



Private Frederick Charles Somerton (Regimental Number 1342), 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 Church of England *school teacher* and earning an annual four-hundred dollars, Frederick Charles Somerton presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's on March 27, 1915. It was a procedure which would pronounce him as being...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

Two days later, on March 29*, he returned to the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, there to enlist – engaged at the private soldier's rate of a single dollar per diem, plus a daily ten-cent *Field Allowance*.

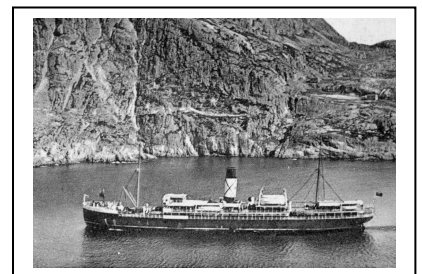
**A second source records April 10 as the date of his enlistment, but in that case he could not have attested on April 1 (see immediately below).*

Three days again after his enlistment, on April 1 he was to undertake his attestation, to swear his *Oath of Allegiance*, the concluding official formality. At that moment Frederick Charles Somerton thereupon became...*a soldier of the King*.

There now passed a lengthier period of exactly three weeks before, on April 22*, 1915, Private Somerton, Number 1342, embarked in the harbour of St. John's for...*overseas service*...with the two-hundred forty-nine officers and...*other ranks*...of 'E' Company onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* en route for Halifax.

**Once again, a second source differs and records him as departing Newfoundland on April 30. This is not correct as no other ship was to carry Newfoundland troops on that particular date.*

There appear to be no details of how or where he may have spent that intervening period before taking ship for...*overseas service*; Private Somerton may have returned home to Trinity, or perhaps even temporarily to his work as a teacher – but this is mere speculation.



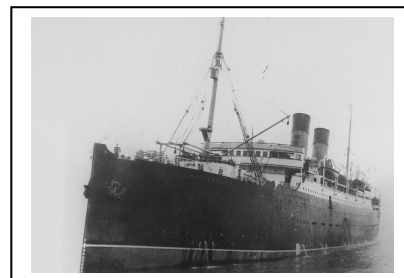
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(Preceding page: *The image of 'Stephano' passing through the Narrows of St. John's Harbour is shown by courtesy of the Provincial Archives.*)

Having arrived in Halifax, on April 24 at eleven-thirty in the evening the detachment began its trans-Atlantic passage on board the trans-Atlantic liner SS *Missanabie* from Nova Scotia to Liverpool. The vessel arrived in that English west-coast port-city on May 2 or 3 – the two dates are recorded although the second may well have been the date of disembarkation.

The Newfoundlanders on this occasion had sailed from Halifax in the company of the Canadian Army Service Corps *Railway Supply Depot*.

(Right: *The image of 'Missanabie' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries website. The vessel was of the Canadian Pacific Line and, although transporting troops during the Great War, did so as part of her commercial services which continued during the conflict. On September 9, 1918, she was torpedoed and sunk off the south coast of Ireland with the loss of forty-five lives.*)



From Liverpool the contingent travelled northwards by train to the Scottish capital, Edinburgh where, on May 4, 'E' Company joined 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies which had already taken up station as the garrison at the historic Castle, the first troops from outside the British Isles ever to do so.



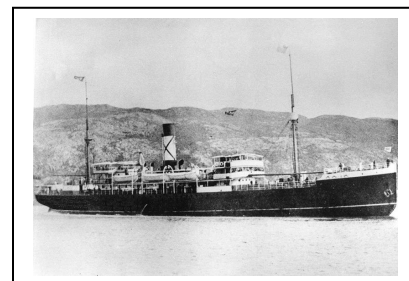
(Right: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011*)

Private Somerton's 'E' Company, however, was to have but a few days to savour the charms of the Scottish capital.

* * * * *

Some seven months before that May 4, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's for the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits – these to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after a recruit's enlistment and/ or attestation. To become known to history as the *First Five Hundred* and also as the *Blue Puttees*, on that day they had boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting 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 had sailed for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

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



Once having disembarked 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, as recorded beforehand, it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.

Only days after ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, ‘C’ Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent* - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of ‘D’ Company to arrive – they via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty*...at Edinburgh.

**This contingent, while a part of the Newfoundland Regiment, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

* * * * *

Seven days after the arrival of Private Somerton’s ‘E’ Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit was dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent would eventually receive 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*. On that date the newly-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus now available to be ordered on...*active service*.

(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*)



**This was approximately fifteen hundred, sufficient to furnish four ‘fighting’ companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

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At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at *Camp Aldershot*. This force, now the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



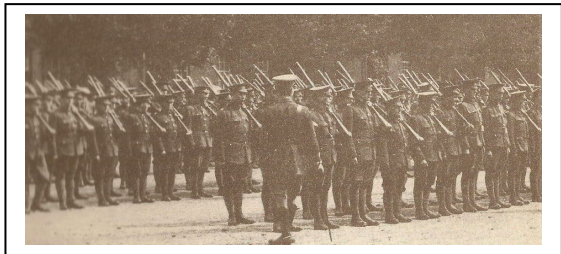
(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India* – the photograph is from *Bain News Services* via the *Wikipedia* web-site.)

