

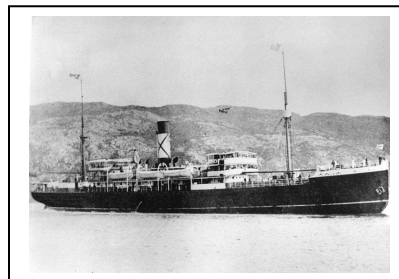


Private Michael Joseph Ross (Regimental Number 250) is interred in Auchonvillers Military Cemetery – Grave reference II. M. 10.

His occupation prior to enlistment recorded as that of a *miner* earning a weekly forty dollars, Michael Joseph Ross presented himself for medical examination on Bell Island on August 26, 1914, just some three weeks after the *Declaration of War*. It was a procedure which pronounced him...*fit for Overseas Service*.

During the next few days Michael Joseph Ross made the short journey to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, where he was now to enlist at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 (this included a ten-cent Field Allowance) - on September 2. He was a recruit of the First Draft.

Following a four-week wait – although training was to be ongoing – Private Ross was to attest on October 1 and then, after a further two days, was to embark on October 3 with the others of the *First Five Hundred* onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting the contingent in St. John's Harbour.



The ship sailed on the morrow to its rendezvous off the south coast of the Island where she was to join the convoy transporting the 1st Canadian Division across the Atlantic.

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

In the United Kingdom Private Ross trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; at Edinburgh Castle – where it provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles; and later again at the tented *Stobs Camp* near the town of Hawick to the south-east of Edinburgh.

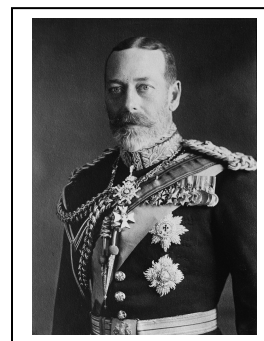


(Right above: *Fort George, constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, still serves the British Army to this day. – photograph from 2011)*



(Right above: *The Newfoundland Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp and about to be presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915 – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)*

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', were then sent south to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot; meanwhile the two junior Companies, the later-arrived 'E' and 'F*', were sent to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, where they were to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.



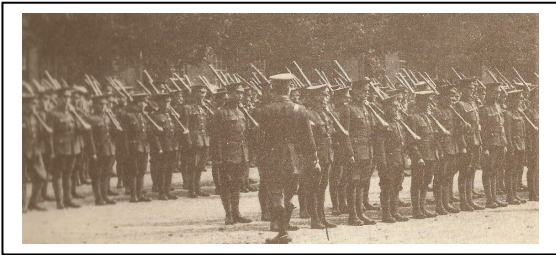
(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – photograph from Bain News Services via Wikipedia)*

**On July 10, 1915, 'F' Company had arrived at Stobs Camp from Newfoundland, its personnel raising the numbers of the unit to battalion establishment strength, and thus permitting it to be ordered to active service. The 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, comprising those four Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.*

(continued)

It had then been during that period spent at Aldershot that Private Ross of 'A' Company – he was not alone in doing so - had been prevailed upon, he on August 14, to re-enlist *for the duration of the war**.

**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*



(Right above: *Some of the men of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915 – from The Fighting Newfoundlander by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)*

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



On August 20, 1915, Private Ross and his comrades-in-arms 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 two weeks billeted in British barracks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, he and the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment disembarked at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *Kangaroo Beach, where the officers and men of the 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is to be seen in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on 'A' Beach. – photograph taken in 2011)*



(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros: either Megantic on August 29, Ausonia on September 18, or Prince Abbas on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on Gallipoli. – from Provincial Archives)*



(Right: *A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla Bay, and where Private Ross served during the early fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)*

(continued)

* * * * *

On November 15, 1915, Private Ross was admitted into the 26th Casualty Clearance Station at *Suvla Bay* (also recorded elsewhere as the 54th CCS on November 18) suffering from severe pyrexia – an acute fever - a complaint which was subsequently diagnosed as due to malaria.



