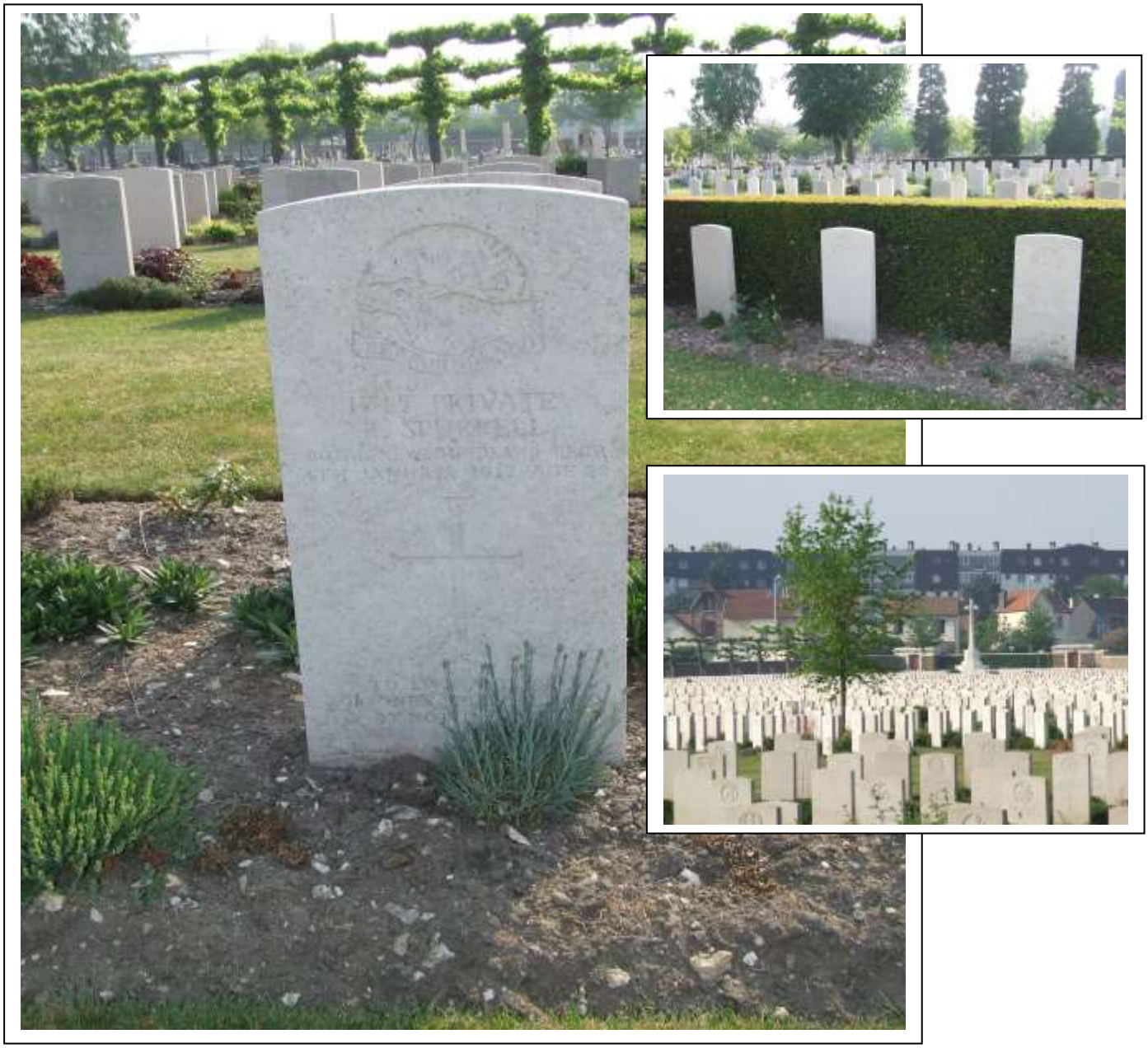


Private Richard Spurrell (Regimental Number 1745) lies in St-Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen: Grave reference O. 4. G. 9.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman*, Richard Spurrell was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He presented himself for a medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on July 27 of 1915. It was a procedure that was to pronounce him as being…*Fit for Foreign Service.*

(continued)

Two days after that medical assessment, on July 29, Richard Spurrell was to return to the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, on this second occasion in order to enlist. He was thereupon engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar, this to be supplemented by a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

It was then only likely a matter of hours afterwards that there then came the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On the same July 29 he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, at which moment Richard Spurrell thus became…*a soldier of the King.*

An extended waiting-period was now in store for the recruits of this draft, it to be designated as 'G' Company, before they were eventually to depart from Newfoundland for…*overseas service*.

