



28TH APRIL 1918



Sergeant Martin Picco (also found as *Picot*), DCM (Regimental Number 2010) is buried in Boulogne Eastern Cemetery: Grave reference IX. A. 42.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman* working on his own account and earning some forty dollars a month, Martin Picco was a volunteer of the Eighth Recruitment Draft. He presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on November 27, of 1915, for a medical examination. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being...*fit for Foreign Service*.

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There was then to be an interval of three days after that medical assessment before, on November 30, and at the same venue, the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, he was also to enlist. Martin Picco was thereupon to be engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar, to which was to be added a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

Only twenty-four hours were now to pass before there then came the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On December 1 he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, Martin Picco became...*a soldier of the King*.

Private Picco (Regimental Number 2010) would not sail to the United Kingdom until just less than four months had passed. What the reasons might have been for this delay, or how he was to spend the lengthy waiting-period after his attestation, appear not to have been documented. It may therefore be that he continued to work temporarily and was perhaps to spend time with friends and family at his home in the Newfoundland west-coast community of Boswarlos (at the time usually *Bos Warlos*) – but of course, these conclusions are a little bit speculative*.

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

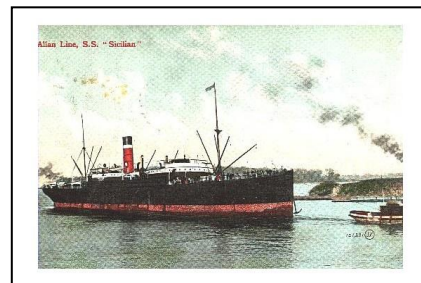
Wherever he may have been during that pre-departure interval, he was back in the capital city several days before his sailing for it was at that time that Private Picco took as his bride a young lady by the name of Ethel May Peddle of 32, John Street in St. John's. The ceremony took place on March 19.

When he eventually took ship, it was as a private soldier of the second contingent of 'H' Company that he embarked for...*overseas service...onto the SS Sicilian* in St. John's Harbour on March 23-24, 1916. The vessel did not sail from Newfoundland until the morrow, the 25th, to reach the United Kingdom some two weeks later - a slow crossing*. The first half of 'H' Company had already sailed in mid-December of 1915 – in fact, the last recruit of that first-half had enlisted only days before had Private Picco of the second-half (also see further below).

**It was surely not because she was in a slow-moving convoy as this system did not come into being until 1917. The fact that she was carrying a large quantity of fish from St. John, New Brunswick - and had sailed from there on March 18 - to supply the needs on the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the United Kingdom was likely not a factor either.*

For whatever the reason – perhaps the annual spring ice had been a problem - it was nevertheless a slower than normal voyage: the date of disembarkation – although the port is not named - and the date of the contingent's arrival at the Regimental Depot in Scotland are both recorded as being the same April 9.

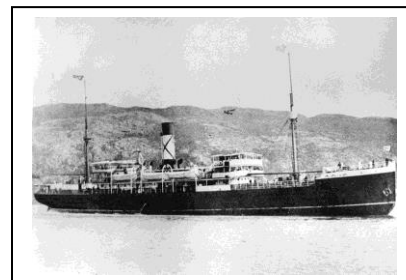
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(Preceding page: *The image of 'Sicilian' is from the Old ship Picture Galleries web-site. Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched – the vessel, originally built for the Allan Line, had been requisitioned as a troop-ship and transport carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War. It seems that during the Great War, even though she was often to carry troops, it was as a part of her commercial business and not as a requisitioned vessel.*)

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Some nineteen months prior to that April 9 of 1916, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914, the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and were formed into 'A' and 'B' Companies.



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



(Right: 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 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.*

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

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



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

(Right above: 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.)

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



(Right below: The High Street in Ayr as shown on a postcard of the time, the imposing Wallace Tower – it stands to this day (2017) - dominating the scene – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo.



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

That November 15 of 1915 (see above) 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 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.

A further seven weeks plus a day were now to pass before the first one-hundred personnel of 'H' Company, having sailed in mid-December as recorded in an earlier paragraph, were to present themselves at the Regimental Depot on January 4, some of them to be affected, even fatally, by an ongoing measles epidemic of the time.

