

Captain Charles St. Clair Strong (Regimental Number 30) is buried in Lijssehoek Military Cemetery – Grave reference XXVI. FF. 5.

****Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were not considered as enlisted. These officers thus had no Regimental Number allotted to them.***

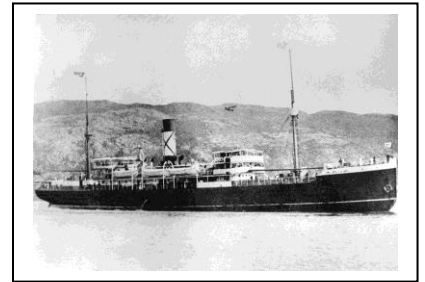
And since officers did not enlist, they were not then required to re-enlist ‘for the duration’, even though, at the beginning, as a private, they had volunteered their services for only a limited time – twelve months.

His occupation previous to his military service recorded as that of an accountant with *R. G. Rendell & Co., General Importers & Dealers*, of Steward’s Cove, Water Street, and earning a monthly \$50.00, Charles St. Clair Strong was a recruit of the First Draft.

Having presented himself on August 26 of 1914, three weeks plus a day after the *Declaration of War*, for medical examination, a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*, Charles Strong enlisted a week later, on September 2, at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John’s, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland – engaged at the daily private soldier’s daily rate of a single dollar plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*.

Some three weeks later, during a four-week period of training on the shores of Quidi Vidi Lake in the East End of St. John’s, Private Strong was promoted directly to the rank of sergeant, on September 21. Training continued.

Sergeant Strong subsequently attested and was also appointed as colour sergeant, both on October 3. On that same day, as a non-commissioned officer of the *First Five Hundred* – also to become known as the *Blue Puttees* – he embarked onto the Bowring Brothers’ vessel *Florizel* awaiting the contingent – the force was not yet a battalion - in St. John’s Harbour.



The ship would sail for the United Kingdom on the following day, October 4, via its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

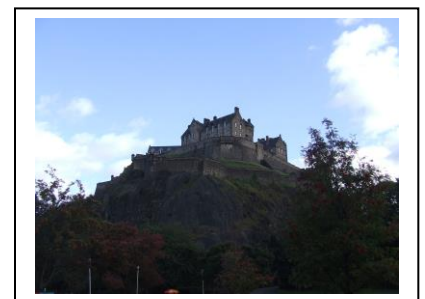
(Right above: The image of Florizel at anchor in the harbour at St. John’s is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.)

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



In the United Kingdom Sergeant Strong trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; then at Edinburgh Castle – where it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles – and where he was further elevated in rank, to that of company sergeant major, on May 6.

(Right: Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from its position on the summit of Castle Hill. – photograph from 2011)



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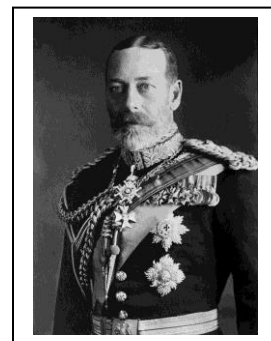
On May 11 the Newfoundlanders were transferred to a tented *Stobs Camp*, in the vicinity of the Scottish town of Hawick, where they were to undergo further training and exercises for some three months.

(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 from *Stobs Camp* 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*', to be accompanied by Company Sergeant Major Strong, were ordered posted to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, where they were to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion*.



(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – 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.*

(Right: *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. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)



Following this summer of 1916, the once-Royal Borough of Ayr on Scotland's west coast was now to serve as the overseas base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment from where – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 - re-enforcement drafts from home were to be despatched to bolster the 1st Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.



(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*)

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It was to be almost immediately upon his arrival at Ayr that Company Sergeant Major Strong was to be once more promoted, to the post of Depot Sergeant Major on August 2. He would then remain in Scotland, to be granted an Imperial Commission some six weeks later again, on September 13, and the accompanying appointment to the rank of second lieutenant.

Two further months were now yet to pass two months before he departed from Scotland with the 1st Re-enforcement Draft of one-hundred officers and *other ranks* to join the 1st Battalion which had been fighting at *Suvla Bay* on the Gallipoli Peninsula since September 20.



Second Lieutenant Strong boarded His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* – sister ship of *Britannic* and of the ill-starred *Titanic* – on November 14, sailing from the Royal Naval harbour of Devonport where he had disembarked from *Florizel* some thirteen months previously.