Private Spurrell, Regimental Number 1745, was not to be again called upon until October 27, after an interval of thirteen weeks. Where he was to spend this intervening time appears not to have been recorded although he may well have returned temporarily to work and perhaps returned home to spend time with family and friends in the Trinity Bay community of Butter Cove – this, of course, is only speculation.

On the above-cited date of October 27, 'G' Company left St. John's by train to cross the island to Port aux Basques, the other passengers on board reportedly having included several naval reservists and also some German prisoners-of-war. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry – documented as having been the *Kyle* - and afterwards proceeded again by train from North Sydney as far as Québec City.

There the Newfoundlanders joined His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* for the trans-Atlantic voyage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9. The vessel had departed Montreal on October 30 with Canadian troops on board before stopping at Québec: the 55th Canadian Infantry Battalion and the Second Draft of the (1st?) Divisional Signals Company.

(Right adjacent: *The image of Corsican is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Launched in 1907 for the Allan Line, one of the largest private shipping companies of the time, she spent much of her early career chartered to the Canadian Pacific Line which in 1917 was to purchase the entire Allan Line business. She was employed as a troop-ship during much of the Great War which she survived – only to be wrecked near Cape Race on May 21, 1923*.)

(Right: *The once-busy Royal Navy facility and harbour of Devonport almost a century after the Great War* – photograph from 2012(?))

By the morning of November 10, Private Spurrell's 'G' Company had again travelled by train, to Scotland where it had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gailes, not far

removed from the evolving Newfoundland Regimental Depot at Ayr where accommodation for the new arrivals was as yet not available.

*** * * * ***

More than a year prior to that November 10 of 1915, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914, the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and were formed into 'A' and 'B' Companies.

During that same period the various authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

(Right: *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.

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

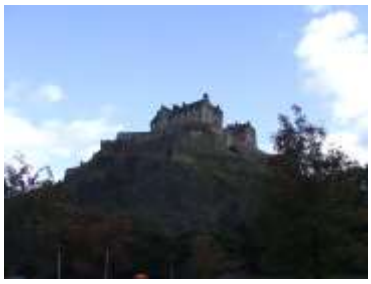
Once having disembarked* in the United Kingdom this first Newfoundland contingent was to train in three venues during the late autumn of 1914 and then the winter of 1914-1915: firstly in southern England on the *Salisbury Plain*; then in Scotland at *Fort George* – on the *Moray Firth* close to Inverness; and lastly at *Edinburgh Castle* – where it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.

It was to do so at Devonport through which 'G' Company would pass eleven months later.

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, and then 'E' Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4*.

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

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



Seven days after the arrival of 'E' Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent had been ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit had been dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.

(Right below: *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 of Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

Two months less a day later, on July 10, 'F' Company would march into *Stobs Camp*.

This had been an important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength* of a battalion which could be posted on…*active service*.

A number sufficient to furnish four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.

(Right: *The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles*. – original photograph from the *Provincial Archives*)

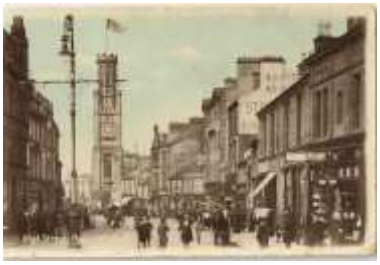
From *Stobs Camp*, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the four senior Companies, having now become the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, had been transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before the Battalion's departure to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(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.)

The later arrivals to the United Kingdom, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were eventually to form the nucleus of the soon to be formed 2nd (*Reserve*) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *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.

