



**Sergeant Joseph Ross Waterfield, MM, (Regimental Number 789), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.**

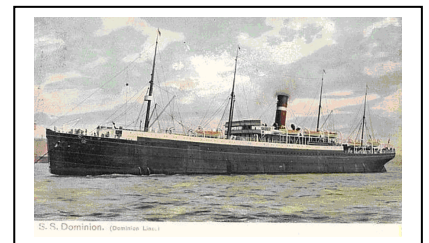
**His recorded occupations previous to military service recorded as those of *tailor* and *clerk* earning a weekly four dollars, Joseph Ross Waterfield presented himself for medical examination on December 10, 1914, at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*. Joseph Ross Waterfield was a recruit of the Second Draft.**

**Eleven days after having undergone this medical assessment, he was to return to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, there to enlist – engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar a day plus a ten-cent *Field Allowance*. It appears that he was also to attest on that same December 21.**

**Now for Private Waterfield, Number 789, there was to be a seven-week waiting period. How he occupied himself during that period is not recorded among his papers; he may, of course, have temporarily returned to work but this is only speculation.**

**However, during this relatively calm period, there was to be a first promotion when, on January 26, Private Waterfield was appointed to the rank of Lance Corporal.**

**On the fourth day of February of 1915, the first reinforcements – this was 'C' Company - for the Newfoundland contingent – it was not yet at battalion strength - which by this time was serving in Scotland (see further below), were to embark via the sealing tender *Neptune* onto the *SS Dominion* – the vessel having anchored to the south of St. John's, off Bay Bulls, because of ice conditions.**



**The vessel was then to sail - and Lance Corporal Waterfield thus departed Newfoundland for *overseas service* - a day later again, on February 5, for trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom.**

**(Right above: *The image of the steamer 'Dominion' - launched in 1894 as the 'Prussia' - is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. An older vessel, she was to be requisitioned during the latter part of the Great War as a store and supply ship. She survived the conflict to be scrapped in 1922.*)**

*\*There appears to be some confusion in some sources as to whether these troops were 'C' or 'D' Company. However, 'D' Company was to go overseas some time later on 'Stephano' to Halifax and then on 'Orduña' to Liverpool.*

*(Right: The photograph of personnel of 'C' Company on board the 'Neptune' on the way to the harbour at Bay Bulls is from the Provincial Archives.)*



Having disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool, the Newfoundlanders entrained for Edinburgh, the first Newfoundland Regiment contingent having by this time been posted to the historic Castle in Scotland's capital city. There they were to provide the garrison, thus being the first unit from overseas ever to do so.

Lance Corporal Waterfield and the other new-comers reported to duty at Edinburgh Castle on February 16.

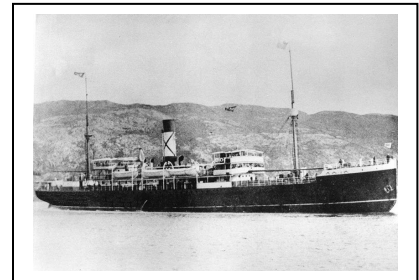


*(Right above: Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from its position on the summit of Castle Hill. – photograph from 2011)*

\* \* \* \* \*

Five to six months before that time, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of some 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 - to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after 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 would sail for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 adjacent: Fort George, constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, still serves the British Army to this day. – photograph from 2011)*



(continued)

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 – and where ‘C’ Company and Lance Corporal Waterfield, as also cited beforehand, would arrive from Newfoundland on February 16 of 1915.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some three months later, on May 11, and three weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit was ordered moved 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 received 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\*. The now-formed 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered eligible to be sent on ‘*active service*’.

And it was also at about the same time that Lance Corporal Waterfield received a further advancement, on this second occasion to the rank of corporal, to put up his second stripe on July 2.

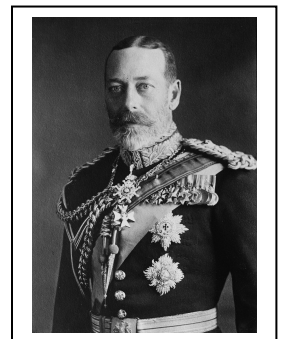


(Right: *The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915. – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

*\*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 Aldershot. This force, now the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

Meanwhile the two junior Companies, ‘E’ – 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 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 – the photograph is from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.*)

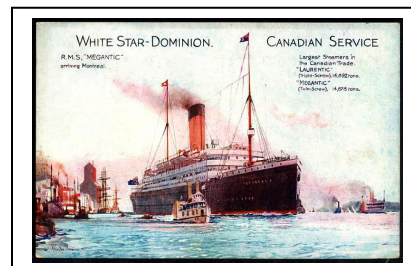
It was during this final period of training at *Camp Aldershot*, on August 15, that Corporal Waterfield was to be prevailed upon to re-enlist, now signing on for the...*duration of the war*\*.