After that there was now to be an interlude of three months plus several days before Private Picco's detachment reported on the aforesaid April 9 to the Regimental Depot.

Note: *Until as late as the spring of 1916 it had been the intention to form a 2nd Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment to fight on the Continent. In fact it would seem that Private Picco's contingent of one-hundred sixty-three recruits was to form the nucleus of that unit, while the personnel already at the Depot by this time would form a reserve battalion to serve as a re-enforcement pool for both the fighting units.*

It could not have been long before a change of plan came about as very soon, men of Private Picco's contingent (the second half of 'H' Company) were being sent – including Private Picco himself – to strengthen the 1st Newfoundland Battalion already on the Continent – maybe Beaumont-Hamel had something to do with it.

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During the winter of 1915-1916 the men of the soon-to-be 2nd Battalion (*Reserve*) had been lodged in several venues, at a nearby military camp at Gales and also as far afield as the one at Paisley Barracks, some sixty-five kilometres distant. However, by the spring of 1916 the difficulty had been overcome by housing the men in a school, in a tented community and in the Ayr Racecourse Grandstand, all in the district of Newton-upon-Ayr.

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



It was to be at *the Racecourse* at Newton-on-Ayr that Private Picco re-enlisted on June 30, 1916*, only nine days before his departure for the Continent.

**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 original enlistment.*

By that time of his departure the Regimental Depot had already seen the dispatch of the first seven re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: the First directly to *Gallipoli*; the Second which had sailed to Egypt before being turned back to land in France; and the Third which had sailed straight to France at the end of the month of March. Those which had sailed since then – and those which were to do so later on – also had gone or would also cross directly to the Continent.

Private Picco had not been selected to serve in any of the earlier drafts since his arrival at the Depot; he was to be remain posted in Scotland for some three months altogether before his turn would come. When it *did* come, his draft was to be dispatched directly to France.



(Right: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

On July 9, the 8th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, Private Picco one of its private soldiers, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent. On the morrow, the 10th, the detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot which had been established there. There the draft spent time in final training and organization* before proceeding on to its rendezvous with the 1st Battalion.

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

There must have been a sense of urgency at the time: the 1st Newfoundland Battalion had suffered terribly at a place called Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, and on July 6 its depleted strength, as reported by the Regimental War Diary, still numbered no more than one-hundred sixty-eight *other ranks*, one-sixth of establishment battalion (fighting) strength.

At this stage, Private Picco's 8th Draft, a fairly large detachment, was to be divided, its personnel to march in one of the several re-enforcement drafts ordered at this time to report to the parent unit.

Private Picco was one of the contingent of one-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* from Rouen to report...*to duty*...with the 1st Battalion on July 21 in the small community of Acheux*. The Newfoundland unit had marched to there from the trenches in the area forward of Mailly-Maillet four days prior, and would continue this march as far as Beauval on the 23rd where they stayed for only forty-eight hours before covering – still on foot – a further twenty kilometres to Candas on the 26th to board a train.

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been ordered northwards into the *Kingdom of Belgium*.

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A year prior to this juncture, in the early summer of 1915, the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both 'E' and 'F' Companies had only then been beginning their time of training at Ayr; as for Martin Picco, he had still to enlist and attest, after which he would still have those almost four months to wait before the call was to come to sail overseas to the United Kingdom.

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



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.

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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 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 below: 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.

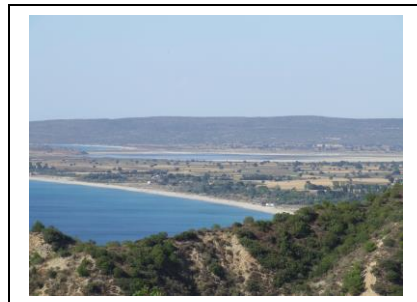
**Many of the commanders chosen were second-rate, had been brought out of retirement, and had little idea of how to fight – let alone of how to win. One of the generals at Suvla, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.*



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

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(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.

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

There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number.



Numerous, however, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.

