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit was once more to board a train.

(continued)

By ten-thirty that same evening, the Newfoundland Battalion had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and would now march the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.

The Newfoundlanders were still there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and three days later when, on November 17, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to be ordered yet again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it had begun to move further eastward, by this time on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while on the move, the Battalion would be issued as it went with…*war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of the night it had marched to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, had moved up into its forming-up area.

From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten that morning, and with bugles blowing, the 1st Battalion had advanced to the fray.

(Right above: *The Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai* – photograph from 2009)

This new offensive – apparently initially conceived to be no more than a large-scale raid - the so-called *Battle of Cambrai*, was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders to be directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle was to begin well for the British who had used tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities were again be squandered. There had been no troops available to exploit what was, admittedly, a hoped-for yet unexpected success, and by the close of the battle, the Germans had counter-attacked and the British had relinquished as much – more in places - territory as they had originally gained.

The Newfoundland Battalion thus once again had been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of the communities of Marcoing and Masnières where a Caribou stands today and in the area of the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who had advanced into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day*.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of the 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether its capture was ever achieved is at best controversial*. – photograph from 2012)

At five-hundred fifty-three all ranks – not counting the aforementioned ten per cent reserve - the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment even at the outset of the operation was operating at just over fifty per cent of establishment strength: not that it would have been any consolation had it been known, but a goodly number of battalions in all the British and Dominion forces – with perhaps the exception of the Canadians - were encountering the same problem.

(Right above: *A number of graves of soldiers from the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery. Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, has identified them as being Canadian*. – photograph from 2010)

After the exertions of *Cambrai*, the Newfoundlanders had been withdrawn from the line, the last casualties incurred on December 4. The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment by then numbered the strength of only a single company - whereas a full battalion comprises four.

The withdrawal from the theatre of battle had begun at half past five on the morning of December 5 with an eleven-kilometre march. On the evening of the same day the Newfoundland unit had taken a train which was to become the victim of an enemy artillery bombardment with the engine hit and forced off the track. Thus it was not until the morning of the morrow that the 1st Battalion had reached its destination, Humbercourt.

The 1st Battalion had then remained in the vicinity of Humbercourt, to the west of Arras, until December 18 when it was to march to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There the unit would spend both Christmas and New Year.

The weather was now to oblige during those later days at Fressin where the Newfoundland Battalion was to be posted for sixteen days; the *gods* would allow the Newfoundlanders a reminder of home: snow – perhaps a bit too much at times apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, after that snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of the 1st Battalion had returned to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time. There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.

(Right: *By 1918 Ypres was looking like this; some of these broken buildings had been a school which had served as a shelter for troops in the earlier days of the conflict*. – from a vintage post-card)

The 1st Battalion's posting during that winter and early spring was to be divided into the usual duties: the front-line trenches, behind them the support positions and, yet further to the rear again the various reserve sectors.

The troops would move in a rotating pattern which would see them spend approximately a week in each posting – although the arrangement was very flexible – and at times there had been further and longer withdrawals to the rear for training, re-organization and what was often to be called *rest*: it hardly ever was.

The eight-day respite at *Brake Camp*, Vlamertinghe from February 4 to 11 (*inclusive*) was to be an example of the last-mentioned: work-parties, inspections by…*the Brass…*, the awarding of decorations and the announcement that the Newfoundland Regiment was now to be, as of January 25 of that 1918, the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment*, had been some of the highlights of that particular period.

***The title had been granted on January 25, 1918, in a War Office Letter (Number 058/4282 (AG 10)) – Document Collection 145.2R21 (D6)*.**

On the above-mentioned February 11 the Newfoundland unit had moved westward across the Franco-Belgian border to the area of Steenvoorde where it was to be billeted for the following eight days. There, and elsewhere, there was yet work to do: on the 19th day of that February the Newfoundland Battalion had marched back into Belgium and into the town of Poperinghe (today *Poperinge*) where it was to be billeted for a further eight days to be employed in the construction and amelioration of nearby defences.

