

Private Morley Soper (Regimental Number 1259), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a station agent (railway?) working for an annual six-hundred dollars, Morley Soper presented himself for medical examination in the Trinity Bay community of Catalina on February 13 of the year 1915. It was a procedure which would pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

Having then travelled to St. John's he then enlisted eleven days later on February 24, 1915, at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland – engaged at the private soldier's rate of a single dollar per diem to which was added a ten-cent per day *Field Allowance*.

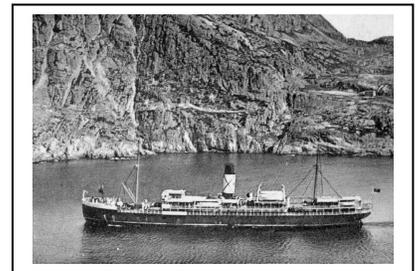
Five weeks less two days later, on March 29, he was to undertake his attestation, to swear his *Oath of Allegiance*, the concluding official formality. At that moment Morley Soper became...*a soldier of the King*.

It was not to be for a further three weeks and three days, until April 22, 1915, that Private Soper, Number 1259, 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.

There appear to be no details of how or where he may have spent those two lengthy intervening periods before taking ship for...*overseas service*; Private Soper may have returned home to Catalina, and perhaps even to work – but this is mere speculation.

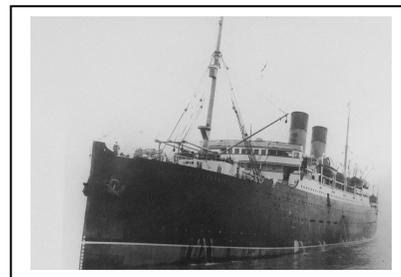
Having arrived in Halifax, on April 24 at eleven-thirty in the evening the detachment began its trans-Atlantic passage on board the trans-Atlantic liner *SS Missanabie* from Nova Scotia to Liverpool. The vessel arrived in that English west-coast port-city on May 2 or 3 – the two dates are recorded although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



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

(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.

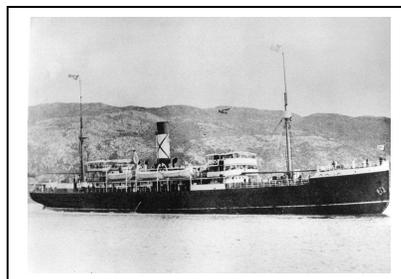


(Right: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011*)

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

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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.



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

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.



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.

(Preceding page: *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.*

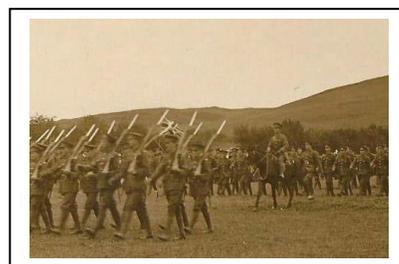
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Seven days after the arrival of Private Soper’s ‘E’ Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

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.

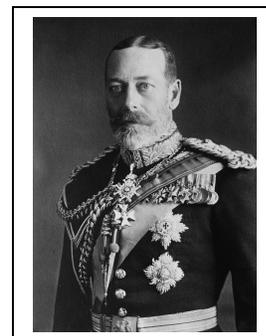
It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent would eventually receive the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength*. On that date the newly-formed 1st Battalion of 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.*

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.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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.)

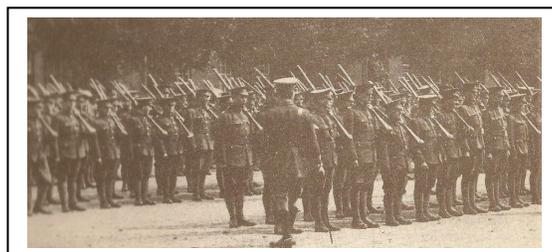
Meanwhile the two junior Companies, ‘E’ – as seen, the last arrived at Edinburgh - and the aforementioned ‘F’, were ordered transferred to Scotland’s west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

Private Soper, 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 Soper 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 ‘C’ 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 Soper was prevailed upon to re-enlist...*for the duration of the war*. This he did on August 15*.

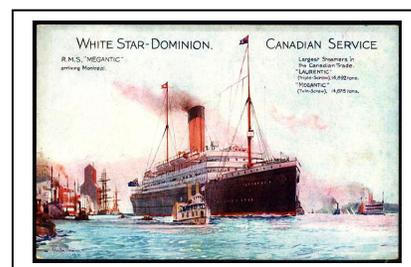
**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of only a short duration, the recruits enlisted for only the limited period of a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was likely to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.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



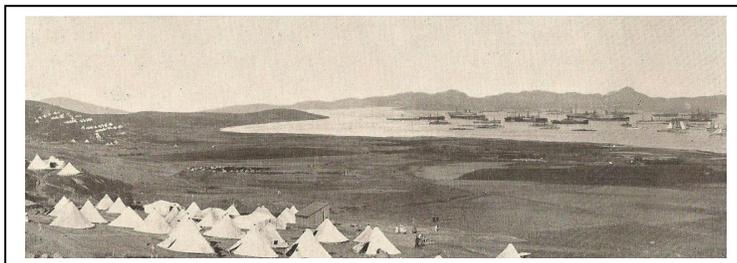
If the situation had been already tenuous at the time of the Newfoundland unit's disembarkation at *Suvla Bay* on that September night, it was to become progressively worse. November 26 of 1915 had seen perhaps the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at *Gallipoli*; there was to be a freak 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.

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, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

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On December 17, three weeks after that cataclysmic storm and only two days before the British were to definitively abandon their positions at *Suvla Bay*, Private Soper was withdrawn from the Newfoundland positions to be admitted into the 54th Casualty Clearing Station. He was suffering from severe pyrexia (*high fever*). From the *Gallipoli Peninsula* he was transferred on the following day some seventy kilometres distant to the 18th Stationary Hospital at West Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos.

(Right: Towards the end of the autumn of the year 1915, the surrounds of the bay at Mudros with its minuscule harbour were almost totally occupied by various Allied – French and British - medical and other facilities – the majority of them under canvas. – from *Illustration*)



On or about December 26 – Boxing Day – Private Soper was taken on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Aquitania* for further medical attention and also for passage back to the United Kingdom. By that time he had been diagnosed as suffering from bronchitis and pneumonia.

(Right: Some of the peace-time facilities on board 'Aquitania' in use as a war-time hospital ward – the original photograph from the *Cunard Archives*)



The son of Thomas Soper, a tide-waiter, and of Elizabeth Soper (née *Courage*)* of Catalina where all their family was born** – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty-five cents from his pay - in the District of Burgeo and La Poile, he was also brother to Walter-Edwin, Egbert, Chesley, Beatice-Maud, Priscilla, John, Thomas and to Susie.

*The couple was married on July 13, 1880.

**Morley Soper's given address was *Port-aux-Basques*, perhaps where he was working at or about the time of his enlistment.

Private Soper was reported as having...*died of sickness...*,of bronchitis and pneumonia, on December 29, 1915, on board HMHS *Aquitania*. He was buried at sea on that same day.



Morley Soper had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-six years: date of birth in Catalina, Newfoundland, October 23, 1888 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

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

Private Morley Soper 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.