Some of the Battalion personnel had thereupon been evacuated to the nearby island of *Imbros*, some to *Lemnos*, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right: 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.



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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 above: *'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in that January of 1916 and by the Newfoundlanders who were to be the last soldiers off the beach: Vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011)*

Immediately after the British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria and beyond.

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

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

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



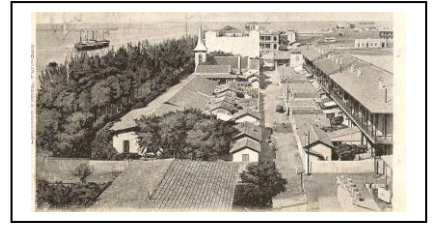
**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.*

(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)*



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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.



(Right adjacent: *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*)

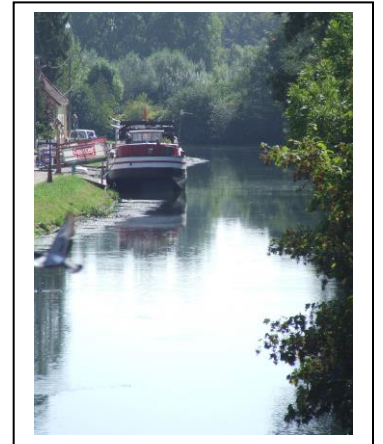


Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille.

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 above: *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(?)*)

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

(Right: *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*)



**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...?*)

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

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

As recorded in an earlier paragraph, it had been as a soldier of the second of the three above-mentioned contingents that Private Picco had reported...*to duty...with the 1st Battalion* and then was to move by train into Belgium.

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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 entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



(Right below: *Canadian trenches in Sanctuary Wood, not far removed from the Newfoundland Battalion's positions during August and September of 1916 – photograph 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.

And it had been here 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 of the time, as it is almost a century later - a monument to the twelve Royal Engineers who were buried alive there may just be perceived on the periphery of the trees – photograph from 2014*)



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.

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



On October 8, after having served in Belgium since the end of that July, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return south and was to be transported back into France, and back into the area of the...*First Battle of the Somme.*

Just four days after the unit's return to France from Belgium, on October 12 of 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was again 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.

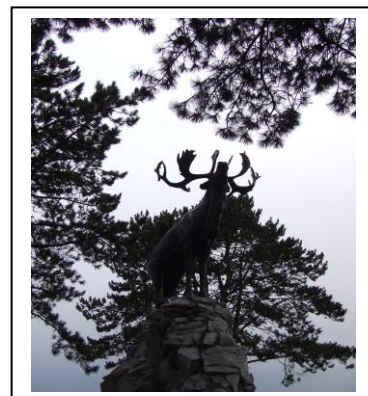
The action was to prove to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.



(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. – photograph from 2007)*

(Right: *The Caribou at Gueudecourt stands at the furthest point of the Newfoundland Battalion's advance of October 12, 1916. – photograph from 2012)*

The Newfoundland Battalion was not then to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it furnished 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 the Newfoundland unit was a battalion.



(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme. – from Illustration)*

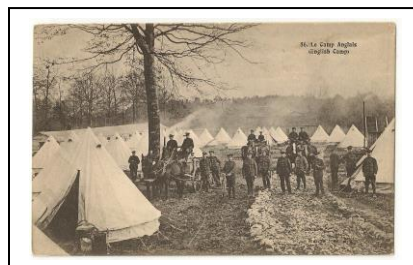


On October 30, the Newfoundland unit eventually retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving continuously in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

(continued)

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks retired to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It would not be until November 15 that the Battalion began to wend its way back to the front lines.

There it continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period to be broken by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.



And it would be remiss not to record that the pre-Christmas period was also interrupted by Private Picco's promotion to the rank of lance corporal. He received his stripe on November 7 while at Corbie.

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

The Christmas festivities having been completed – turkey dinner washed down with...*real ale*...apparently – it was not to be until a further sixteen days had passed, January 11, that the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* to make its way on foot to the town of Airaines.

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 fatality – of 1917.

