



Sergeant John A. (*John Joseph* in his files) Sheehan (Regimental Number 35) is interred in Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Cemetery in St. John's, in the Naval and Military Plot.

His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of *labourer, fireman* and also *sailor*, working for the *Furness Withy Company* as well as for *Harvey and Company*, both of Water Street, and earning a weekly eight dollars, John Joseph Sheehan presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on August 23 of 1914 – just nineteen days after the Declaration of War – for a medical examination. It was an exercise which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

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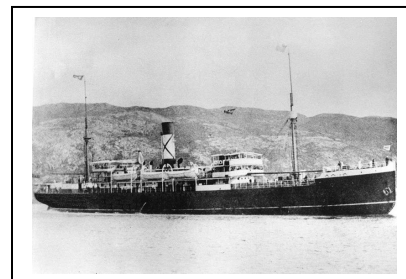
Ten days later, on September 2, John Sheehan returned to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, on this second occasion for enlistment, whereupon he was engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar a day plus a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance. A recruit of the First Draft, he was likely now ordered to the tented area by that time established on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the East End of St. John's where a four-five week course of training was already under way.

The regimental authorities were *also* busy by now, preparing for the transport of this, the first body of volunteers, to *overseas* - and later to *active* - service.

At the beginning of the month of October a large number of the new recruits underwent attestation; Private John Sheehan was one of that number, taking his oath of allegiance on October 1.

Two days later, after the Newfoundland contingent - it was not as yet a battalion - of 'A' and 'B' Companies had paraded through the city, it embarked onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* which was awaiting in St. John's Harbour.

Private Sheehan and his comrades-in-arms of the *First Five Hundred* - also to be known to history as the *Blue Puttees* - were now to sit on board ship for the best part of a day as it was not to be until the morrow that *Florizel* would sail to the south coast of the Island and to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the Canadian Division to the United Kingdom.



(Right above: *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 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 the unit was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.



(Right: *The venerable Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from its position on the summit of Castle Hill. - photograph from 2011*)



Some three months later, on May 11, and some seven weeks into spring - although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit - by now, 'A' and 'B' Companies re-enforced by 'C', 'D', and 'E' - was ordered moved from the Scottish capital to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick and where he received promotion to the rank of lance corporal.

It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent received the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength*. The now-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered eligible to be ordered on ‘active service’.

**The number was about fifteen hundred, sufficient to provide four ‘fighting’ companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

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

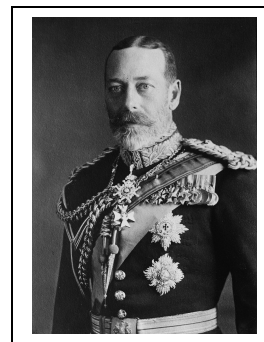


At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ – Private Sheehan among their ranks - were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot.

This force, now designated the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

Meanwhile the two junior Companies, the later-arrived ‘E’ and the aforementioned last-arrived ‘F’, were ordered transferred to Scotland’s west coast, to Ayr, there 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 – the photograph is from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.*)



It was also during this period while at Aldershot that on August 13 Private Sheehan re-enlisted, on this occasion for the *duration of the war**.

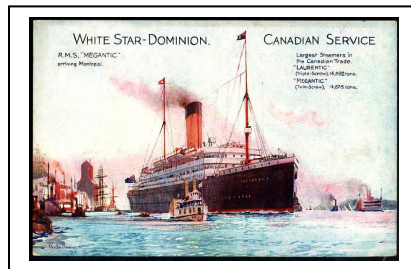
**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was likely to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

(Right: *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.)*



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While 'E' and 'F' Companies had been beginning their posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr, on August 20 of 1915, the 1st 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.



(Right above: *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.*)

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*.



It was unfortunately while at the *Abbassia Barracks* that, on September 2, Lance Corporal Sheehan was reduced to the rank of private for having been...*drunk and absent*...from parade on the previous day.



(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, and where the 1st Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011*)



When the Newfoundland Battalion had landed from its transport ship at *Suvla Bay* on that September night of 1915, it was to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

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

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

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

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



November 26 would see the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm was to strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be the priority.

There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

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, Indian and *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – had now only been marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.