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer and the early autumn of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the newly-forming 2nd (*Reserve*) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 – that the new-comers were to be sent in drafts, at first to *Gallipoli* and then subsequently to the *Western Front*, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1st Battalion*.

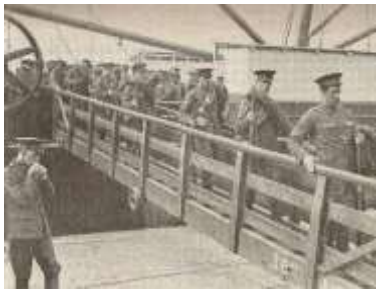
The first such draft was, in fact, to depart from Ayr for service on the Gallipoli Peninsula days after the arrival in Scotland of Private Spurrell's 'G' Company, on November 15.

This then had been the situation facing the new-comers: the new Regimental Depot had still been in the throes of its establishment when Private Spurrell and comrades-in-arms of 'G' Company were to arrive in Scotland on November 10 of 1915; thus, as related in a preceding paragraph, the new-comers were required to be quartered at Gailes, some sixteen kilometres further up the coast – but apparently sixty kilometres distant by road.

It was during this posting to Ayr that Private Spurrell re-enlisted…*for the duration of the war…*, signing the form to that effect on May 24*, one month before being dispatched. By that time he had already seen the departure of the first six re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: the first directly to *Gallipoli*; the second which had sailed to Egypt before being turned back to land in France; and the third which had sailed straight to France only a week and a day beforehand. Those which had subsequently sailed – and which were to later on – also went directly to the Continent.

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. Later recruits signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.

Private Spurrell had not been selected to serve in any of the first six drafts; he was to have been posted in Scotland for some seven months before his turn would come. When it *did* come, his draft would be dispatched directly to France.



(Right: *British troops disembark at an earlier time of the Great War at Rouen en route to the Western Front.* – from *Illustration*)

On June 25 the 7th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent, Private Spurrell among its ranks. On the morrow, the 26th, the detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot. There the draft was to spend several days undergoing final training and organization* before proceeding to its rendezvous with the Newfoundland Battalion, it just having experienced the maelstrom of a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

Apparently the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.

Private Spurrell would join the Newfoundland unit *in the field* on July 11-12.

*** * * * ***

A year prior to this juncture, in the early summer of 1915, the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both 'E' and 'F' Companies had only then been beginning their time of training at Ayr; as for Richard Spurrell, he was as yet only at the point of enlistment and attestation at home, and he still had some three months to wait before the call was to come to sail overseas to the United Kingdom.

The four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', of the Newfoundland Regiment – aforementioned on an earlier page - having by then become the 1st Battalion had at this same time been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been dispatched to…*active service*.

(Right above: *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 of 1915, the Newfoundland 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. 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*.

(Preceding page: *'Kangaroo Beach', where the officers and men of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is to be seen in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on 'A' Beach*. – photograph taken in 2011)

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros: either Megantic on August 29, Ausonia on September 18, or Prince Abbas on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on Gallipoli*. – from Provincial Archives)

(Right below: *A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where the 1st Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915* – photograph from 2011)

When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* they were to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would now 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: *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.

(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)

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

November 26 would see what perhaps was to be 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.

By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire 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 thereupon been evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(Right 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 by now simply 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*)

(Right above: *'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)

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.

Immediately after the British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria – and beyond.

On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived there with the 1st Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16th, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she had docked early on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders had landed and marched to their encampment.

There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.

(Right: *The image of the Blue Funnel Line vessel Nestor is from the Shipspotting.com web-site. The vessel was launched and fitted in 1912-1913 and was to serve much of her commercial life until 1950 plying the routes between Britain and Australia. During the Great War she served mainly in the transport of Australian troops and was requisitioned once again in 1940 for government service in the Second World War. In 1950 she was broken up*.)

Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.

(Right: *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 were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.

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

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

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

(continued)

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 Marseille.

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 which they had then traversed on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.