It was now the beginning of the winter period. As had been and as 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 a shortage of fuel and many other things, particularly in 1917 - for most of the combatants of both sides. It would also be a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were kept busy, particularly, so it seems - at least according to Canadian medical documents and records - with thousands of cases of dental work.

This period 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 were to be at least partially undertaken in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.



On February 18 the 1st Battalion started a five-day trek back from Coisy to the forward area where it went back into the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers.

(continued)

This relief came about at a place called Saily-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans was to be warm and lively: after only two days the Battalion had incurred four dead, nine wounded and three gassed without there having been any infantry action. The Newfoundlanders were withdrawn on February 25...but to return only three days later.

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

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

The imminent *bombing raid* planned was in fact to be the sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during that entire period – from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917 and that same sharp engagement at Saily-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, was an action which would bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.



(Right above: *The fighting during the period of the Battalion's posting to Saily-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(?))

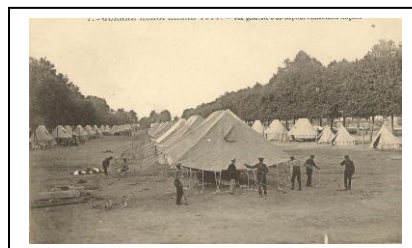
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Lance Corporal Picco was the recipient of the DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal) for his conduct during the engagement at Saily-Saillisel: "*Action Date 3rd March, /17 For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. Although wounded*, he continued bombing the enemy, and eventually succeeded in driving them back. He then assisted to build a new block and remained in command. He set a splendid example of courage and determination.*" - London Gazette, 17th April, 1917 (also see further below)



* * * * *

On March 5, only days after the action at Saily-Saillisel, Lance Corporal Picco was ordered sent via the 14th Corps Main Dressing Station to the 55th (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown, Meaulté, to receive treatment for trench-foot (in fact, trench-feet). Forwarded to the 6th General Hospital in Rouen on the 8th, five days later again, on the 13th, he was evacuated back to the United Kingdom on board the His Majesty's Australian Hospital Ship *Warilda*.



(continued)

(Preceding page: A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War: Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card)

(Right: The image of ‘Warilda’ clad in her war-time hospital-ship garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. A vessel of almost eight-thousand tons. ‘Warilda’, constructed in 1911, was one of three identical ships built for the Adelaide Steamship Company’s coastal trade. Originally requisitioned as a troopship, in 1916 she was converted for use as a hospital ship. It was while playing that role that on August 3 of 1918 she was torpedoed and sunk while crossing the English Channel: of the eight-hundred one on board her, one-hundred twenty-three were lost.)



Lance Corporal Picco arrived in England on the following day and was admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. That day, March 14th, was also the date on which he was awarded his second stripe, although one might wonder whether the now-Corporal Picco was to know anything about this second promotion for a number of days*.



***It was also while he was in hospital at Wandsworth that, on April 1, the Newfoundland Pay & Record Office sent notice to him that he had been decorated with the Distinguished Conduct Medal.**



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

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

The records show that he was discharged from Wandsworth on May 21; to where, however, appears *not* to be documented – although a good possibility is the Lammer Auxiliary Hospital and Convalescent Home at Esher in the County of Surrey.

On or about June 5, Corporal Picco was granted the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom, after which period of leave he was posted to the Regimental Depot in Scotland where he reported...*to duty*...on the 14th of the same month.

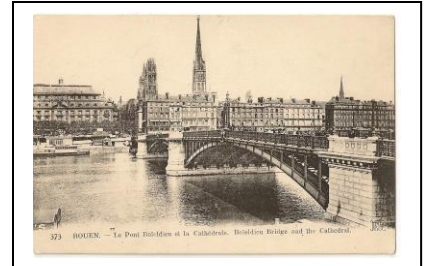
(Right below: *A view of the Newfoundland Plot in Ayr Cemetery – photograph from 2011*)

The 27th Re-enforcement Draft from Barry* – the Regimental Depot having been, as it transpired, temporarily moved from Ayr, passed through Southampton on July 22 and disembarked in Rouen on the 24th to spend the inevitable days of final preparation at the nearby Divisional Base Depot.