During the interim of the late autumn of 1917 and the early part of the winter that had followed, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the *Great War*: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians on the *Eastern Front* now allowed them.

It had been expected that they would launch a spring offensive - which they would – in fact they were to unleash a number of them*.

There were to be several assaults by the Germans on French forces during that spring. They all met with varying degrees of success at the outset, but eventually they would be thwarted by Petain's divisions, aided at times by the newly-arriving Americans.

(Right above: *Some of the countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders had built a tram-line in January and had been stationed for a week and then five days in March and likewise for five days in early April* – photograph from 2011)

In the area of Zonnebeke, the sector where the Newfoundland unit was now to serve in March and April when at *the Front*, the personnel of the Battalion had continued to dig and build and wait. While the Germans had gone to the offensive elsewhere on earlier dates, the blow would not fall in the northern area until April.

(continued)

As suggested in the above paragraphs, the Germans, by this time re-enforced, had done as was expected of them: Ludendorff's armies had launched a powerful thrust against the British on March 21, the first day of that spring of 1918, although not in the North where the Newfoundlanders were stationed; they had struck at first in the area of - and just south of - *the Somme*, there to overrun the battlefields of 1916 and well beyond. For a while their advance had seemed unstoppable.

(Right below: *British troops accompanied by refugees in Flanders in April, 1918* – from *Illustration*)

For a number of reasons, after two weeks the offensive had begun to falter and would eventually halt; but then, just days afterwards, a second offensive, *Georgette*, was to be launched in the northern sector of the front, in Belgian Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders had been posted: the date April 9. Within only two days the situation of the British had become desperate.

On the day after the first heavy bombardments of April 9, and as the Germans had approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were to be deployed to meet them. On that April 10 the Newfoundlanders, having been due to come out of the line and to move back to the area of *the Somme*, were instead to board buses at three o'clock in the afternoon, thereupon to be directed southward, towards the border town of Nieppe.

They were to be in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, just three hours later.

(Right: *The area of La Crêche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station* – photograph from 2010.)

The British had been pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12th of April the Newfoundland Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, had had to make a series of desperate stands.

(Right: *Ground just to the east of Bailleul where the 1st Battalion was to be in action during the period April 12 to 21* – photograph from 2013)

On April 12-13 – the dates in the 1st Battalion's War Diary are not clear - during the defensive stand near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company had been obliterated while trying to check the German advance.

Then, as the 1st Battalion War Diary cites…*the remainder of 'C' Coy. under Capt. Paterson, M.C. and Hqrs. took up a position along a light railway line and prepared to fight to a finish.*

…there can be no doubt that it was Hqrs., 'A' & 'C' Coys. that by their resistance saved what would have been at least a very serious position for the whole 34th Division*.

'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening – would be equally heavily involved.

The period from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of the 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never had materialised and the front had finally been stabilised.

****The 88th Brigade – and therefore the Newfoundland Battalion – was to be seconded to the 34th Division from the 29th Division during this critical period.***

(Right: *The De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving the 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there stand several houses and a convenience store*. – photograph from 2009)

By April 18 the Newfoundland Battalion had taken over a sector of the new *Front Line* to be relieved by French troops three days afterwards, on the 21st. It had then retired in preparation for a more permanent departure from the field (see further below).

By this time, the German advance having been held and the danger passed, on April 24 the 1st Battalion of the *Royal* Newfoundland Regiment was to bid farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the 88th Brigade and 29th Division. On the morrow, April 25, there had been a full recessional parade complete with speeches from Brigadier-General Freyberg, Commanding Officer of the 88th Brigade.

The unit was to later be deployed to another unit, a Scottish infantry division, but for the summer of 1918 it had been ordered moved a world away from Flanders where, as seen in the preceding pages, it had just fought during the crisis of the German spring offensive. The Newfoundlanders were to now be stationed on the west coast of France.