(Right above: *Olympic on the right and Aquitania in the centre of the image, lie at anchor in Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915 – from an old photograph originally from the Imperial War Museum*)

Olympic reached *Mudros Harbour* on the Greek island of Lemnos at the end of the month. From there the Newfoundland re-enforcements were to travel the remaining seventy kilometres or so on a smaller vessel, to step ashore at *Suvla Bay* on December 1. But the newcomers, however, having arrived there, were to remain to serve at *Suvla* for less than three weeks.



(Right above: *Almost a century later and largely unchanged since that time, the area at Suvla where the 1st Battalion was posted from September 20 until December 20 of 1915 – photograph from 2011*)

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At this time, during those few months of Company Sergeant Major (later Second Lieutenant) Strong's posting to Ayr, the four senior companies of the Newfoundland Regiment, having become the 1st Battalion, had thereupon been attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been despatched 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 leaving for active service – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)*

On August 20, 1915, the Newfoundland unit had embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport on England's south coast, 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 had landed at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



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



(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*)

When the Newfoundland Battalion landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* on that September night of 1915 they disembarked into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would 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*, was to 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 which 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 above: *An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at Suvla Bay – from Provincial Archives*)

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

November 26 would see the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; 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.

Such had been the chaos into which Second Lieutenant Strong's draft stepped on December 1.

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



(Right: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration*)

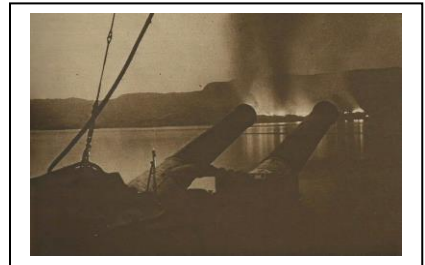
This final operation would take place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion to furnish part of the British rear-guard on this second occasion also.

**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 – with General Maude - to sail from the Gallipoli Peninsula.*



(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*)

Immediately after the British had evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, arriving there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to the vicinity of Suez, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.



**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.*

(Right above: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration*)

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 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.



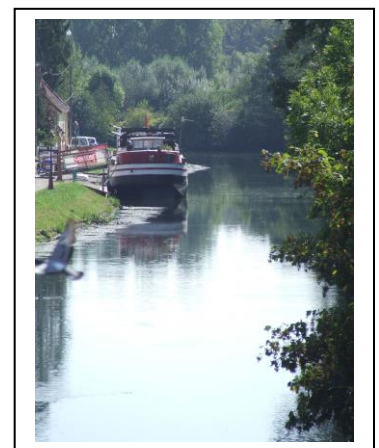
(Right above: *Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal as it was just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.

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

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they had then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* would become a part of their history.

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



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

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

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



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

Having then been withdrawn, at the end of that April after the completion of their first tour in the trenches 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 – this to include the construction of a light railway in the Louvencourt area - for the now-impending British campaign of that summer to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, flowing sedately – as it still does today – through the region on its journey to the sea.

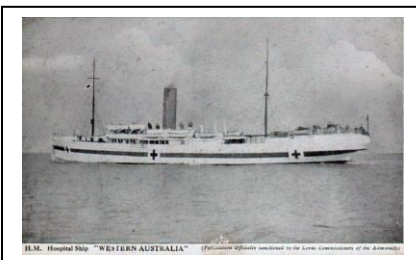
(Right below: A further part of the re-constructed trench system in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?))



Second Lieutenant Strong was now to suffer bomb (hand grenade) wounds to the buttocks and rectum on June 27/28, 1916, during one of the night-time raids made on enemy trenches in the area of Beaumont-Hamel, just prior to, and in preparation for, the main attack.

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Evacuated from the field, eventually to the Number 2 General Hospital in Rouen on June 30, he was then transported back across the English Channel on July 1 on board His Majesty's Australian Hospital Ship *Western Australia* to the United Kingdom and taken on that same day for further treatment to the Officers' Hospital, 24 Park Street, in West London.



(Right: The image of HMAHS 'Western Australia' is from the *Birtwistle Wiki web-site*.)

The following is an extract of a Medical Board finding of September 5, 1916:

He was wounded by splinters of a bomb (hand-grenade) as follows:

(1). A large deep jagged wound on right buttock about 6” long by 4” deep.

(2). Another about three inches long nearer to the anus involving the rectum with fæcal fistula. Both wound are now healed but there is some slight contraction of lower part of rectum...

...he is recommended to be allowed to proceed to Newfoundland as likely to make a more complete and rapid recovery there.

Second Lieutenant Strong was thus granted leave for two and a half months – recommended as seen above by the medical staff during the time of his hospitalization – back to Newfoundland beginning on September 5. For the voyage he almost certainly was to find himself once more on board His Majesty’s Transport *Olympic*, to travel via Halifax – there on September 11 - and to arrive home days later just prior to that autumn of 1916.