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

On April 13, the entire 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 re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front.*

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

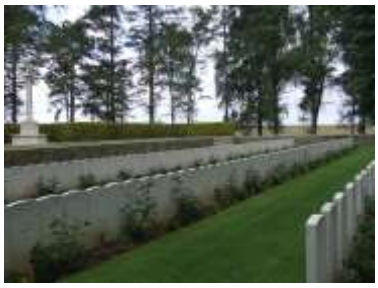
Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front*, two of the four Companies – 'A', and 'B' – were to take over several support positions from a British unit* before the entire Newfoundland unit was to then be ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions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

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.

(continued)

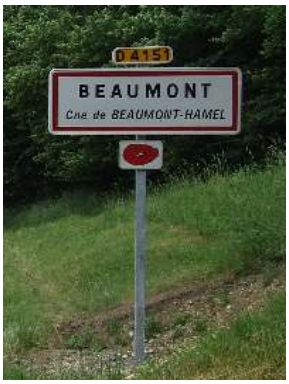
(Preceding page: *Beaumont-Hamel: Looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences: The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph*. – photograph taken in 2009)

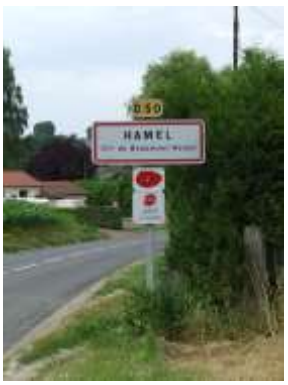


If there is one name and date in Newfoundland history which is etched in the collective once-national memory, it is that of Beaumont-Hamel on July 1 of 1916; and if any numbers are remembered, they are those of the eight-hundred who went *over the top* in the third wave of the attack on that morning, 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 greatest disaster *ever* in the annals of the British Army…and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage of the…*First Battle of the Somme*…was to continue for four and a half months.

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

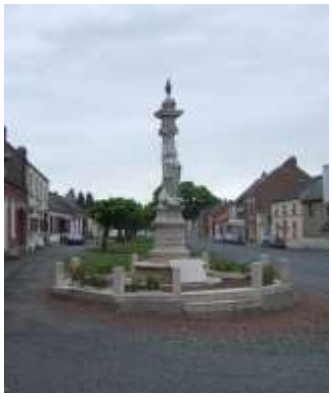
In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists today – at the time comprising two communities: Beaumont, a village on the German side of the lines, and Hamel which was behind those of the British. No-Man's-Land, on which the Newfoundland Memorial Park lies partially today, was on land that separated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

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

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 any 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: *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 11-12, 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, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion was still to number only…*11 officers and 260 rifles*…after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

And, as seen in an earlier paragraph, Private Spurrell had been one of that draft arriving from Rouen.

*** * * * ***

Of course, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had not been the only unit in the British Army to have incurred horrific losses on July 1, 1916, even though it had indeed been one of the most devastated. But even with its depleted numbers, the Battalion was needed and, after that first re-enforcement, it had almost immediately again been ordered to man the trenches of the front line: as of July 14 the Newfoundlanders began another tour in the trenches where…*we were shelled heavily by enemy's 5.9 howitzers and a good deal of damage was done to the trenches* (excerpt from the 1st Battalion War Diary).

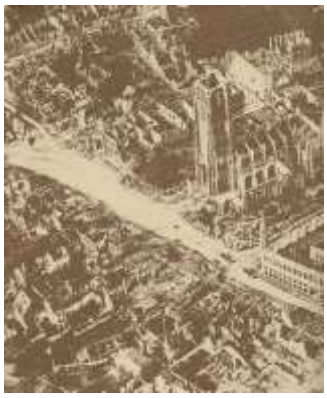
The Newfoundland Battalion was to remain for a further two weeks in the area of *the Somme*, during that time welcoming two further re-enforcement drafts.

On July 27-28 of 1916, the unit - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – maybe even fewer - even after still further re-enforcement – would move northwards by train and enter into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

(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)

(continued)

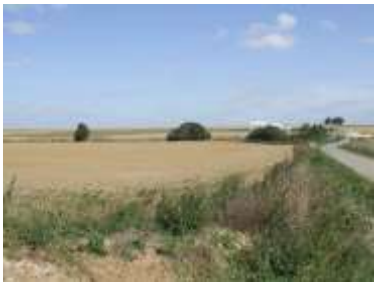
The unit had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.