On April 29, the unit personnel – the Newfoundland Battalion by now having been reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four *other ranks* – had boarded a train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étaples, where they had arrived by eleven o'clock in the late evening.

Their day, however, had not yet been at an end: there had still been a two-hour march ahead of them before the Newfoundlanders would reach their new quarters. On the following day, April 30, they had been on the march again, a further eight kilometres to the community of St-Josse where they would remain for the next ten days.

St-Josse is at a distance of some five or six kilometres from the coast and about ten kilometres from the well-known sea-side resort of Le Touquet with its fine beach, Paris-Plage. During the next week, and at times afterwards during its next posting, the Battalion would avail of this luxury – on that part of the beach not reserved for officers.

The Newfoundland Battalion had remained posted at St-Josse until May 10 when it had then marched a further six kilometres inland to the south-east to the community of Écuires. There it was to relieve the troops responsible for the safety and security of the nearby British General Headquarters at Montreuil-sur-Mer and of Douglas Haig, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.

(Right: *Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ* – from *Illustration*)

The protective role of the Newfoundland unit was now to continue until the end of June but the cosmetic honour of this duty was to mask the reality that the 1st Battalion of the *Royal* Newfoundland Regiment had no longer been capable of serving in the field.

Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that 1st Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.

And while it is true that a number of re-enforcement drafts were to arrive at Écuires during this period, for the most part their numbers had been in single digits or only just higher.

(Right: *The sparsely-populated community of Équihen at or about the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

The posting to Écuires completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders had been encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihen* – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.

On July 1, 2 and 3, the eleven officers and three-hundred twenty-three *other ranks* – well below establishment strength - of the Newfoundland Battalion had marched into Equihen Camp from Écuires. There the unit had been visited on July 3 by the Right Honourable D.W.F. Lloyd, the new Prime Minister of Newfoundland and it was there that the unit was to pass the next two months.

And during the final days of that July, as reported in an earlier paragraph, Private Hollett once more returned to service with the Newfoundland Battalion.

*** * * * ***

The Newfoundlanders would officially return to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28th Brigade of the 9th Scottish (*Infantry*) Division. The 1st Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today *Ingooigem*).

But that event had still been in the unforeseeable future.

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2nd British Army had broken out of their positions and overrun the enemy lines. It was to be the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders had been fighting at the *Keiberg Ridge*. After almost four years of stalemate, the *Great War* on the *Western Front* was once again to be a conflict of movement.**

(Right above: *British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days Offensive* – from *Illustration*)

***This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3rd Somme*.**

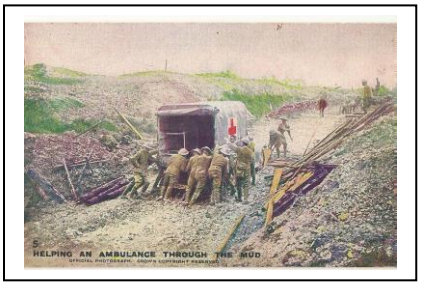
It had been just before mid-night of October 1 that the Newfoundland Battalion was to take up positions in the area of the railway station at Ledeghem and to relieve the Royal Scots. On October 2…*Orders had been received to prepare to continue the advance but final orders were never received*. The Newfoundland unit would not attack nor was the enemy to counter-attack on that day and both sides had remained where they were.

(Right above: *The re-constructed village of Ledeghem, as it appeared almost a century afterwards* – photograph from 2010)

Thus by October 3 the advance on the Newfoundlanders' front had begun to stall, albeit temporarily. At that place called Ledeghem the Germans had given notice that they were far from being a spent force. For five days as of October 1 attempts had been made to take the village; on October 6, when the 1st Battalion had been withdrawn to rest, the village would still be in enemy hands.

But by that time, Private Hollett was again in medical hands.

