



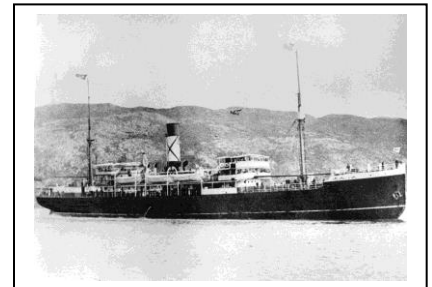
Sergeant William Thomas Simmonds (also found as *Simmons*) (Regimental Number 349), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *tailor* employed by Mr. William White of LeMarchant Road – and by the *Nfld. Clothing Co. Ltd.* - and earning twelve dollars a week, William Thomas Simmonds enlisted at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 - on September 7, 1914, a recruit of the First Draft*.

****While there is a completed medical report, also undertaken at the CLB Armoury, on William Thomas Simmonds, and while it pronounces him as...fit for foreign Service...the document had not been dated. It was, however, likely before his enlistment.***

Having attested on October 1, over three weeks later - during which period the new recruits were to be training, and also during which, on September 21, Private Simmonds was elevated to the rank of lance corporal - he then embarked two days later again, on October 3, onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* which was awaiting the contingent in St. John's Harbour.



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

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

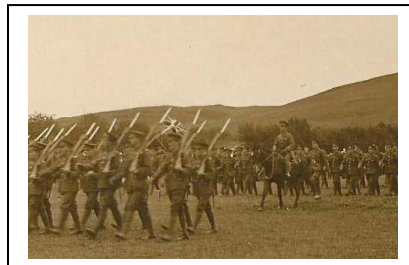


In the United Kingdom Lance Corporal Simmonds trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; at Edinburgh Castle – where it provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles; and later again at the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

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And it was there at Hawick, on July 2, that there came further promotion with Lance Corporal Simmonds now putting up his corporal's stripe.

(Right: *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 furnish 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.

It had then been during the period spent at Aldershot that Corporal Simmonds of 'B' Company – he was not alone in doing so - had been prevailed upon, he 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, here clad in the peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)*

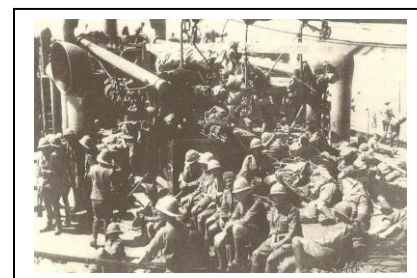


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On August 20, 1915, Corporal Simmonds and his comrades-in-arms embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks where, a month later – 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 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)

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 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 was to see a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be the priority.



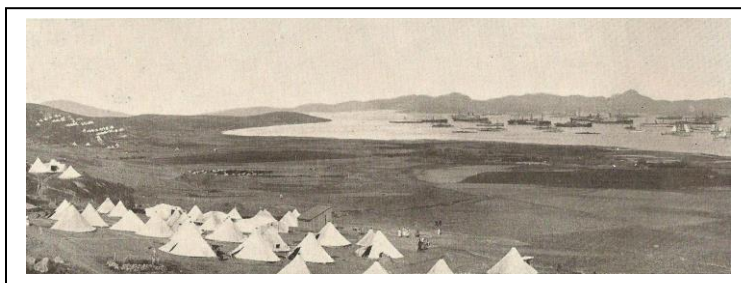
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There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, were those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

* * * * *

However, on November 26 of 1915, only just more than two months after his arrival at *Gallipoli* and on the day of the aforementioned storm, Corporal Simmonds was admitted into the British 54th Casualty Clearing Station at *Suvla Bay*, suffering from neither trench-foot nor frost-bite but from jaundice. He was subsequently ferried from there to be subsequently admitted into the 2nd Australian Hospital three days later at *Mudros Bay*, on the Greek island of Lemnos, some fifty kilometres distant.