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



(Right above: *Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.)*

On August 20, 1915, Corporal Waterfield and the Newfoundland unit 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion landed at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

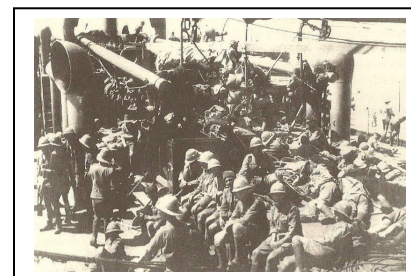


(Right above: *The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)*

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



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



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

(continued)

When the Newfoundlanders 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 proved to be little more than a debacle:



Flies, dust, disease, the frost-bite and the floods – and of course the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command\* had ever anticipated – were eventually to overwhelm the British-led forces and those of the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.

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

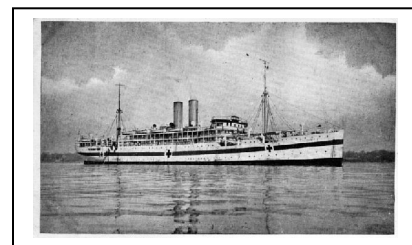
(Right: *An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at Suvla Bay – from Provincial Archives*)



*\*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.*

\* \* \* \* \*

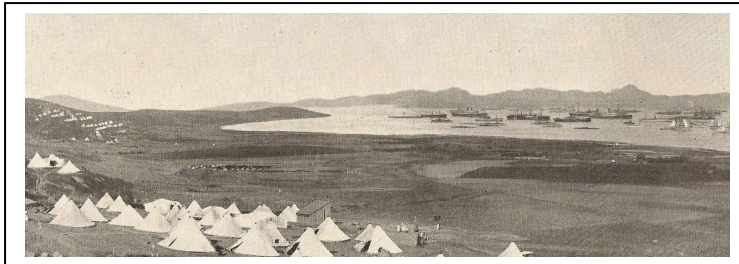
Just more than five weeks after having set foot on the sand and stone – mostly the latter – of *Kangaroo Beach*, on October 28, Corporal Waterfield was taken on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Valdivia* and there diagnosed as suffering from dysentery. The vessel was to then transfer him from the *Gallipoli Peninsula* to the 15<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital at East Mudros, on the Greek Island of Lemnos, where he was admitted three days later, on the 31<sup>st</sup> day of the month



(Right above: *The image of HMHS 'Valdivia' in her war-time garb of a hospital ship, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Built in 1911, prior to hostilities she was a French-owned passenger ship which in 1915 – a year into the War - was loaned to the British. She thereupon served as a hospital ship until 1919 when she was to be returned to her previous owners with whom she would serve until 1933 when she was scrapped.*)

Following further treatment, Corporal Waterfield was sent to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convalescent Depot, also on Lemnos, on November 11. From there a month later, on December 12, he was discharged *to duty* and was returned to the 29<sup>th</sup> (Division) Base Depot in Egypt.

He was not to re-join his parent unit until March 1, 1916, at a time when the Newfoundland unit, having left the *Gallipoli Peninsula* some six weeks beforehand, was encamped at Suez and preparing to be transferred to the *Western Front*.



(Right above: *By the end of 1915 Mudros Bay and its minuscule harbour were almost entirely surrounded by Allied medical facilities – a goodly number of them under canvas. – from Illustration*)

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile, during the short period which was to follow Corporal Waterfield's hospitalization, things were to worsen at *Gallipoli*\* for the British in general and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in particular.

*\*The French know the place as 'Les Dardanelles' while the Turks call it 'Çanakkale'.*

(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*)



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, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

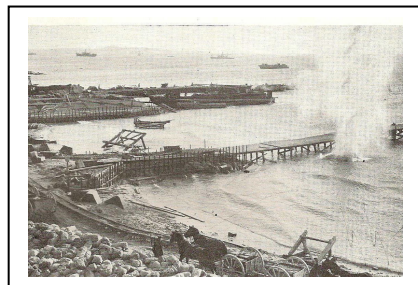


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**(Preceding page: Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed Achi Baba, positions which were never breached: The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011)**

**The British, Indian and Anzac forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at Gallipoli – had now only 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: 'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration)**

**\*Lieutenant Owen Steele of St. John's, Newfoundland, is cited as having been the last soldier of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force to step into the final small boat to sail from the Gallipoli Peninsula.**



**(Right: '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 evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria. On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport Nestor had arrived there with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16<sup>th</sup>, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she arrived on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders landed and marched to their encampment.**



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

**(Right above: 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.)**

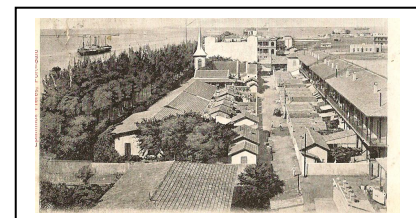
**\*Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.**

(Right: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)



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

After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Marseille, on March 22.