*** * * * ***



The hands in question were those of a British field ambulance nursing staff: at Ledeghem on that October 3 he had been wounded for a second time and evacuated on that same day to the 87th Field Ambulance for preliminary treatment to a gun-shot wound to his left* thigh. That same day saw him forwarded to the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearing Station at Bandaghem, on the outskirts of Poperinghe.

(Right above: *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)

On the next day, the 4th, Private Hollett was on the move again, admitted into the 10th Canadian Stationary Hospital in the coastal town of Calais. Three days later again, on October 7, he was on his way back to England on an un-named hospital ship and transported to the Military Hospital, Bethnal Green, London, for further attention.

Private Hollett was wounded on October 2, 1918, in the lt. thigh, three inches above the knee, and lt. groin. The wound of thigh healed in a few days and has remained healed ever since. The wound of the groin has never healed. At first its discharge diminished to a small and intermittent amount but later an abscess formed, which was opened. Discharge has been continuous since. Some time after his wound he developed rt. sided swelling and pain. This was opened and two sinuses have been discharging ever since. The sinuses are stated to be secondarily infected with K.L.*, but on Feb. 20th, 1920, the Provincial Laboratory reports discharge negative for K.L. On July 13, 1920, an operation for drainage incision in the Left Loin by Lt. Col. Starr. Pocket of pus not found, right sinus enlarged, and tube inserted. Jul. (July) 20, 1920, had a smart secondary haemorrhage from right sinus. General condition poor. Ascites and oedema of the legs. On August 25th, general condition very poor. Abdomen has been tapped several times and quantities of fluid removed to relieve the abdominal tension. Pocket of pus in left loin opened and drained. Patient became progressively weaker and more emaciated. Peritoneal fluid removed several times by puncture. He died at 2 a.m. on September 7th, after having been unconscious for several hours. Cause of death – G.S.W.L. thigh (Osteomyelitis). Immediate cause Ascites and Cardiac Failure. – (Post-mortem medical report issued by the *Dominion Orthopedic Hospital*, Toronto, Ontario, on September 19, 1919)

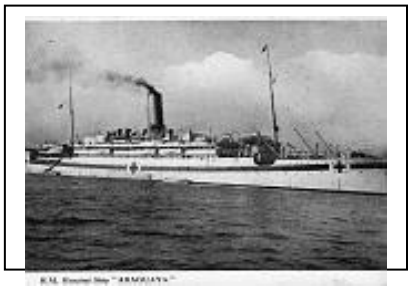
****Is this Klebs-Loeffler bacillus?***

There being no evidence to the contrary, it is to be supposed that Private Hollett remained in hospital until April 11, 1919 when he was transferred to a sanatorium in Cheam, Surrey. In the meantime, on February 24, he had been reported as by then suffering with tuberculosis and as being in a dangerous medical condition.

By the end of July, 1919, it had been decided that he be repatriated to Newfoundland.

Early on the morning of September 11, 1919, Private Hollett, having arrived at Victoria Station in London, crossed the city to Euston Station, there to board a special train for the journey to Liverpool. There, from the *Princes Landing Stage*, at some time between the hours of ten in the morning and four in the afternoon, he was embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship - *Araguaya* for the trans-Atlantic crossing. On board were: TB cases, blinded personnel, VD cases, cot-cases, the insane, and amputees.

(Right below: *The image of 'Araguaya', seen here clad in her war-time hospital-ship garb, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel had been built in 1906 for the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company for its service between the United Kingdom and South America. It was apparently not until 1917 that the vessel was requisitioned by the Admiralty and converted for use as a hospital ship capable of the transport of eight-hundred forty sick and wounded. Leased as such to the Canadian government later during that same year, by the time her service ended she had repatriated some fifteen-thousand servicemen to Canada*.)