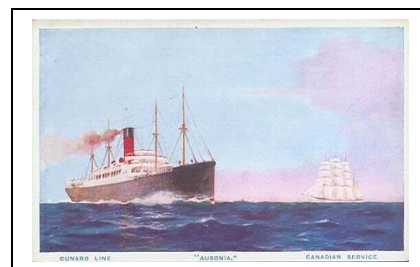
After two months, on November 15, he was attached to Headquarters in St. John’s where he was now to serve for the following eleven weeks.

During that autumn period, on October 9 – a second official paper cites October 19 - he would be promoted to the rank of full lieutenant.

Lieutenant Strong’s return to Europe via Halifax on the *Florizel* commenced on January 31, 1917. However, this contingent – to become known as the *Windsor Draft* - once having landed in Nova Scotia, was to remain there for some ten weeks*.

**This draft of men, numbering three-hundred nineteen in all, was delayed by an outbreak of mumps and measles and the subsequent quarantine, re-instated at the end of February due to a further outbreak. The contingent would spend most of this time in the small town of Windsor where two of them remain today.*

In mid-April, the medical crisis having passed, passage for the draft was found on three ships carrying Canadian troops overseas: *Grampian*, *Northland* and *Ausonia*. Lieutenant Strong, Second Lieutenant Hicks and ninety-two *other ranks* embarked onto *Ausonia* on April 17 – a second source says the 18th - for trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom in the company of the 221st Canadian Infantry Battalion.



The three ships docked in Liverpool on April 29.

(Right above: *The image of Ausonia is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries. Orininally built as the ‘Tortona’ in 1909, she became ‘Ausonia’ when bought by the Cunard Line in 1911. The vessel was torpedoed and sunk in May of 1918 with the loss of forty-four lives.*)

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Upon his disembarkation at Liverpool, it is probable that Lieutenant Strong and Second Lieutenant Hicks escorted their charges to the Regimental Depot at Ayr. Lieutenant Strong, judging from some correspondence that he later wrote a propos a kit-bag, was now to serve there until the beginning of June of that 1917.

He would be ordered back to *active service* at or about this time and, likely on his way to the Continent, on June 8 was in London signing papers at the *Pay & Record Office* in Victoria Street. His own records then record him as returning to the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment *in the field* on June 19* at a time when the unit was re-enforcing and reorganizing in the vicinity of the community of Bonneville.



(Right: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

**The Battalion War Diary shows no arrival of officers on that date, but a draft of one-hundred eighteen other ranks. Three officers are documented as having arrived on June 14, but they are not named.*

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By the time of Lieutenant Strong's return *to duty* with the Newfoundland Battalion, it had been almost a full year since he had been wounded during that raid just prior to the opening day of the British summer campaign of 1916. On July 1 he had been on board HMAHS *Western Australia* en route to hospital in London.

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 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*)

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

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



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

It was to be the largest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.

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

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



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

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*)

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 was still to

number 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.

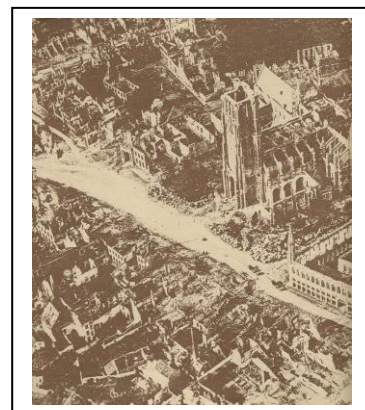
(Right: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



The Salient – close to the front lines for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict - was to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there; yet they had 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*.

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



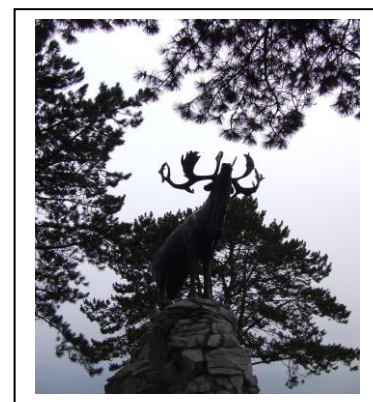
Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was to be at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.

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

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



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



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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 below: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme. – from Illustration*)

On October 30, the Newfoundland unit had eventually been retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

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

There it 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 broken only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.



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

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

Those casualties, however, had been only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig casually referred to as *wastage*. The sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during that entire period – from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action which would bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.

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



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(Right: *The fighting during the period 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 was a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They were even to have 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: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from *The War Illustrated**)

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had begun to make their way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, the march to finish amid the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right: *The remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War – from *Illustration**)

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

On April 9 the British Army was to launch 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 to be 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.