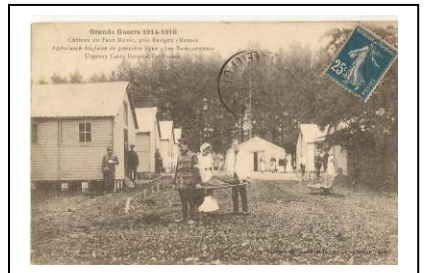


(Right below: *The Seine flowing through the centre of the city of Rouen – and under the watchful gaze of its venerable gothic cathedral – at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

**During the summer months of 1917, the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*



Although it seems not to be recorded, it must be likely that Corporal Picco re-joined the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in early August as he is subsequently reported as having been admitted on August 23 into the 46th Field Ambulance before being forthwith transferred to the 10th Stationary Hospital at St. Omer – these medical facilities both being in the area of 1st Battalion's posting at the time. He was suffering from that common affliction of soldiers, NYD (*Not Yet Determined*), although accompanied by a case of diarrhoea.



(Right above: *A British Field Ambulance, more permanent than some closer to the Front, at a later date in the War – from a vintage post-card*)

Released to Base Details on August 30, Corporal Picco re-re-joined the 1st Battalion...*in the field*...on September 3-4 at *Proven Camp* near the Belgian community of Poperinghe, one of the draft of twenty-six *other ranks* to report at that time.

* * * * *

All those months before, after Saily-Saillisel and Lance Corporal Picco's departure for medical attention to his feet, the month of March had been a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events. They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band come from Ayr, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



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

(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 had commenced to make their way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, the march to finish amid the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.

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



On April 9 the British Army had 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.

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 had proved to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war: four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone*.



**It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had 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.

When the other thirty-nine *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen had reported to the 1st Battalion on April 18, they had been just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers. They had been only two hundred twenty in number plus twelve officers now serving with some two hundred of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. Those of the 1st Battalion had spent the 19th salvaging equipment and burying the dead. They had then remained there until the 23rd.



(Right above: *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* had been the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This had in fact been an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies.

It had apparently not been a particularly successful venture, at least not in the sector of the 1st Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions which had been accompanied by heavy losses.

And the Newfoundlanders also had sustained further casualties: ten...*killed in action*, three ...*missing in action*, and forty-eight...*wounded*.

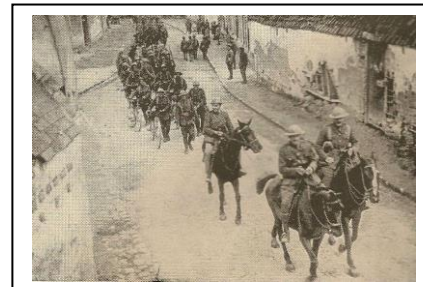
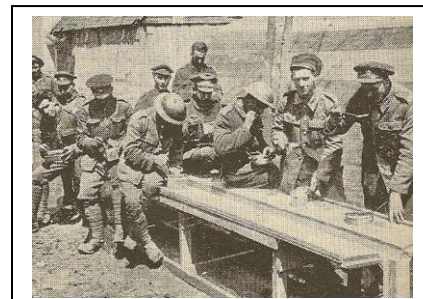
Late, on that same evening, the Newfoundlanders had retired the dozen or so kilometres to the relative calm of Arras.

(Right above: *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*)



(Right adjacent: *Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from The War Illustrated*)

The *Battle of Arras* had by now been proceeding to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-month, but the Newfoundland unit was not to be further involved in any further co-ordinated offensive action – it had been too exhausted; this now would be a period when the Battalion was to be moving in a circular fashion on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches.



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

(Preceding page: 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*)

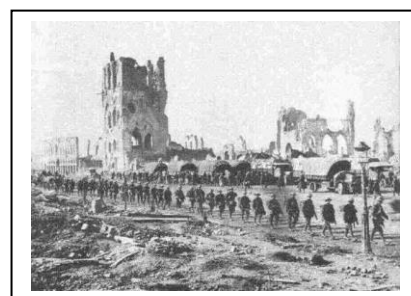
At the outset of June, the 1st Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and in training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

The Newfoundlanders were then soon once again to be moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.



