



Corporal Robert William (*Wakeham* – not *William* - according to both *Ancestry.ca* and *Newfoundland Vital Statistics*) LeBuff (also found as *LeBuffe*) (Regimental Number 1362) is interred in Earlsfield (*Wandsworth*) Cemetery – Grave reference Nfld. 775.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *lumberman* earning a monthly forty-five dollars, Robert LeBuff presented himself for medical examination in the central Newfoundland logging community of Badger on March 22, 1915. It was a procedure which would pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

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Having then travelled by train to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, Robert LeBuff enlisted four days later on March 26 at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road – 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.

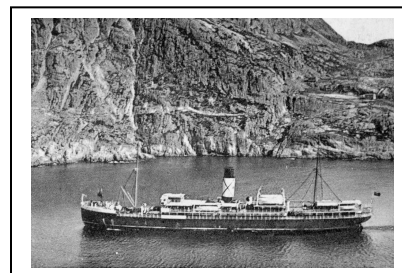
It was to be six days after his enlistment, on April 1, that he was then to undertake his attestation, to swear his *Oath of Allegiance*, the concluding official formality. At that moment Robert LeBuff became...*a soldier of the King*.

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

There now passed a period of three weeks before, on April 22, 1915, Private LeBuff, Number 1362, embarked in the harbour of St. John's for...*overseas service...with the two-hundred forty-nine officers and...other ranks...of 'E' Company* – he was of Number 1 Platoon - onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* en route for Halifax.

There appear to be no details of how or where he may have spent that final three-week period before taking ship for...*overseas service*; there are no papers among his files which suggest that he went temporarily back to work in Badger; or to his place of birth, Springdale; surely not to his given address of Campbellton, New Brunswick; but neither is there any mention of St. John's. The answer is likely the last of these but, of course, that is only speculation.

Having arrived in Halifax, on April 24 at eleven-thirty in the evening the detachment began its trans-Atlantic passage on board the trans-Atlantic liner *SS Missanabie* from Nova Scotia to Liverpool. The vessel arrived in that English west-coast port-city on May 2 or 3 – the two dates are recorded although the second may well have been the date of disembarkation.



The Newfoundlanders on this occasion had sailed from Halifax in the company of the Canadian Army Service Corps *Railway Supply Depot*.

(Right above: The image of 'Stephano' passing through the Narrows of St. John's Harbour is shown by courtesy of the Provincial Archives.)

(Right: The image of 'Missanabie' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries website. The vessel was of the Canadian Pacific Line and, although transporting troops during the Great War, did so as part of her commercial services which continued during the conflict. On September 9, 1918, she was torpedoed and sunk off the south coast of Ireland with the loss of forty-five lives.)



From Liverpool the contingent travelled northwards by train to the Scottish capital, Edinburgh where, on May 4, 'E' Company joined 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies which had already taken up station as the garrison at the historic Castle, the first troops from outside the British Isles ever to do so.

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

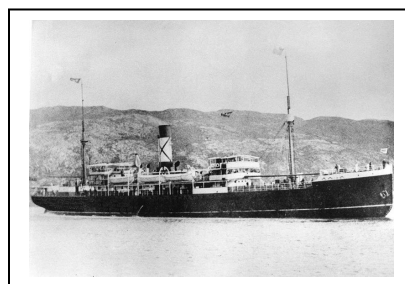


Private LeBuff and his 'E' Company, however, were to have but very few days during which to savour the charms of the Scottish capital.

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Some seven months before that May 4, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's for the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits – these to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

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



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

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



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

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

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 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.

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

* * * * *

Seven days after the arrival of Private LeBuff's 'E' Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

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

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

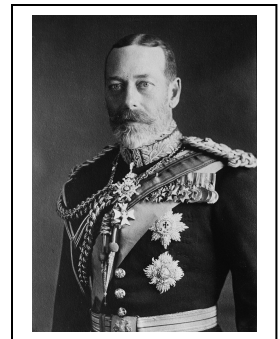
It was also during that period spent at *Stobs Camp*, on July 26, that Private LeBuff received a first promotion and appointment to the rank of lance corporal – complete with a five-cents-per-day pay increase.

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



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

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



(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – the photograph is from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.*)

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

The Depot was to be Lance Corporal (later Corporal, see below) LeBuff's home for the next seven to eight months.