(Right: *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*)



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 .*

The few that now remained of the Newfoundland Battalion had continued to serve in the area of Monchy-le-Preux. The unit's casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred extremely heavy losses, be amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming re-enforcements would allow the two units' strengths to once more resemble those of bona fide battalions.

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *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, actions accompanied by heavy losses.



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

(Right above: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card*)

That month of May was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders would be moved hither and thither on the *Arras Front*, marching into and out of the trenches. While there was to be the ever-present artillery-fire, concerted infantry activity, particularly after May 15 – the end of the *Battle of Arras* – and apart from the marching, was limited.

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

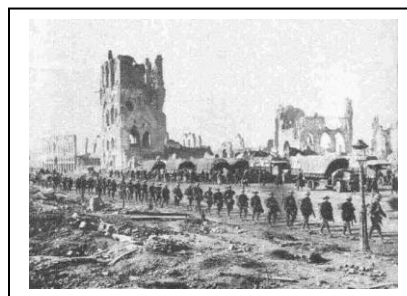
(continued)

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 be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.



(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1st Battalion of the 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: *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: *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 whose troops 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 both 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 would be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

(Right below: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010*)

Lieutenant Strong was promoted to the rank of captain on the day of the action of August 16 and played his role at the *Steenbeek* as the Officer Commanding 'B' Company.

On the right-hand side of the Newfoundland advance, his 'B' Company was to move in the first two waves of the attack and to assist in the capture of two machine-guns during the taking of the first objective. At this point 'C' and 'D' Companies took over the advance.



Captain Strong survived the action unscathed and later was to send a telegram home to Newfoundland to that effect through his friend Second Lieutenant Fred Marshall at the *Pay & Record Office* in London. He accompanied the message with a short note to Fred.

*In the Field
Aug 18/17*

Dear Fred –

Please wire the following promptly at my expense and charge to a/c Strong, St. John's, Newfoundland...

*Following from Charlie begins: **Came through scrap OK...Casualties slight...Feeling fine ...love to all...Don't publish***

Strong

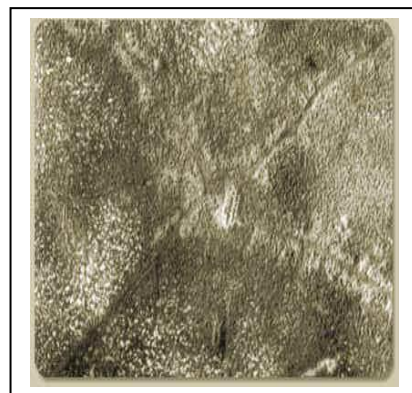
This is just to remind the anxious minds of those at home and you know exactly how the home folks feel about this game. Of course you will fix it up so that they won't think I am in England.

Best to you & yours old man, had a few days sport

*Yours in haste
Charlie*

There is no seemingly no record as to whether or not Captain Strong was present at the *Broembeek* on October 9 or, if so, in what capacity.

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



It was to be only two days after this last-mentioned confrontation that the 1st Battalion would march 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 was once more to board 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.

The Newfoundlanders were still there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and two days later when, on November 17 the Battalion was once again to travel by train, on this occasion in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it began to move further eastward on foot towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while on the move once more, the unit was issued as it went with... *war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of that night it was to march 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, moved up into its forming-up area.

From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten, bugles blowing, the 1st Battalion advanced 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 was to begin well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered, there were 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 was again 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 went into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day*.



(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 above: *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*)

(continued)

****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 – with perhaps the exception of the Canadians - were encountering the same problem.***



(Right above: 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)

There does not seem to be any official documentation as to the whereabouts of Captain Strong during the *Battle of Cambrai*. The evidence that does exist, suggesting that he was not involved, is a series of *Western Union* cablegrams sent home by him to Newfoundland from London on November 6, December 24 and then January 9 of the New Year, 1918 – but these dates, of course, are not those of the battle itself.

Nevertheless, at some time between the message of November 6 and that of Christmas Eve, Captain Strong was present in France, but correspondence sent to his father in St. John's on December 7 from the Minister of Militia suggests that he was neither at Masnières nor at Marcoing: *I have received a cablegram from the Pay & Record Office stating that Capt. Strong is on a special course in France but not giving any particulars...*

After the exertions of *Cambrai*, the Newfoundlanders were to be withdrawn from the line, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment now numbering the strength of only a single company whereas a full battalion comprised four. The unit remained in the vicinity of Humbercourt, to the west of Arras, until December 18 when it marched to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There the unit was to spend both Christmas and New Year. The weather obliged and even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow - a bit too much at times apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, after that snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of the 1st Battalion had returned to 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)

In the meantime the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied. The Germans on the other hand had available the extra divisions that their

victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them. It was expected that they would launch a spring offensive - which they eventually did (see below). In the sector where the 1st Battalion was stationed, the blow was not to fall until April.