By November 26, eleven days following, Private Ross had been evacuated from the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, having been ferried from *Suvla Bay* to *Mudros Bay* on the Greek island of Lemnos some fifty kilometres distant. There he had been placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Nevasa* for passage to the British-held Mediterranean possession of the island of Malta where he had been admitted into the Military Hospital at Tigne.



(Right above: The picture of HM Hospital Ship Nevasa, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Used as both a hospital ship and a troop transport, she survived the Great War and was again in service during the conflict of 1939-1945.)

(Right above: One of the many British military hospitals, now abandoned on the former British possession of Malta, hospitals that were used during both World Wars: The island has been independent since 1964 – photograph from 2011)

From hospital Private Ross was transferred on December 13 to the *St. Lawrence Camp Hospital* at Ghajn Tuffeiha for convalescence. Eighteen days later again, on the final day of the year 1915, he then again found himself on board a hospital ship, on this occasion the *Regina d'Italia*, being invalided from Malta back to the United Kingdom. The voyage was to last eight days.



(Right above: The picture of the Regina d'Italia, shown here in her pre-War occupation as an ocean-going passenger ship, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)



Upon arrival his back in England, Private Ross was admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital, in the southern Borough of Wandsworth on January 8, 1916, where he remained for treatment and subsequent convalescence for six weeks.



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

(continued)

(Preceding page: *A group Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified – although the fourth from the left in the second row is ‘Joseph’ - convalescing at Wandsworth in the company of members of the staff – from a post-card by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

Discharged from Wandsworth on February 19, Private Ross was granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded to military personnel upon release from hospital. This time expired, on February 28 he reported to duty with ‘E’ Company of the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at the Regimental Depot, Scotland.

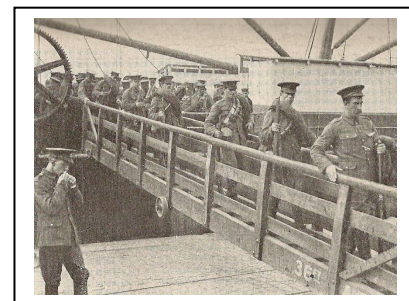
(Right: *An aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr, where the ‘other ranks’ were quartered, is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where lived the officers, is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)



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



One month later, embarking onto His Majesty’s Transport *Archangel* with the 3rd Re-enforcement Draft from the English south-coast port of Southampton on March 28, Private Ross was en route to the *Western Front*. The detachment landed in the Norman capital of Rouen on March 30, two days later, and made its way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot there for some days of final training and organization* before leaving to seek out the parent unit.



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

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



*Apparently the standard length of time for this final training was 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 to the troops as the *Bull Rings*.

(continued)

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

It was most likely on April 15 that Private Ross re-joined the 1st Battalion *in the field*. A detachment of two officers and two-hundred eleven *other ranks* reported to duty from Rouen on that day in the small *Somme* village of Englebelmer just behind the lines. By that evening the men were already at work in the nearby communication trenches.

In fact, the 1st Battalion *itself* had marched into the village only two days previously, thus completing its transfer from Egypt to the *Western Front*. It *also* found itself working in those communication trenches on April 15.

*** * * * ***

After the departure of Private Ross in mid-November, the 1st Battalion was to serve at *Suvla Bay* for a further five weeks. It was to be a difficult period, particularly on November 26 when there had been a freak rain-, ice- and snow-storm - and on the days that were to follow. In fact, the operation at *Suvla Bay*, and the entire *Gallipoli Campaign* itself was to be a debacle: Flies, dust, disease, frost-bite, floods – and 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 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: A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where the Newfoundland Battalion was to serve in the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)



On the night of December 19-20, 1915, the British were to abandon *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, would form a part of the rear-guard.

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

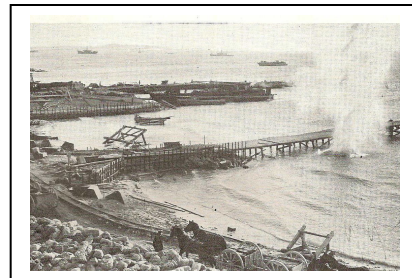
(Right: *Cape Helles* as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed *Achi Baba*, positions which were never breached. The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side in the picture. – photograph from 2011)



The British and the Anzac forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – had now been only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the Peninsula could be undertaken. This operation had taken place on the night of January 8-9, and the Newfoundland Battalion was to provide some of the rear-guard for this second withdrawal as well*.