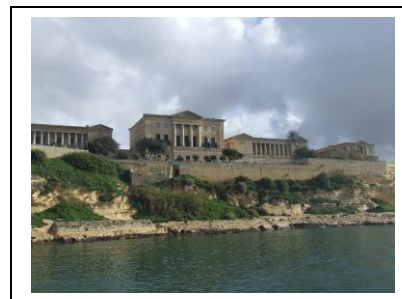
(Below right: A busy *Mudros Bay* and its almost non-existent harbour, at Lemnos, seen here in late autumn of 1915, and showing some of the many Allied medical units already established there, most of them under canvas – from Illustration)



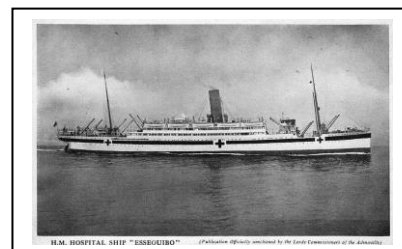
After a two-month period of treatment and convalescence, Corporal Simmonds was then evacuated from *Mudros Bay* to the British-held Mediterranean island of Malta on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Panama*. He was thereupon received into St. Andrew's Military Hospital on January 26 of 1916, for treatment to a further problem: a severe case of appendicitis.

Twenty-four days later again, after a successful operation, he was invalided on February 19, 1916, on board HM Hospital Ship *Essequibo*, for the return voyage to the United Kingdom.

(Right: One of the former British Royal Naval Hospital facilities, today disused, on the island of Malta: Since 1964 an independent nation, at the time of the Great War – and also during the Second World War - it was a British possession. – photograph from 2011)



Upon his arrival in England Corporal Simmonds was forwarded to the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth, into which he was admitted on February 27. Some two weeks later he was discharged, having been granted the customary ten-day furlough – on or about March 2 to 11 – which was accorded military personnel upon their release from hospital.



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(Preceding page: *The image of HMHS Essequibo in its war-time white with red flags, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Requisitioned as a hospital ship in 1915, two years later she was loaned to the Canadian government, also as a hospital ship, to repatriate sick and wounded military personnel.*)

(Right: *The main building of what was to become the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth 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*)



(Right below: *A group of unfortunately unidentified Newfoundland patients convalescing at Wandsworth – from a post-card by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo.*)



After this short period of leave, Corporal Simmonds was posted to the Regimental Depot, reporting there *to duty* on March 13, and was joined there on July 19 by his wife and one-year old son, William Thomas. The family moved into lodgings at 19, McCallum Avenue, Newton-on-Ayre, where a second son, James Douglas, was to be born in the autumn of 1917.

**She and William Thomas had left St. John's on or about July 19 to sail to the united Kingdom.*

The Depot had been established as a base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in the summer of 1915 some eight months previously and it was from there that re-enforcements were – as of November, 1915 up until January of 1918 – to be despatched to bolster the fighting Companies of the 1st Battalion, at first to the Middle East, and then later to the *Western Front*.



(Right above: *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 were housed the officers, is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

Corporal Simmonds was not, however, to be returning to the *Western Front* very soon, but rather to back to hospital.

On this occasion it was to be the 4th Scottish General Hospital in not-distant Glasgow where he was admitted from April 10 to 18 for treatment to a sequel to his appendectomy.

His report for that period merely states: *Nothing abnormal noted except debility*. There was, however, to be a follow-up report dated May 14 of the same 1916, which reads as follows: *Unfit for foreign service on account of pain which developes (sic) after any more strenuous exercise such as digging, marching etc. This operation developes in the region*

of an old operation for appendicitis, and is probably due to adhesions following the operation... A further like report added that there was...No sign of hernia...

The 2nd Battalion authorities apparently followed the proffered medical advice: Corporal Simmonds was relieved from certain duties and was attached to 'H' Company, the unit with which he apparently was to remain until his transfer in the late winter of 1918, back to the parent 1st Battalion.

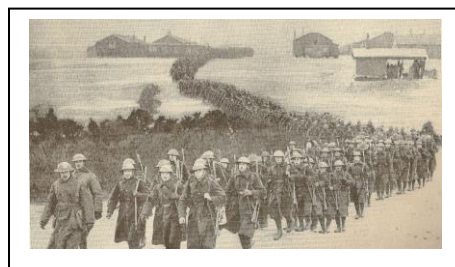
It was to be at that time, on April 24 of 1916, having by then returned to Ayr, that Corporal Simmonds would put up a third stripe – although the appointment was apparently to the rank of *acting-sergeant*.