Thus, while they were awaiting events, the Newfoundlanders would continue to dig.

(Right: *Some of the countryside in-between 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 had then done as was 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 and just south of, *the Somme*, there to overrun the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while their advance had seemed unstoppable.

For a number of reasons, after two weeks it had begun to falter and would eventually halt; but then, just days afterwards, a second offensive, *Georgette*, was to be launched in the northern sector of the front, in Belgian Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders had been stationed: the date April 9. Within only two days the situation of the British had become desperate.*



(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

**There were also to be several assaults by the Germans on French forces during that spring. They all met with varying degrees of success at the outset, but eventually they would be thwarted by Petain's divisions, aided at times by the newly-arriving Americans.*

On the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, and as the Germans had approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were to be 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, thereupon to be directed southward, towards the border town of Nieppe. Three hours later they were to be in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive.



(Right above: *The area of La Crèche - 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 had been pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12th of April the Newfoundland Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was to make a series of desperate 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 on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of ‘C’ Company had been obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of ‘C’ Company had taken up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with ‘A’ Company, had stopped a later enemy attack. ‘B’ and ‘D’ Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening – had been equally heavily involved.



(Right above: *Ground just to the east of Bailleul where the 1st Battalion was to be in action during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

The following is an entry in the Regimental War Diary (unfortunately the Diarist confused his dates) which surely refers to April 12: *About 6 p.m. Capt. Strong came up to the firing-line and reported to the C. O., he had arrived with B. & D Coy’s. and asked for orders.*

These two Coys prolonged the left where the enemy showed signs of working round and counter attacked unsuccessfully, a small wood close to our line in which the enemy had penetrated.

(Right: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier – the B is in France, the signs two metres further away, in Belgium - the scene of fierce fighting involving 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. The Germans advanced from the direction facing the camera and from the right. – photograph from 2009(?)*)



The son of Captain William George Strong, former sea-captain and later manager of the *Nfld. Steam Screw Tug Co.*, and of Eliza Hannah Strong (née Cook)* – to whom until May of 1917 he had allotted a daily eighty cents from his pay - of Mundy Pond Road, St. John's – later as of December, 1915, of 271, the Southside (an area where they had previously resided) - he had two sisters, Eliza Gertrude and Laura Jessie, and two brothers, Ralph and William-Herbert.

**The couple married at Portugal Cove on August 20, 1879.*

Captain Strong was reported as having *died of wounds* in the Number 2 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station in the Rémy Sidings near Poperinghe on April 13, 1918.

He succumbed to shrapnel wounds to the abdomen suffered the preceding day, according to the report below to be found in his personal file – perhaps on the *same* day according to the Regimental War Diary - while in Command of both ‘B’ and ‘D’ Companies.



(continued)

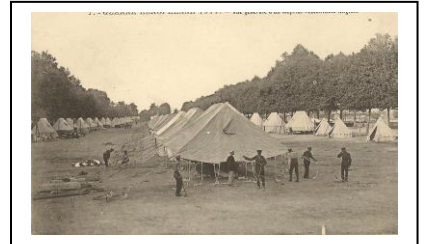
Charles St. Clair Strong had enlisted at twenty-five years of age: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, November 2, 1889 (from St. Mary the Virgin Parish Records).



(Preceding page: *Transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear and through the seemingly-eternal mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)

(The photograph of Lieutenant(?) Strong is from the Provincial Archives.)

(Right: *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*)



Captain C. S. Strong was admitted here on 13th on transfer from 76 Field Ambulance about 2 p.m..He states that he was wounded at 3p.m. on 12th. He had a shell wound, a large segment entering through lower angle of right scapula, fracturing it and 5th, 6th, and 7th ribs and emerging in midline at epigastrium. Diaphragm liver and bile passages torn. And bile was flowing from the wound. His pulse was 160 and he had a marked dyspuors(?). His case was absolutely hopeless and death took place at 9:15 p.m. on date of admission.

The above is an extract from a memorandum of the Officer Commanding the Number 2 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station.

(Right: *A family memorial – right foreground - which stands in the Old Anglican Cemetery on Forest Road in St. John's, commemorates the sacrifice of Captain Strong. – photograph from 2015*)



Captain Charles St. Clair Strong was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to *criceadam@yahoo.ca*. Last updated – February 10, 2023.