***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 would incur casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.**

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

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



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 would prove to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

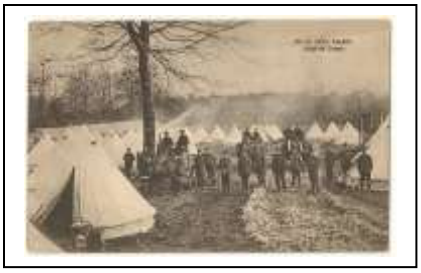
(Right above: *This is the ground over which the 1st Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon*. – photograph from 2007)

(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 continuously in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

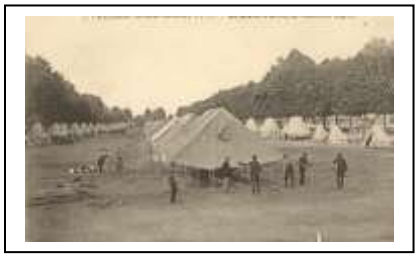


The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1st Battalion had begun to wend its way back up to the front lines.

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

It was on November 20 that Private Spurrell was wounded by enemy artillery. 'D' Company had been serving in the firing-line from the 17th to the 19th inclusive, before having retired to the support trench where it was nonetheless yet again heavily shelled. All four companies of the Battalion were in the sector until the 21st, during which period the Newfoundlanders had incurred casualties of five dead and eight wounded.

(Right above: *The Guards Cemetery at LesBœufs and the ground beyond, in the area of which the Newfoundlanders were stationed in the trenches from November 14 to 21* – photograph from 2009)



On that same November 20 Private Spurrell was evacuated to an unspecified casualty clearing station. From there on the 27th he was transferred to the 12th General Hospital in Rouen for treatment to gun-shot wounds to the left thigh. On December 3 all seemed well: the report cites *seriously ill (improving)*.

Then on December 21 he had a relapse and was deemed as being *dangerously ill*.

On January 4 of the New Year, 1917, Private Spurrell was scheduled to undergo the amputation of his leg at the thigh.

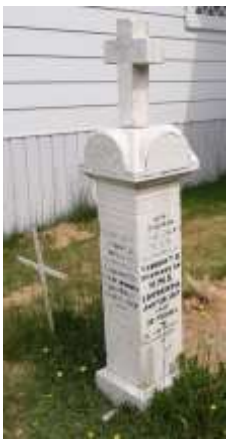
(Right above: *A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War*: *Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature*. - from a vintage post-card)

(Right: *the memorial which stands in Butter Cove to honour the sacrifice of Private Spurrell* – photograph from – and with many thanks to - Stephanie Sparkes)

(continued)

The son of Moses Spurrell (also found earlier as *Spurrill*), fisherman, and of Mary Ann Spurrell (née *Stanley* – the couple married in 1889) - to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of fifty cents from his pay - of Butter Cove, Random, Trinity Bay, and he himself cited as native to Heart's Ease (sic), also in Trinity Bay, he was also brother to Edward, Isabella, Alexander, Jessica-Selina and Edgar.

(Right above: *The image of Richard James Spurrell is from the Saltwire Network web-site*.)



Private Spurrell was reported as having…*died of wounds…on the operating table of the 12th General Hospital, Rouen, on that January 4, 1917. A telegraph was sent to the Reverend W. A. Butler of Hodge's Cove requesting that he bear the news to the family.**

Infection – a scourge in those days before the advent of anti-biotics – had likely set in.

(Right: *The sacrifice of Private Richard James Spurrell is honoured on the War Memorial which stands in St Alban's Churchyard in Gooseberry Cove*. – photograph from 2022)

Richard James Spurrell had enlisted at a *declared* twenty years and five months of age: date of birth in (Little?) Heart's Ease, Newfoundland, September 15, 1894 (from the *Saltwire Network* web-site).

Private Richard Spurrell was awarded the British War Medal (on left) and also 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 – January 19, 2023.