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

(Right above: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles 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.***



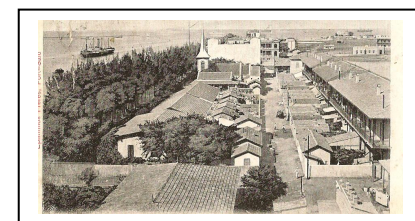
(Right: 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in that January of 1916 and by the Newfoundlanders who were to be the last soldiers off the beach: Vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011)

Immediately after the British 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 the vicinity of 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)



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

After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1st Battalion boarded His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage through the Suez Canal en route to France.



The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseilles, on March 22.

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

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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 Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.

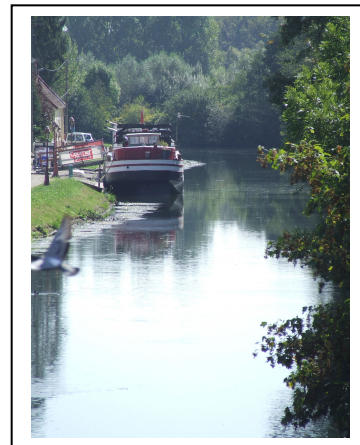
Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they had then marched on their way from the railway station.

But some three months later *the Somme* was to become a part of their history.

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

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



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

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

(Right: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)*)



Having then been withdrawn at the end of that April to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders were soon to be preparing for the upcoming British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, that flowed – and still does so today – through the region.



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

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

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



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

It was to be the largest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for 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: *A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland - dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?*)



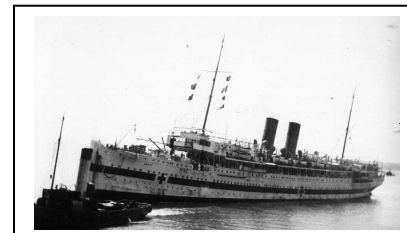
On July 1, the first day of *the Somme*, Private Sheehan was one of the total of three-hundred seventy-four all told, recorded in the Regimental War Diary as having been...*wounded*...during the fighting on the field at Beaumont-Hamel.

He was evacuated on the following day, July 2, for treatment to a injured right foot and sent directly to the 87th Field Ambulance. From there he was then to be forwarded on the following day, July 3, to the 2nd General Hospital established in the area of the industrial port-city of Le Havre.



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

At Le Havre it was decided to transfer Private Sheehan immediately back to the United Kingdom and he thus was placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Egypt* on the same day for the crossing of the English Channel.



(Right above: *The image of HMHS Egypt is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. An elderly vessel, in the pre-War days she sailed on the United Kingdom to India service before, when war came, then being transformed into a hospital ship. She was sunk in a collision in 1922, an accident which cost her eighty-two lives.*)

Having arrived back in England, Private Sheehan was admitted on July 4 into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. There he was to receive medical attention for nineteen days before then being transferred to the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital Extension on July 23. He remained there until the 29th day of the same month, now also undergoing treatment for a case of influenza.



(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: *A group of Newfoundland patients dressed in hospital uniform, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing in the grounds of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



After his release from the Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Private Sheehan was granted the customary ten-day accorded to military personnel upon discharge from medical care – from July 29 until August 7. He certainly spent some of this time in Edinburgh since it was from there that he reported having his pass stolen on or about August 4. He received a duplicate on August 7, the day on which the furlough was to come to its end.

This all-too-short period of leave was subsequently followed by a posting to the Regimental Depot.

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



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

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

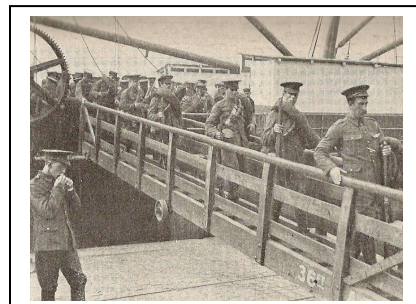


While at Ayr, Private Sheehan was to serve in the ranks of 'H' Company and it was while he was there that he was to be promoted for a second time to the rank of lance corporal, not that his conduct was exemplary at all times – drunkenness was often a problem.

(Right: *The Newfoundland Plot in Ayr Cemetery wherein lie fourteen Newfoundlanders whom the Commonwealth War Graves Commission persist in referring to as Canadians – here and elsewhere* – photograph from 2014(?))



