

Second Lieutenant William Thomas Ryall (Regimental Number 53*), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



**Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were not considered as enlisted. These officers thus had no Regimental Number allotted to them.*

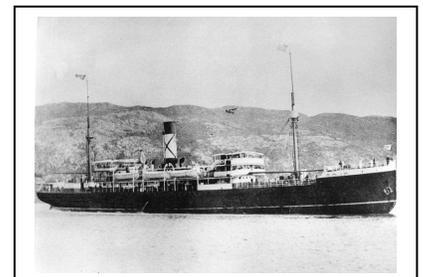
And since officers did not enlist, they were not then required to re-enlist 'for the duration', even though, at the beginning, as a private, they had volunteered their services for only a limited time – twelve months.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a jeweller with *J. T. Duley & Co.*, of Water Street, and earning twelve dollars per week, William Thomas Ryall presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on August 28 of 1914, twenty-four days after the *Declaration of War*. The procedure was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

A recruit of the First Draft, William Ryall enlisted five days later at the same venue - engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem, this including a daily ten-cent Field Allowance. He then attested, perhaps on the same September 2, perhaps a month later on October 1 – both of these dates are cited.

Subsequent to his enlistment there then followed a period of training for Private Ryall and his fellow recruits during which time, on September 21, he received a first promotion, to the rank of lance corporal of 'A' Company. These exercises, undertaken on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's were to last for some five weeks.

He was then to embark on October 3 as a non-commissioned officer of the *First Five Hundred* – also to come be known as the *Blue Puttees* - onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting the contingent in St. John's Harbour. The ship would sail for the United Kingdom on the following day, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.



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

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

In the United Kingdom Lance Corporal Ryall 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 was to provide 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.

It was to be during the period spent at Edinburgh Castle, that Lance Corporal Ryall would receive a further appointment, to the rank of corporal and thereupon put up his second stripe...

...and it was to be while the Newfoundlanders were at *Stobs Camp* that, on June 14, he received the third, having been further elevated in rank, on this third occasion to that of sergeant.

(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*)

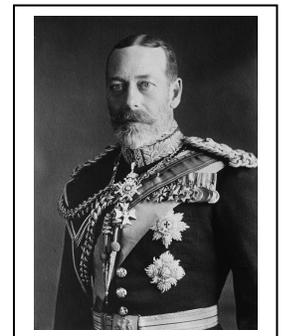
At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot. Meanwhile the two junior Companies, the later-arrived 'E' and 'F', were sent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

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

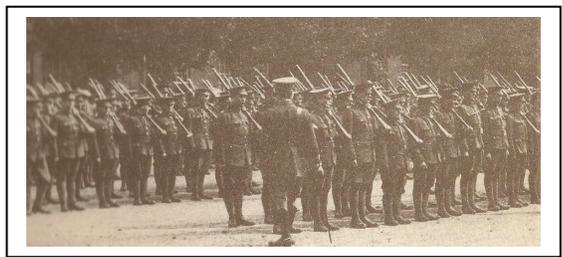
**On July 10, 1915, 'F' Company had arrived at Stobs Camp from Newfoundland, its personnel raising the numbers of the unit to battalion establishment strength, and thus permitting it to be ordered to active service.*

The 1st Battalion of the 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)



***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.)

Perhaps it had been felt by the authorities that a senior NCO such as he would be of greater value at the new Regimental Depot than on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*. For whatever the reason, Sergeant Ryall was to remain behind in the United Kingdom, being posted with ‘E’ and ‘F’ Companies to western Scotland.

The Regimental Depot on the west coast of Scotland was at the time being established at the Royal Borough of Ayr. It was there to serve as the overseas base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, from where – as of November of 1915 up until January of 1918 - re-enforcement drafts were to be despatched to bolster the 1st Battalion’s numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later on to the *Western Front*.



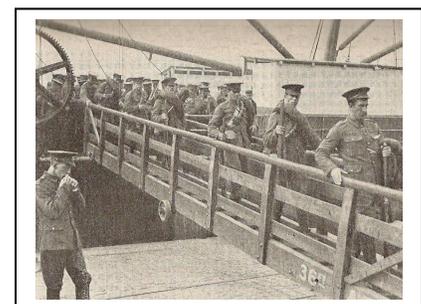
(Right above: an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on-Ayr, where were quartered the ‘other ranks’, is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)

During this posting, on October 4, he became a quarter-master sergeant and, some six weeks later again, on November 27, was to be granted an Imperial Commission and the accompanying appointment to the rank of second lieutenant.