Meanwhile the two junior Companies, 'E' – as seen, the last arrived at Edinburgh - and the aforementioned 'F', were ordered transferred to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

Private Somerton, however, although having left Newfoundland as a soldier of 'E' Company, was not to be posted to the Regimental Depot but to southern England.

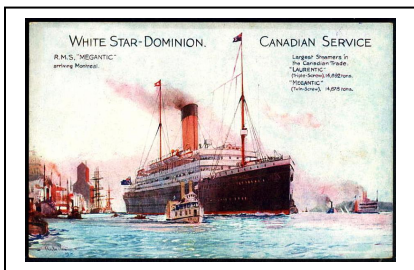
When he had been apprised of this change in plans seems not to be recorded – nor why he was selected - but Private Somerton was one of the few from 'E' Company who were to swell the ranks of the units posted to *Aldershot* - thus he became a soldier of 'A' Company. And it was during the period while he was at *Camp Aldershot*, and as was the case with the great majority of the Newfoundland troops there, that Private Somerton was prevailed upon to re-enlist...*for the duration of the war*. This he did on August 15*.

**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 likely to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their enlistment.*



(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.)

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



On August 20, 1915, Private Somerton and his 1st Battalion embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks. There, a month later – having spent 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*.

(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 below: 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 Bay, and where the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to serve during the autumn of 1915 – photograph from 2011)



When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at Suvla Bay on that September night of 1915 they were 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 been proving 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 their allies, the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only Suvla Bay but the entire Gallipoli venture.

(Right above: No-Man's-Land at Suvla Bay as seen from the Newfoundland positions – 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.**

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

(Right: This is Anzac Bay in the fore-ground with the Salt Lake in the centre further away. The bottom of Suvla Bay is just to be seen on the left and adjacent to the Salt Lake, and further away again. The hills in the distance and the ones from which this photograph was taken were held by the Turks and formed a horse-shoe around the plain surrounding the Salt Lake - which was where the British and Newfoundlanders were stationed. – photograph from 2011)



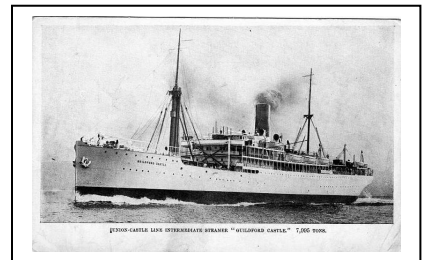
Two months after having set foot on the sand and rock – mostly the latter - of Kangaroo Beach, on November 20 Private Somerton was wounded and admitted to the 54th Casualty Clearing Station at Suvla Bay where he was subsequently reported as being *dangerously ill*.



(Right: Turkish artillery still stands guard at Suvla Bay today. – photograph from 2011)

He had incurred injuries to the head inflicted by shell-fire and was suffering from a skull fracture. From the 54th CCS, Private Somerton was transferred to the His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Guildford Castle* on the following day, November 21.

(Right: The image of 'Guildford Castle', perhaps in peace-time, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Launched in 1911 as a ship of the Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company she was to carry both passengers and cargo. On the outbreak of the War she was used as a troop transport until September of 1914 when she was requisitioned to serve as a military hospital ship; as such she served in the Mediterranean and on both the east and west coasts of Africa.



She survived the War and was returned to her owners for whom the vessel then worked until a collision in 1933 in the River Elbe rendered her a total loss.

The son of Frederick Somerton – stipendary magistrate, and to whom he had willed his everything - and of Caroline Augusta Somerton (née *Hibbert from Burgeo) of Trinity, Frederick Charles was also brother of Blanche, Sarah-Amanda, Bessie-Ash, Edward-Finley and Francis-Hibbert.**

****The couple was married on November 5, 1885.***

Private Somerton was reported as having...*died of wounds*...on November 25, 1915, on board ship and as having been subsequently *buried at sea*. Private Somerton's passing was reported by the Commandant, Malta. At home it was the Reverend H.V. Whitehouse of Trinity who was requested to bear the news to his family.



(The photograph of Private Somerton is from the Provincial Archives.)

Frederick Charles Somerton – born in Burgeo - had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-six years: date of birth, March 31, 1888 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).



(Right above: *The Trinity-Dunfield Anglican Cemetery and its mortuary chapel* – photograph from 2012)

(Far right above: *The sacrifice of Private Somerton is honoured on a stained-glass window in the Trinity-Dunfield Anglican mortuary chapel...* - photograph from 2012, courtesy of Cyril Bennett)

(Right: *...as well as on the Trinity War Memorial.* – photograph from 2012)



Private Frederick Charles Somerton 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).



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 6, 2023.