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



(Right 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.



During his posting at Ayr, in mid-November Lance Corporal LeBuff was to see the departure of the 1st Re-enforcement Draft to the Middle East. He was then to witness the 2nd Re-enforcement Draft leave in mid-March for its circuitous voyage to the *Western Front* via Egypt – an adventure for which there appears to have been no recorded explanation.

While Lance Corporal LeBuff was awaiting the call to *active service* he was to receive a further advancement, promotion to the rank of corporal, February 3 having been the date on which he put up his second stripe.

In March of 1915, Robert LeBuff had enlisted for the limited time of a single year. Most of his fellow recruits at Ayr during the time spent there were prevailed upon to re-enlist. And while in the case of Lance Corporal (later Corporal) LeBuff this event does not appear among his documents, it is quite possible this was where and when it came about* – as it surely must have done: Recruits who did not re-enlist were to be on their way home before the...*First Battle of the Somme*.

**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 signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their enlistment.*

Then on March 28 of 1916, Corporal LeBuff, as a non-commissioned officer of the 3rd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton and boarded His Majesty's Transport *Archangel* on his way to join the Newfoundland Battalion on the Continent.

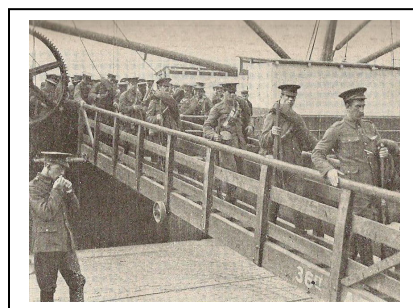
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Disembarking two days later on March 30 in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, Corporal LeBuff's contingent was to make its way to the afore-mentioned Depot for several days of final training and organization* before leaving to seek out the parent unit.



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

(Right: *British troops, at perhaps an earlier time during the War, disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

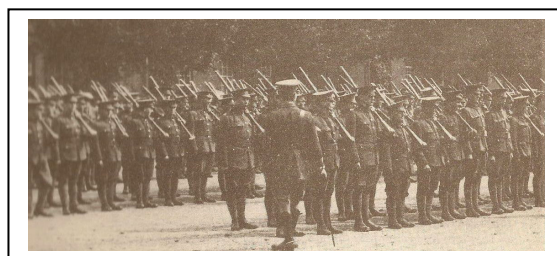


*Apparently the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.

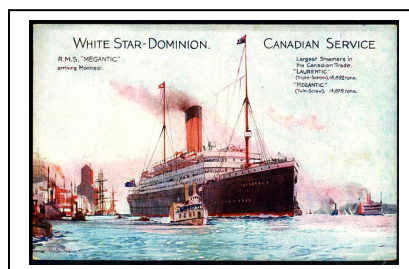
On April 15, a detachment from Rouen of two-hundred eleven other ranks – accompanied by two officers – reported...to duty...with the 1st Battalion already billeted in the village of Englebelmer some three kilometres behind the lines of the *Western Front*. Corporal LeBuff appears not to be documented as among that number, a contingent comprising not only personnel from Ayr, but also others from Egypt who, for divers reasons, had been detained there. However, the likelihood is that he was there and, if not, he would have been among the following draft of April 26.

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While Lance-Corporal LeBuff and his 'E' Company had been commencing their time of training at Ayr in the summer of 1915, those aforementioned four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', of the Newfoundland Regiment, having now become the 1st Battalion, had thereupon been attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been despatched 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.*)



(continued)

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

On August 20 of 1915, the Newfoundland Battalion had embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks. There, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, the 1st Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *Kangaroo Beach, where the officers and men of the 1st Battalion, 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 adjacent: *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 would disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion were to serve but, even ever since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, had 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 the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.

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



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**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 perhaps 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 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*.