(Right: *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*)

This low-lying area, Belgian *Flanders*, 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: *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 their way to the front in 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.



(Right above: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn 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.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *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*)

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

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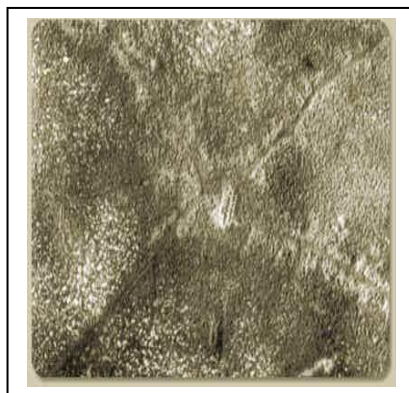
As related above, it had been at the onset of the month of September – after the action at the *Steenbeek* but before that at the *Broembeek* – that Corporal Picco had reported to the Newfoundland Battalion at *Penton Camp*.

There were to be four weeks of relative calm at this time for the Newfoundland unit. It had already begun at *Penton Camp* with the Battalion's arrival there on August 28 and would continue while the British forces re-enforced and re-organized after a month of fighting which had not gone as well as the British High Command had optimistically anticipated. The Newfoundland Battalion would go back to war during the last days of what had been a fine month of September, in contrast to what had gone before – but, as the fighting started once more...so did the rain.

The offensive recommenced for the Newfoundland Battalion on September 25, although the unit had incurred four wounded two days prior to that date due to long-range artillery fire. Back in their trenches personnel prepared for their next concerted attack on German positions. It came some two weeks later and it came at the *Broembeek*.

(Right above: *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*)

(continued)



It was to be only two days after the confrontation of October 9 of 1917 at the *Broembek* that the Newfoundland Battalion marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe, from where it was to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of the community of Proven. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit once more boarded a train.

By ten-thirty that same evening, the Battalion arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and then marched 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 two days later when, on November 17, the 1st Battalion was again to be ordered once again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it began to move further eastward, now on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while still on the move, the unit was issued as it went with... *war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of that night it then marched up to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the Newfoundland unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, was to move forward into its forming-up area. From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten, bugles blowing, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment 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 having been directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle was to begin well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities were again squandered. There had been no troops made available to exploit what had been a hoped-for - yet admittedly 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 had once again been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing, 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*.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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 were to be withdrawn from the line, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment by then numbering the strength of only a single company - whereas an establishment battalion comprises four. The unit 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 had obliged and had even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow - a bit too much at times apparently.

It was in this period after the failed offensive of the *Battle of Cambrai*, during the Christmas-time break spent out of the line, that Corporal Picco was further promoted to the rank of acting sergeant, on Boxing Day, 1917 - a second source has December 27 - while 1st Battalion was resting and again re-enforcing after its exertions of the previous month. This promotion was to be confirmed on March 16, three months later.

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, as seen above had returned to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time. There, like the other British and affiliated troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.



(Right above: *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)*

On January 17, the Newfoundland unit had de-trained at the station at Brandhoek, mid-way between Ypres and the town of Poperinghe, to the westward. Nine days later, by January 26, the Battalion had moved to the eastern side of Ypres, to find itself in a forward sector not far removed from Passchendaele. It was to remain in that area for the next ten weeks.

In the meantime the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the 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 now had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East allowed them. It was expected that they would launch a spring offensive which they were to do – in fact they were to unleash several of them*.

**A number of these assaults by the Germans during that spring were to be on French forces. They all met with varying degrees of success at the outset, but eventually would be thwarted by Petain's divisions and his strategy of 'defence in depth', aided at times by the newly-arriving Americans.*

In the sector where the 1st Battalion was stationed, the blow was not to fall until April. Thus, while they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders had continued to dig.

(Right: *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 were still stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)



As suggested above, the Germans would do 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; 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.

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 stationed: the date April 9. Within only two days the situation of the British had become desperate.



(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

On the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, and as the Germans had approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were to be deployed to meet them. 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.

(continued)

(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 to make a series of desperate stands.