(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*)

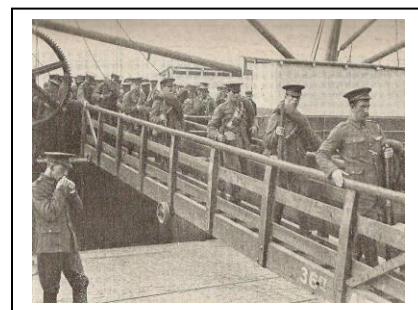
Sergeant Simmonds was not to re-join the 1st Battalion until some two years later, in March of 1918. By that time, the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had moved quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the cathedral city of Winchester.

This transfer had been finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was from there that Sergeant Simmonds was to eventually be despatched to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.



(Right: *A bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some period during the winter of 1918 1918 – from The War Illustrated*)

Sergeant Simmonds was a senior non-commissioned officer of the 39th Re-enforcement Draft comprising fifty *other ranks* which passed through Southampton on March 1 of 1918 and which disembarked in the city of Rouen on the following day. From there the contingent was forwarded to the nearby British Expeditionary Force Base Depot for final training and organization before proceeding to its rendezvous with the Newfoundland Battalion*.



(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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The exact date on which Sergeant Simmonds re-joined the 1st Battalion – although it may well have been at *Haslar Camp* or elsewhere in the area of Poperinghe, Belgium, during the period from mid-March to early April - seems not to be recorded, neither in his personal records nor in the Regimental War Diary.

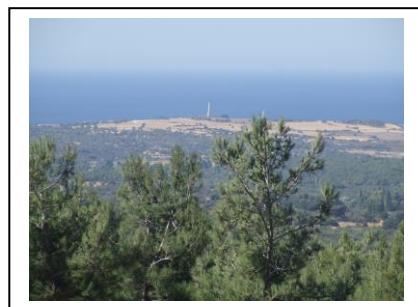
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By this time Sergeant Simmonds had been absent from the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for the best part of twenty-eight months. During that time the Newfoundland unit had been withdrawn from the Middle East to the fighting on the *Western Front* where it had thereupon served in both France and Belgium.

The following is a resume of that story:

The remaining officers and men of the Newfoundland Battalion, having recovered from the wrath of nature which had struck Gallipoli on November 25, the day before Corporal Simmond's departure to hospital, 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* was 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 above: *'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.*



(Preceding page: *'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 Alexandria, having arrived 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.

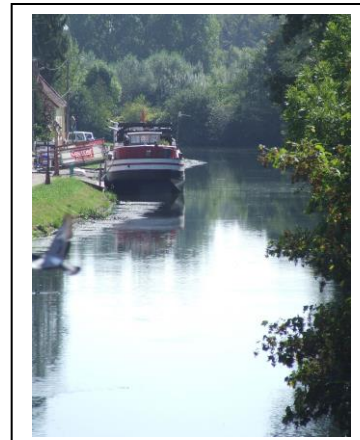


Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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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.

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



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*.

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 the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles - true also on the day of the attack on July 1.*

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.

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 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.*

(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*)



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

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

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: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village.* – photographs from 2010 & 2015)

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



After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that 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)

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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.

On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1st Battalion - still under 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 above: *The entrance to ‘A’ Company’s quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

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

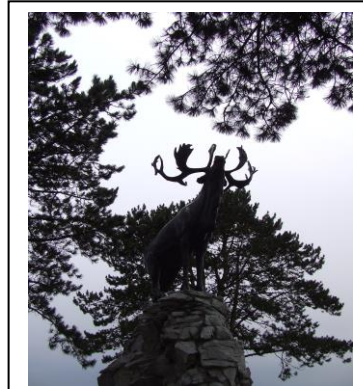
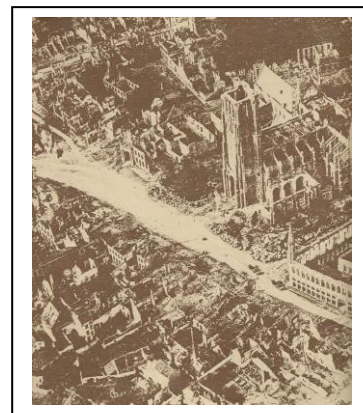
The Salient – close to the front lines for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict - was to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders’ posting there; yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the 1st Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