On December 30, 1916, the 16th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Lance Corporal Sheehan among its numbers - embarked in the English south-coast port of Southampton for the short voyage across the English Channel to the Norman capital city of Rouen and thence to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot nearby. There the detachment underwent final training and organization* before moving to its rendezvous with the parent unit.



(Right above: *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.*

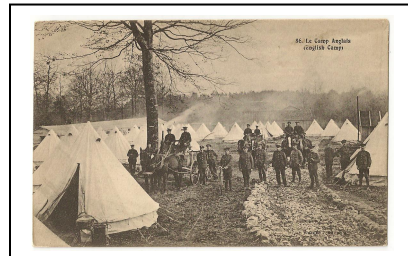
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Private Sheehan reported back *to duty* with the Newfoundland Battalion on January 17 of 1917, as one of a draft from Rouen of fifty-one *other ranks* - mostly wounded men returning - at *Carnoy Camp*.

At the time the Newfoundlanders were completing a six-week posting to *Corps Reserve* well behind the lines and were now to make their way up to the forward area and resume *active service*.

(Right above: *The area of Carnoy almost a century later* – photograph from 2014)

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



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After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916 - one of the victims of the day at Beaumont-Hamel having been Private Sheehan - such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that a 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.



It had then been 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 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 having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

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On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1st Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

It 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*.

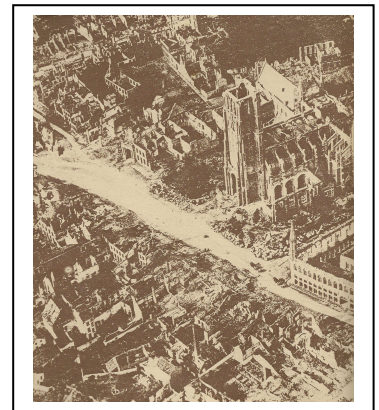
(Right: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



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 incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the *Newfoundland Battalion* had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

(Right: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916: it is described as the 'Ville morte'. – from Illustration*)



Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1st Battalion of the *Newfoundland Regiment* had again been ordered to the offensive; it was to be at a place called *Gueudecourt*, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of *Beaumont-Hamel*.

The encounter had proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right above: *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 to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of *Gueudecourt* although, on October 18, it would

supply 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 Brigade.

(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 had eventually been retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1st Battalion began to wend its way back up 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 broken only 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.

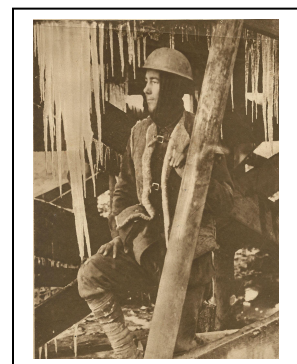
It had been on January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* from where it would make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it was to entrain for the small town of Corbie where it had thereupon taken over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

Days later again, of course, after having continued its way forward, it had arrived at Carnoy Camp which was where the Newfoundland Battalion had been joined by the re-enforcement draft of fifty-one *other ranks* which comprised among that number a returning Lance Corporal Sheehan.

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After that recent six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve* far to the rear, 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.

Those casualties, however, were only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig casually referred to as *wastage* as the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches. It was not to do so now – except when having been relieved of front-line and support-line duties – until the beginning of March when it would fight the sharp action at Sully-Saillisel.



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(Preceding page: A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, their unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold and ice of the trenches at Sailly-Saillisel during the winter of 1916-1917. – from Illustration)

Private Sheehan received a promotion on February 9 of 1917, to the rank of corporal during a period when the 1st Battalion was out of the line in the vicinity of the community of Coisy, receiving, according to the Regimental War Diarist,... *classes daily in Lewis gun, Bombing, Sniping, Rifle grenade & Trench Mortars*. He also was to report...*Nothing of Military Importance...*

Corporal Sheehan's Battalion moved back into the firing line on February 23, on a day about which the Regimental War Diarist later recorded: *...after receiving anti-trench-foot treatment at Combles. Strict orders were given that gas helmets were to be worn at alert position as enemy had been making frequent use of gas shells. Fairly lively enemy bombardment while Batt. going in. Casualties: 1 killed, 3 wounded, 1 gassed*



The 24th was reported as being *fairly quiet*. The Regimental War Diary makes no mention of casualties but Corporal Sheehan's file reports him as being both wounded and gassed – from the explosion of a gas-shell - on that day – a second source says the 23rd.