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. The remainder of 'C' Company had taken up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, had stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening – had been equally heavily involved.

(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*)



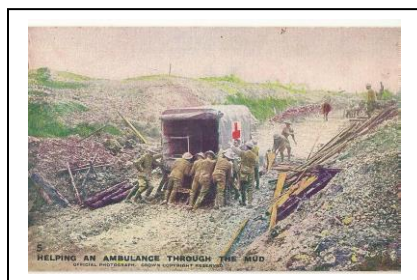
The period from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of the 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never had materialised and the front had finally been stabilised*.

**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: *These are 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(?)*)



Sergeant Picco incurred injuries to his back from flying shrapnel while serving with 'B' Company on April 13. At first evacuated from the field to the 57th Field Ambulance, he was subsequently admitted on that same April 13 into the 64th Casualty Clearing Station at Mendinghem. His condition by that time considered as *dangerous*, Sergeant Picco was transferred four days later – on April 17 – to the 83rd General Hospital in the French coastal town of Boulogne.



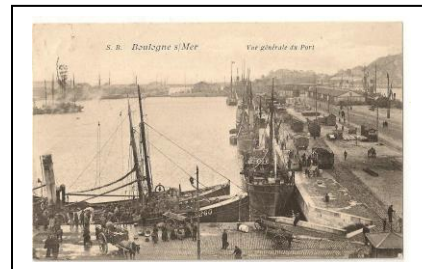
(Right above: *Transferring sick and wounded from the forward area to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)

The son of William Henry Picco (in original documents usually found as *Picot*), fisherman, and of Mary Ann Picco (née *Abbott*, deceased by the time of the 1911 Census) – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of seventy cents a day from his pay - of Boswarlos on the Port au Port Peninsula - and husband of Ethel May Peddle* of 32, John Street (her address also cited as 82, George Street) in St John's - to whom he had willed his everything, he was also brother to Albert-Seymour, Caroline Helen, Rhoda and Joseph-Norman-Arleigh* (twin), William-Henry-Thomas, Mary-Jane and Emma-Cordelia (twin), Lily-Beatrice, Annie, Violet, Warren, Sarah and Henry.

**Private Norman Joseph Arleigh, Regimental Number 2518, survived the conflict but having enlisted and arrived in the United Kingdom in 1916, had been admitted into the Insane Asylum at Ayr to be discharged from there and from the Regiment later that same year.*

Sergeant Picco of 'B' Company was reported as having...*died of wounds...in hospital in Boulogne on April 28, 1918.*



Martin Picco had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-one years and one month: date of birth at 'The Mines', District of St. George, Newfoundland (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

**His widow, Ethel, later re-married, to Norman LeFresne of Cape Ray – the 1921 Census recording her given name as Lillian.*

(Right above: *the French port of Boulogne – the location of the 83rd General Hospital – at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Lance Corporal Martin Picco, DCM - **88th Brigade Lists**

“This N.C.O. was in command of the bombing post at the block at the right of Palz trench on the 3rd March. At about 8.15 am, the enemy attacked from the right under cover of a heavy bombardment thick mist and it is also reported smoke bombs. The enemy got very close without being seen and at the moment of attack a shell fell in the post, killed two of the bombers and wounded one man of a Lewis Gun team that was supporting the post. L/Cpl. Picco with the remainder of his men fought for his post and were only driven back when they had thrown all their bombs. The Lewis Gun had been hit and put out of action by the first of the enemy bombs and this N.C.O. slightly wounded in the first two fingers of the left hand, but he went on bombing drawing the pins with his little finger. The post was driven back to the communication trench and as soon as more bombs were obtained from the Coy. in support in Potsdam trench L/Cpl. Picco counter attacked along the trench itself, drove our enemy out of our part of the trench and chased them well down his own part. He helped to build a block 40 yds in advance of our old one and remained in command of the new bombing post. In being relieved that night he marched to Combles and next day at foot inspection the Medical Officer sent him to hospital with a very bad pair of trench feet.”

Note: His widow later received the equivalent of £20 (twenty pounds sterling), the gratuity which accompanied the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Sergeant Martin Picco, DCM, was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – February 4, 2023.