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

The 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)



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

After Gueudecourt, the Newfoundland Battalion had continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period to be broken only by the several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period of that 1916. It was a time during which the Regimental personnel was to be encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

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

After that welcome six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve* well to the rear, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to *active service* on January 23, although they had apparently already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

The only infantry activity directly involving the 1st Battalion during that entire period – from the action at Gueudecourt in mid-October of 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and beginning of March, an action which would bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.

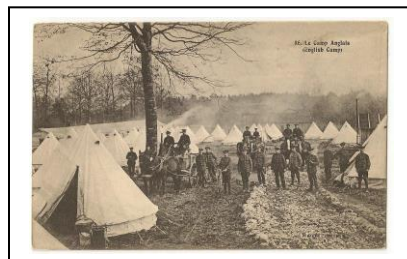
(Right above: *The fighting during the time of the Battalion's posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time. - photograph from 2009(?)*)

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March had been a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they had now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.

(Right above: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1st Battalion encamped at Meaulté – from *The War Illustrated**)

On March 29, the 1st Battalion had begun to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond. The march was to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.

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(Preceding page: *The remnants of the Grande Place of the city of Arras in early 1916 after some eighteen months of bombardment – from Illustration*)

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

On April 9 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a major French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties this attack was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, its only positive episode having been the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday, 1917.



While the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, the French *Bataille du Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

The 1st Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, the ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux would prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone*.



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

(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community: The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)



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

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This was in fact an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies. It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1st Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks and accompanied by heavy losses.

Late on that same evening the Newfoundlanders had retired to the relative calm of Arras.

The month of May that had followed had then been a period when the Newfoundlanders were to be moving hither and thither on the *Arras Front*, marching into and out of the trenches. While there was to be the ever-present artillery-fire, there had been little infantry activity – apart from the marching. At the outset of June, the 1st Battalion retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.



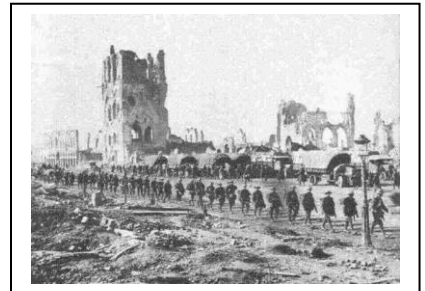
(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – not Bonneville - in early May, perhaps the 7th, of 1917 – from The War Illustrated*)

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



(Right above: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right – photograph from 2014*)

This low-lying area, Belgian *Flanders*, the only part of the country unoccupied by German forces, had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917.



(Right above: *Troops arriving from the railway station in single file, march past the vestiges of the historic Cloth Hall and through the rubble of the medieval city centre of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer or early autumn of 1917. – from Illustration*)



Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.



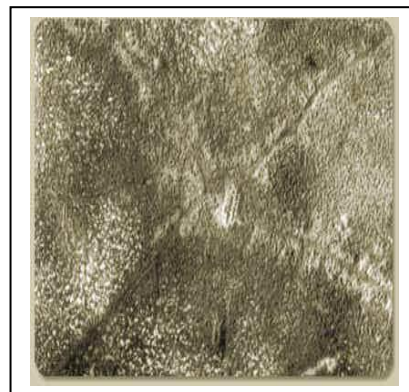
(Right above: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration*)

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army – as were to be by then the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians – all of which had floundered their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Flanders.

Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see immediately below) on October 9. At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost had been higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

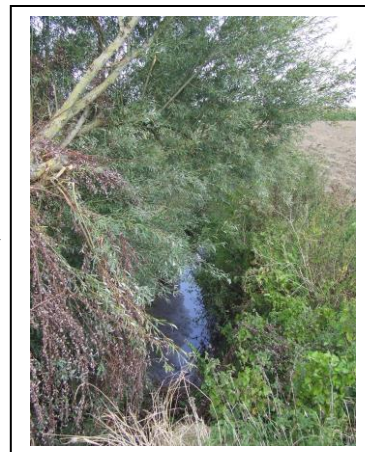
(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)



After a respite during much of the month of September, during which the British – and thus the Newfoundlanders - re-enforced and re-organized, the *Battle of Passchendaele* recommenced. The 1st Battalion began to prepare for the offensive at the *Broembeek*, otherwise recorded as the *Battle of Poelkapelle*.

'The Batt'n formed up for attack astride the STRAVEN Railway and about 300 yds south of BROOMBEKE River. After attack line extended across the railway to Tranquil House...'* – from a written report in Corporal Miller's file.

**In fact it was the Ypres-Staden (sic) railway line which today no longer exists.*



(Right above: *An apparently innocuous stream, the nondescript Broembeek seen here overflowed its banks in the autumn of 1917, and transformed its surrounds into a quagmire. – photograph from 2010*)

It was to be only two days after this last-mentioned confrontation, on October 11, that the 1st Battalion had marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe from there to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of Proven. Having remained *there* for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit had once more boarded a train.

By ten-thirty that same evening, the Battalion had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and would now march the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.

On November 17 the Battalion once again had travelled by train, on this occasion in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it was to begin to move further eastward on foot towards the theatre of the battle now imminent. On November 19, while on the move once more, it was issued as it went with... *war stores, rations and equipment*.

(continued)

For much of that night it had marched to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – Zero Hour – the Newfoundland unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, had then moved up into its forming-up area. From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten, bugles blowing, the 1st Battalion would advance to the fray.

This new offensive – apparently initially conceived to be no more than a large-scale raid - the so-called *Battle of Cambrai*, was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders to be directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle had begun well for the British who had used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities would be squandered, there were to be no troops available to exploit what was, admittedly, a hoped-for yet unexpected success, and by the close of the battle, the Germans had counter-attacked and the British had relinquished as much – more in places - territory as they had originally gained.



The 1st Battalion had again been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing, Masnières - where a Caribou stands today - and the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who had gone into battle, two-hundred forty-eight were to become casualties by the end of only the second day*.

**At five-hundred fifty-three all ranks – not counting the aforementioned ten per cent reserve - the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment even at the outset of the operation was operating at just over fifty per cent of establishment strength: not that it would have been any consolation had it been known, but a goodly number of battalions in all the British and Dominion forces were encountering the same problem.*

(Right above: *The Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

(Right: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of the 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether its capture was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012*)



At the termination of the final fighting retreat of the *Battle of Cambrai*, on December 4 the Newfoundlanders of the 1st Battalion had left behind them the chaos and the exertions of it all – it had been a difficult period. The unit was to be subsequently billeted in the vicinity of the community of Humbercourt, a number of kilometres just to the south-west of Arras and not far from Berles-au-Bois whence they had gone into battle less than three weeks before.



(Preceding page: *A number of graves of soldiers from the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery: Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, has identified them as being Canadian. – photograph from 2010*)

The Newfoundland Battalion had remained there at Humbercourt until December 18 when it had been ordered to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There the unit was to spend both Christmas and New Year. The weather had obliged and had even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow - a bit too much at times apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, and after that snowy Christmas period spent to the west of Arras - and withdrawn from the front - the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been ordered into Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time.



There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.

(Right above: *By 1918 Ypres was looking like this; some of these broken buildings had been a school which had served as a shelter for troops in the earlier days of the conflict. – from a vintage post-card*)

Meanwhile, while the Allies had been building those defences, by the beginning of 1918 the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns that previous year and some units of the French Army had mutinied.

On the other hand, the Germans now had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East had given them. It had been expected that the Germans would launch a spring offensive.



While they had been waiting, the Newfoundlanders were to continue to dig.