HMHS *Araguaya* berthed in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on September 19 whereupon Private Hollett was admitted into *Camp Hill Hospital* where, curiously enough, his condition was apparently not deemed to be serious. There he remained until November 28, by which time that same medical opinion had evolved.

On the 29th, he was transferred by train to the General Orthopœdic Hospital in Toronto.

Private Hollett was wounded on October 2, 1918, in the lt. thigh, three inches above the knee, and lt. groin. The wound of thigh healed in a few days and has remained healed ever since. The wound of the groin has never healed. At first its discharge diminished to a small and intermittent amount but later an abscess formed, which was opened. Discharge has been continuous since. Some time after his wound he developed rt. sided swelling and pain. This was opened and two sinuses have been discharging ever since. The sinuses are stated to be secondarily infected with K.L.*, but on Feb. 20th, 1920, the Provincial Laboratory reports discharge negative for K.L. On July 13, 1920, an operation for drainage incision in the Left Loin by Lt. Col. Starr. Pocket of pus not found, right sinus enlarged, and tube inserted. Jul. (July) 20, 1920, had a smart secondary haemorrhage from right sinus. General condition poor. Ascites and oedema of the legs. On August 25th, general condition very poor. Abdomen has been tapped several times and quantities of fluid removed to relieve the abdominal tension. Pocket of pus in left loin opened and drained. Patient became progressively weaker and more emaciated. Peritoneal fluid removed several times by puncture. He died at 2 a.m. on September 7th, after having been unconscious for several hours. Cause of death – G.S.W.L. thigh (Osteomyelitis). Immediate cause Ascites and Cardiac Failure. – (Post-mortem medical report issued by the *Dominion Orthopedic Hospital*, Toronto, Ontario)

Is this Klebs-Loeffler bacillus?

(continued)

The son of George Moulton Hollett (deceased of pneumonia on June 1, 1892, some three weeks before the birth of his son George – see below) and of Mary Maria (also found as *Myra*) Hollett (also apparently deceased by the time of her son's enlistment), he was the only brother of Cyrus (often also incorrectly identified as *Silas*) – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay, and to whom he had willed his all - of Bull's Cove, Great Burin, and of an un-named sister – in fact Elizabeth-Ann – by the time of his death in Boston, Massachusetts*.

According to a letter written by his brother Cyrus and dated March 2, 1921, he, Cyrus was Private George Hollett's only brother and Elizabeth Ann, living in Boston, his only sister. However, on the Ancestry.ca web-site there are also to be found siblings Winnifred-Elfreda, Emma-Miranda, Ernest and Charles-William.

(Right: *The photograph is purportedly of Private George Hollett and a Miss Jones in the Dominion Orthopædic Hospital, Toronto, during the year 1920. It comes originally from a book called 'Illustrated Souvenir' and was found on the Imperial War Museum web-site 'Lives of the First world War'*.)

Private Hollett was reported as having *died of sickness* - of tubercular osteomyelitis of the 3rd and 4th left lumbar - in the same hospital in Toronto at two o'clock in the morning of September 7, 1920.

His remains were brought home to be interred. The Imperial War Graves headstone for his grave was delivered by the Bowring Brothers' vessel SS *Portia* to Burin on or about November 20, 1925.

(Right above: *There were two Portias: this is surely a picture of the second, the one used to transport Private Hollett's headstone*. – from the Newfoundland Archives)

George Hollett had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-two years and nine months.

(Right: *The sacrifice of Private Hollett is honoured on the Screen Wall in the Military Plot, Mount Pleasant Cemetery, St. John's*. – photograph from 2011)

When he died George Hollett was still Private George Hollett of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. It was the policy of the Newfoundland Government – following the lead of the Imperial Government in London – that military personnel were not to be discharged from service until they were on home soil. Until 1949, of course, Canada was yet a foreign country.

(continued)

At the time, his was the only such case of a Newfoundland serviceman on record.

Private George Hollett 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 – January 30, 2023.