(Right: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was 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 below: *The same 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces and by the Newfoundlanders who were the last soldiers off the beach: vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011*)



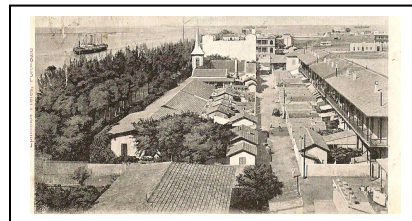
(Right below: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from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



After the British evacuation of the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the 1st Battalion had been sent to Alexandria, having arrived there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders were thence to be immediately transferred southward to Suez, one of the ports at the southern end of the canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders as, at the time, the subsequent destination of the Battalion's 29th Division had not yet been decided*.

**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.*

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



On March 14, the Newfoundlanders had taken ship through Port Tewfiq, also at the southern end of the *Suez Canal*, for the French port of *Marseilles*, and had disembarked there on March 22, en route to the *Western Front*.

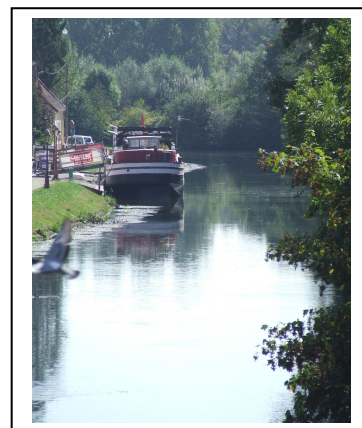
(continued)

Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train would arrive at the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having travelled unused in a separate wagon. De-training at the local station at two in the morning, the Newfoundlanders still were to have a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

(Right below: *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 over which they had marched on their way from the station. But some three months later, *the Somme* would have become a part of their history.

It was to be there, in the French *Département de la Somme*, on April 15, 1916 – only two days after the arrival there on April 13 of the parent unit - that the 3rd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr via Rouen – and Private Ross among its number – was to report to *duty* with the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in the village of Englebelmer.



* * * * *

The days following Private Ross's presumed return to his Battalion had been taken up with work in the nearby communication trenches. Only days later again, two Companies – 'A' and 'B' – had taken over some support positions from a British unit* before the entire Newfoundland unit moved 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 the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles. This was also true on the day of the attack on July 1.*

Briefly admitted into the 87th Field Ambulance on May 19, the reason for which was entered as ICT (*Inflammation of Connective Tissue*) of a toe, and immediately transferred to the Divisional Rest Station, Private Ross returned to *duty* with Battalion six days following, on May 24.

(Right: *A British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)



For the remainder of the spring of 1916, the Newfoundlanders were to be preparing for the British campaign of that upcoming summer, the battles to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river flowing through the region, and over which the parent unit of the 1st Battalion had marched only some few weeks previously at Pont-Rémy: *the Somme*.

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*.

**Perhaps ironically, the majority of the Battalion's casualties was sustained while advancing 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.*

(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*)



(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village (see below). – 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.



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 would prove to be the biggest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps worse, it was to continue for the next four and a half months.

Born in Colchester in the County of Essex, England, the son of James Ross and Margaret Ross – she married to Francis Neary of Portugal Cove, Conception Bay, by the time of enlistment - Private Ross was also brother to John*.

**Private John Ross, Regimental Number 1210, survived the conflict only to be killed in an accident on Bell Island soon after his discharge from the Army.*



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

Private Ross was at first *unofficially* reported, on July 18, as having been *killed in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'A' Company during the fighting on the first day of *the Somme*. His death was *officially* confirmed on July in a report dated July 11, 1916, but submitted by the Officer Commanding the 1st Battalion only on July 26.



Michael Joseph Ross had enlisted at a *declared* nineteen years of age.

(Right above: *The Portugal Cove War Memorial honours the sacrifice of Private Ross. – photograph from 2010*)

Private Michael Joseph Ross was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



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 11, 2023.