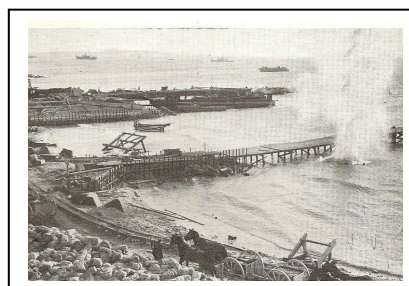
(Right: Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed Achi Baba, positions which were never breached: The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011)



The British, Indian and *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – had by now only 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 as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration)



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

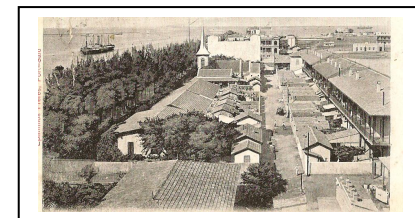
**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.*

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



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

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

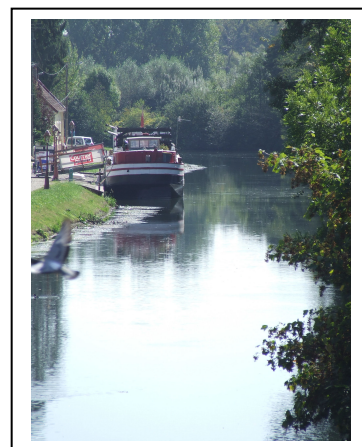
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille.



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 over which they had then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to become a part of their history.



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

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

Those...*re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen*...as seen in a previous paragraph, had in all likelihood included Corporal LeBuff(e) among its ranks.

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Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front*, two of the four Companies – 'A', and 'B' – were to take over several support positions from a British unit* before the entire Newfoundland unit was to then be ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.

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

(continued)



(Preceding page: *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 end of that April 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.

If there is one name and date in Newfoundland history which is etched in the collective once-national memory, it is that of Beaumont-Hamel on July 1 of 1916; and if any numbers are remembered, they are those of the eight-hundred who went *over the top* in the third wave of the attack on that morning, and of the sixty-eight unwounded present at muster some twenty-four hours later*.



(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel: Looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences: The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009*)

(Right: *A view of Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)*)



**Perhaps ironically, the majority of the Battalion's casualties was to be incurred during the advance from the third line of British trenches to the first line from where the attack proper was to be made, and while struggling through British wire laid to protect the British positions from any German attack.*

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

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

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

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



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



On July 1, 1916, Corporal LeBuff was wounded at Beaumont-Hamel during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*. By July 4 he was in the 8th Stationary Hospital in the French coastal town of Wimereux being treated for a gun-shot wound to his right thigh and compound fractures of the femur.

(Right: *Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from Le Miroir*)



On the day following, July 5, he was embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Panama* en route across the English Channel back to the United Kingdom where he was admitted, on the 8th, into the Royal Victoria Hospital at Netley.

(Right below: *The image of HMHS 'Panama' clad in her war-time hospital-ship garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. A Pacific Steam Navigation Company ship built in 1902, she was converted for use as a hospital ship in 1915 and came into service in July of that year. With a capacity capable of caring for just fewer than five-hundred sick and wounded, she served as such until November of 1919. She was purchased by the Royal Navy in 1920 for permanent use as a hospital ship and, re-named 'Maine', was to serve until after the Second World War.)*

The son of Richard Alexander LeBuff(e) (spelled variously elsewhere), former hunter, and of Eliza Jane LeBuff(e) (née *Goodyear*) – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of seventy cents from his pay - of Campbellton, New Brunswick, and later of Restigouche, Québec, he himself had apparently been born in Springdale, Hall's Bay. He was also brother to at least Mary-Elizabeth, Richard-Alec, Rowena, Augustis, Norvel-Cornelius, James-John-Augustus, Roald and Martha.



Corporal LeBuff was reported as having...*died of wounds*... - and of septicæmia (see below) - at Netley, on August 11, 1916.

He was buried on the next day.

Robert Wakeman LeBuff(e) had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-three years: date of birth in Springdale, Hall's Bay, Newfoundland, May 3, 1891 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).



(Right above: *The Royal Victoria Hospital at Netley on the south coast of England – from a vintage post-card*)

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Large wound front of thigh. Fracture of femur at junction of upper and middle thirds - very septic & bone badly comminuted. Condition of patient very toxic...

Aug 8 - Condition of patient worse - High temperature & quick pulse - In very septic condition - Amputation performed through fracture - Condition following no better & he gradually became worse - Death from Septicæmia

(Above: An excerpt from the final medical report issued a propos Corporal Robert LeBuff(e) by the Royal Victoria Hospital)

Corporal Robert William (Wakeham?) LeBuff was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and 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 6, 2023.