(Right: *Countryside in-between the villages of Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)



The Germans were now to do as had been expected of them. Ludendorff's armies had already launched a powerful thrust on March 21, the first day of that spring of 1918, having struck at first in the area of *the Somme*, there to overrun the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while their advance had appeared unstoppable.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *British troops in the company of civilian refugees on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

It was likely during this tense period of the German offensive to the south, that Sergeant Simmonds had arrived back to duty, in Belgium, with the Newfoundland Battalion.

* * * * *

After an impressive advance of some two weeks, the German offensive to the south in the area of *the Somme* had slowed before having being brought to a standstill. But now a second offensive, *Georgette*, was to be launched in the northern sector of the front, in Flanders, where Sergeant Simmonds and the Newfoundlanders of the 1st Battalion had been stationed: the date was April 9, 1918. Within two days the situation of the Allies in the north was desperate.

On the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, having been due to come out of the line and to move back to the area of *the Somme*, were instead to board buses at three o'clock in the afternoon whereupon they were directed southward, towards the border town of Nieppe. There they were to be in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, three hours later.



(Right above: *The area of La Crêche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station – photograph from 2010.*)

The British were pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12th of April the 1st Battalion, by this time fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

On April 12-13 – the dates in the 1st Battalion's War Diary are not clear - during the defensive stand near the De Seule crossroads (see below) on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening - were equally heavily involved.



(Right above: *Ground just to the east of Bailleul where the 1st Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21, the Germans advancing from the direction of the tall poplar trees – photograph from 2013*)

(continued)

What *exact* role Sergeant Simmonds played seems not to be known apart from the eye-witness account below – not even of which Company he was a non-commissioned officer at the time, although it was likely ‘B’ - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for *all* of the 1st Battalion’s personnel – the unit was even to be transferred temporarily to another British division so desperate was the situation.

Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough was not to be realized and by the end of that month of April the front had finally stabilised.

(Right: *These are the De Seule crossroads which lie astride the Franco-Belgian frontier – the B on the ground is in France, the signs two metres further on, in Belgium – and the scene of fierce fighting involving the 1st Battalion on April 12, 13 and 14 of 1918. Today it is the site of several houses and a convenience store. The Germans were advancing towards the camera from the facing direction and from the right. – photograph from 2010*)



‘On the 13th of April, 1918, during the fighting just east of the Neuve-Église-Nieppe road, along the railway track, I saw Sergeant Simmonds hit and apparently in a dying condition near a sandbag dugout just to the east of the light railway. That night we took up a new position and this was the last I saw of Sergeant Simmonds. To my knowledge he was not got back.’ – Sergeant W. Hutchings (#3830)

The son of James Simmonds, former fisherman then rope-maker with *Colonial Cordage*, and of Jessie Ella Simmonds (née *Noseworthy*, the couple married on February 23, 1885), he was brother Elizabeth-Ann, Ethel-May, Ethel-Maud, Virgie-May and Irene. The family was resident of Canning’s Cove, Bonavista Bay, before it then moved to St. John’s at some time prior to the birth in the city of Irene in the year 1902.

William Thomas Simmonds was also husband of Lilly Victoria Simmonds (née *Marshall*, the couple married June 9, 1914) of 60, Hamilton Avenue in St. John’s, later of 13 Long’s Hill – after his widow’s return to Newfoundland in 1918 again at first of 13, Long’s Hill* then, by 1919, of 3, Cabot Row, Fleming Street, St. John’s**.

**13, Long’s Hill was the family home of Lily Victoria Marshall.*

Sergeant Simmonds was reported as having been *killed in action* on April 13, 1918, during fighting to the south of the Belgian border town of Neuve-Église during *Georgette*, the German spring offensive.

William Thomas Simmonds had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-five years; the year of his birth is documented as having been 1890*.

**The year of birth and much of the family information is from the ‘Simmons Family of Newfoundland’ web-site.*

(continued)

*****His wife and two sons, William Thomas (born 10/3/15) and James Douglas (born 13/8/17) returned to Newfoundland in the summer of 1918. The Newfoundland Government offered her and the children third-class passage: officers' wives and families were allowed first-class accommodation.***

Sergeant William Thomas Simmonds 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.