(Right above: A collection of gas-helmets (masks) on display in the Great War Exhibition at Zonnebeke, Belgium – photograph from 2014)

On that February 24 he was admitted into the 60th Field Ambulance, being transferred almost immediately from there to the 55th (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown, Meaulté. Two days later again, on the 26th, he was moved to 12th General Hospital in Rouen. There, his condition deemed severe, it was decided once again to transfer Corporal Sheehan back to the United Kingdom where he arrived on March 5 on board HM Hospital Ship *Gloucester Castle*.



(Right above: The image of HMHS Gloucester Castle is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. She was used as a hospital ship until March of 1917 when she was torpedoed but not sunk, nevertheless remaining unserviceable until after the conflict. In civilian service during the war of 1939-1945, she was sunk by a German auxiliary cruiser in July of 1942 off the coast of Angola with a loss of ninety-three lives.)

Thus on March 6, Corporal Sheehan was again admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth, still suffering from the effects of gas poisoning – shortness of breath and a persistent cough. He remained there until on or about May 3, for fifty-eight days, when he was gain granted that ten-day post-convalescent furlough it is again suggested that he spent this time in Edinburgh - before he reported *to duty* to the Regimental Depot at Ayr – again to 'H' Company.

(continued)

(Right above: *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 – photo from 2012*)



Corporal Sheehan remained in Scotland until August of that year*. He was then repatriated, sailing on the 8th of that month from Liverpool to Quebec on board His Majesty's Transport *Scotian* on his way to Newfoundland where he was to be assigned *special duty*, to assist in recruitment. He arrived back in Newfoundland on August 25.



**He was posted at first to Ayr and then, after July 3, to the vicinity of Barry where the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been stationed. Planned as a permanent change, the protest from several quarters was great enough for the unit to return to Ayr at the end of the summer.*

(Right above: *The image of 'Scotian' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Originally built for the Holland America Line she was bought by the Allan Line in 1911 to serve with it and later with the Canadian Pacific Line – which bought the Allan Line in 1917 – in commercial use for the duration of the Great War. The ship was scrapped in 1927.*)

Some twelve weeks later, on December 8, 1917, Corporal Sheehan was discharged from the Regiment in St. John's as being *medically unfit for duty*. He immediately enlisted in the Newfoundland Forestry Corps two days later, on December 10, having been promoted and to gain his third stripe. Sergeant Sheehan then sailed on the morrow, the 11th, aboard the *Florizel* en route to Halifax with other recruits of the Newfoundland Forestry Corps, to take ship for the United Kingdom.

He was, however, to travel no further.

On December 26 he was reported as being *dangerously ill* in hospital in Halifax, suffering from pneumonia. Sergeant Sheehan was reported as having *died of sickness* at a quarter to five in the afternoon on the following day, December 27, 1917*. His remains were sent home from Halifax via Sydney on December 31 for burial in Newfoundland.

The son of Edward Sheehan, employee of the *Reid Newfoundland Company* – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - and of Margaret Sheehan (née *Sullivan*)* – to whom he had willed his all - of 2 Hunt's Lane in St. John's – and later of 5, Howe Place - he was also brother to Mary-Ann; Annie-May; Michael-Joseph, an invalid and reportedly rejected twice by the enlistment board; to Milne and to Edward**.



**The couple had married on October 28, 1882.*

(The above photograph of Private(?) Sheehan is from the Provincial Archives.)

(continued)

*****Private Edward Sheehan (Regimental Number 3264) who was to be killed in action on July 8, 1917, at the Yser Canal to the north of Ypres, three weeks before the start of the Third Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele. (His story is to be found elsewhere in these files.)***

(Right: The grave-stone of Private Edward Sheehan is in Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium.)

John Joseph Sheehan had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-three years and three months: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, October 9, 1893 (from St. John's Birth Register).

On January 24 of 1923 his remains were exhumed to be re-interred in the Military Plot of the same cemetery.

**It is to be remarked that the date of death engraved on his headstone is incorrect. All the correspondence of the time cites December 27 – St. Stephen's Day – 1917.*



Sergeant John Joseph Sheehan was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) 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 10, 2023.