



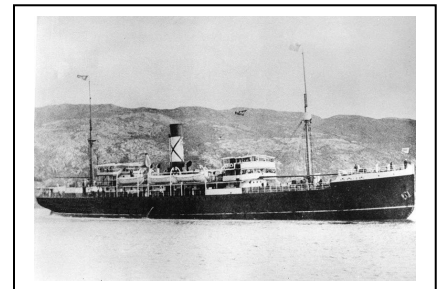
Corporal William Joseph Ryan (Regimental Number 133), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *spinner* earning a weekly \$8.00 working for the *Knitting Mills on Alexander Street, St. John's, Newfoundland, William Joseph Ryan was a recruit of the First Draft and enlisted on September 7, 1914, at the CLB Armoury in the capital city at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 (including a daily ten-cent field allowance).**

****His last employer had apparently been a Mr. Smyth who was to later lose his life in the Florizel disaster.***

Having attested on October 1, Private Ryan embarked for England on October 3 onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel*, and sailed on the following day for the south coast of the Island, there to rendezvous with 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 Ryan trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England – where he attained the rank of lance corporal on November 13 of 1914 - 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 *Stobs Camp* near the town of Hawick.



It was at *Stobs Camp* that he put up his corporal's stripe on July 2.

(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: The Newfoundland Regiment parades at Stobs Camp and is presented its Colours on June 10, 1915. – 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, '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.

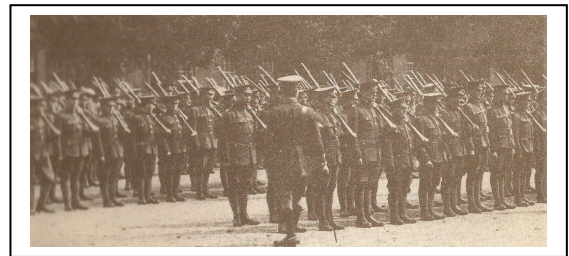


(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India* – photograph from *Bain News Services* via *Wikipedia*)

**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 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.*

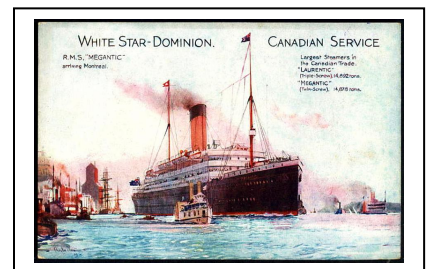
It had then been during that period spent at Aldershot that Corporal Ryan was to be prevailed upon, on August 13, to re-enlist *for the duration of the war**.

**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, Corporal Ryan and his comrades-in-arms embarked 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 September 20, he disembarked with the 1st Battalion 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 below: A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where Sergeant Ferguson was to serve in the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

Three days short of a month after his landing there, Corporal Ryan was evacuated from Suvla onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Galeka* almost one month after his arrival there, on October 17, suffering from diarrhoea and pyrexia (fever), and was admitted four days afterwards, on the 21st, into the 5th Canadian Stationary Hospital in Cairo.



(Right below: The image of *Galeka* is from the *Old Ship Picture Galleries* web-site.)

Some twelve weeks later again, on January 15, 1916, Corporal Ryan was transferred from hospital to the rest camp in the *Abbassia Barracks* close to Cairo, where he had been billeted during those two weeks in September, and from where he was now discharged *to duty* on January 26, 1916, to the British *Sidi Bishr Base Depot*, in Alexandria.



He is recorded as re-joining the 1st Battalion on March 7 at its camp at Suez. It was then to be from there, a week later, that Corporal Ryan embarked with the Newfoundland unit for passage to France.

* * * * *

In the meantime, during Corporal Ryan's absence, the Newfoundland Battalion had continued to serve at *Suvla Bay*. It was to be a miserable existence in the trenches and had been no more successful from a military point of view.

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 – had overwhelmed the British-led forces. It had been decided to abandon the venture.

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

On the night of December 19-20, the British forces had abandoned the area of Suvla Bay – the Newfoundland Battalion, the only non-British unit to have served there, was to form a part of the rear-guard.

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

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



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



**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 at Cape Helles as it was days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration*)

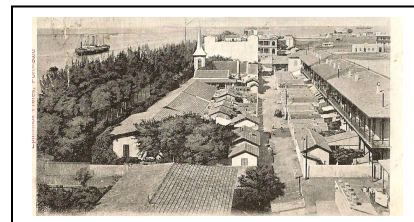
(Right: *'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces and by the Newfoundlanders who were the last soldiers off the beach: vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011*)



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



When the British had finally evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the 1st Battalion was to be sent to Alexandria, having arrived there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders had thereupon been 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 since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the 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.*

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

It was at this time of course, as recounted further above, that Corporal Ryan on March 7 had reported *to duty* from the rest camp at Cairo.

* * * * *

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

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



Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train arrived at the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold and 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 had a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

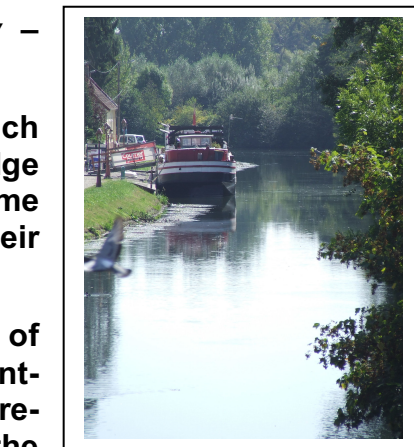
(Right: *the Somme as seen from the bridge at Pont-Rémy – photograph from 2010*)

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 marched on their way from the station. Some three months later *the Somme* would become a part of their history.

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

The Newfoundlanders would also soon be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for that meandering river, *the Somme*.

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



(continued)

If there is one name and one 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 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 killing of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.



(Right above: *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. – 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.



The son of William Ryan (former labourer, deceased January 17, 1896, according to his widow's testimony) and of Catherine Ryan of Southside West, St. John's – to whom he had allocated a daily eighty cents from his pay - he was also brother of Michael, an invalid book-seller.



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

William Joseph Ryan had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-three years and six months.

(continued)

(Preceding page: A grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from ...)

Corporal William Joseph Ryan 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 photograph of Private Ryan is from the Provincial Archives.)

No addresses or dates are written on the following letter, presumably sent to the Pension's Board, correspondence which was likely accompanied by the application form to be found in Corporal Ryan's documents:



Dear Sir –

With reference to my son Michael he with his brother the late Corporal Ryan went up for enlistment.

The night they went up (which was the first night) neither of them got in there was such a rush. When they told me I objected. I had but the two and was

satisfied to give one but not the two having reared them so hard without a father.

Mike often afterwards wished to join up but I always objected.

I told him if his brother was invalided home then he could go.

Another reason for my objecting was because of his health.

Yours truly
Catherine Ryan

Mrs. Ryan was at first refused the pension for which she was applying because only one of her sons had presented himself for service, although he was apparently partially incapacitated.

It was subsequently awarded to her.

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 13, 2023.