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

It appears that on June 5-6 of the following year, 1916, Second Lieutenant Ryall left the United Kingdom - likely through Southampton to Rouen after having enjoyed a recorded furlough in London - as one a party of officers to have been posted to the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent. He would join the Newfoundland Battalion on an unspecified date in the days that followed.



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

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(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, with Sergeant Ryall at Ayr, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment 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 where, a month later – having spent two weeks billeted in British barracks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on the night of September 19-20, the Newfoundland force was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

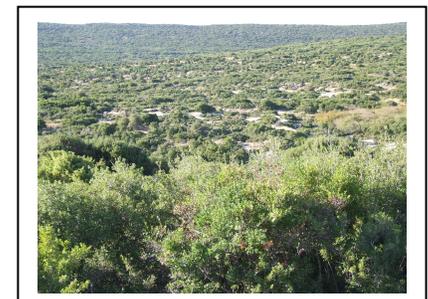


(Right: *Kangaroo Beach, where the officers and men of the 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is to be seen in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on 'A' Beach. – photograph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



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

(Right: *A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where the 1st Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)*



Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion was to serve but, even since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, would prove to be little more than a debacle:

Flies, dust, disease, the frost-bite and the floods – and of course the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command* had ever anticipated – were eventually to overwhelm the British-led forces and those of the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.

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



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

November 26 had seen the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes during the *Gallipoli Campaign*. A freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm had struck the *Suvla Bay* area on that day and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival from the wrath of Nature rather than from that of the enemy was to be the priority.

There were to be many casualties in both camps, 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 had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite but the end of the *Gallipoli Campaign* had already been in sight. After the storm, the Newfoundlanders were to remain stationed at *Suvla Bay* for only a further twenty-five days.

By that time they were to have served there for exactly three months to the day.

On the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.



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

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

The British and the *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps were also to serve at *Gallipoli* – were now only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.

This operation would take place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion to furnish part of the rear-guard on this second occasion also.

(Right: 'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation in January of 1916 – 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: *The same '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)



When the British had evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, to arrive there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to Suez, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.



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

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

After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1st Battalion had boarded His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq on March 14 to sail up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseilles, on March 22.



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

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



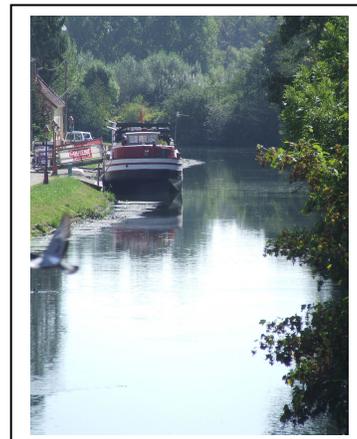
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train had found its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having travelled unused in a separate wagon.

Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they had then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to become a part of their history.

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

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



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

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

(Right: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)



The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the 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. And a part of that preparation was to be the arrival of reinforcements in the days prior to the attack

Second Lieutenant Ryall, of course, had been one of those.

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

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*.



(Preceding page: *Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel* – photograph from 2009(?))

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

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



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

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

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

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

The son of Robert James Ryall, employee of *F. Smallwood, Manufacturer and Importer of Boots and Shoes* (and of the *A.J. Harvey Company(?)*), and of Elizabeth Ann Ryall (*née Slade*) – likely those to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of 40, Hayward Avenue in St. John's – but also of Twillingate, he was brother to Chesley-Frederick, to Robert-Stewart*, Ethel-May, Sarah and to Frank.



Second Lieutenant Ryall was reported as having been *killed in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'A' Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*.

**Private Robert Stewart Ryall, Newfoundland Regimental Number 1891, was reported as missing in action on October 12, 1916, while fighting at Gueudecourt during First Somme. Some thirty weeks later, on or about May 3 of 1917, he was officially presumed dead.*

(continued)

Private Robert Stewart Ryall (Newfoundland Regimental Number 1891), also having no known last resting-place, is commemorated with his brother beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park. (See elsewhere in these files.)

William Thomas Ryall had enlisted at the age of twenty-six years: year of birth in Twillingate(?), Newfoundland, 1888.

(The photograph of Second Lieutenant W.T. Ryall is from the Ancestry.ca web-site.)

Second Lieutenant William Thomas Ryall was entitled to the British War Medal and to 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.