As has been related in an earlier paragraph, it had been at the beginning of that March of 1916, that Corporal Waterfield had reported back...*to duty*...with the Newfoundland Battalion at its encampment at Port Suez. Two weeks later, therefore, he also was to be on his way to France.



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

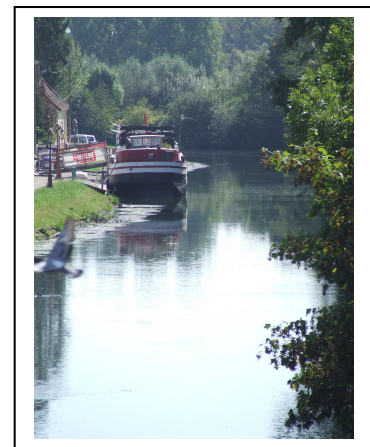
\* \* \* \* \*

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

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



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On April 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 to the areas of Maily-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.

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.*

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

Corporal Waterfield was not one of those to figure in the fighting of the morning of July 1 with the Newfoundland Battalion at Beaumont-Hamel, but his name was included on the unit’s nominal roll; it is therefore possible that he had been seconded to another unit or, more likely, that he was one of the ten per cent reserve of fourteen officers and eighty-three *other ranks* held at Louvencourt and not called forward until late in the afternoon of that day when the fighting had subsided.

*\*The well-known roll-call of July 2 of those who survived the battle unscathed was not officially recorded until two days later. The roll call of those who had been in the ten per cent reserve of fourteen officers and eighty-three men held back for most of the day at Louvencourt was apparently also recorded officially only later. Thus the inscription ‘With Battalion 4/7/16’ on certain records.*

After the events of the morning of that July 1 of 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.

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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, a draft of one-hundred twenty-seven reinforcements – 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 manpower having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion still numbered only...11 officers and 260 rifles...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

Reorganization of the Newfoundland unit was already underway by this time and due to the horrendous casualty rate of the first day of *First Somme*, Corporal Waterfield would receive a third promotion on July 12, now to the rank of sergeant.

On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – 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)*

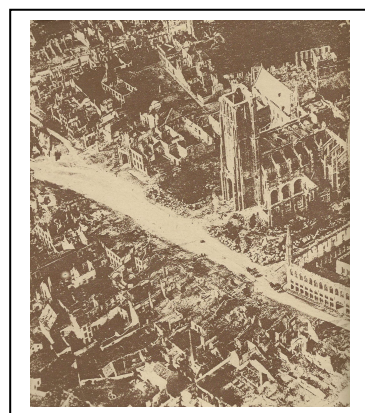


*The Salient* – close to the front lines for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict - was to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there; yet they nonetheless were to incur casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

For Sergeant Waterfield, however, the only incident recorded among his papers, was the one of September 30 when he was admitted into the 88<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance for attention to his teeth: he had a number of cavities to be filled.

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

*(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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

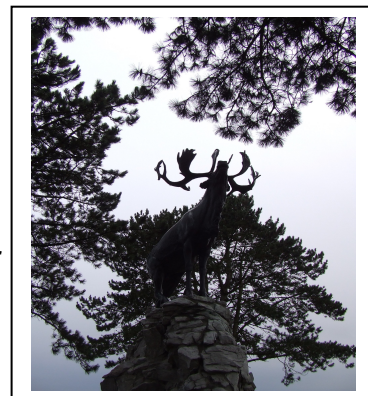


The encounter had proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right above: *This is the ground over which the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 below: *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 88<sup>th</sup> 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.



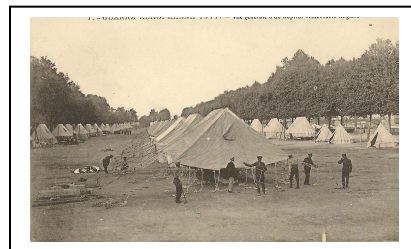
The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to wend its way back up to the front lines.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was while he was serving with the Battalion at Corbie that Sergeant Waterfield contracted what was a common complaint and a scourge of the trenches brought about by the presence of lice: scabies. It was not that it was a particularly difficult problem to cure; it was just that the conditions in which it thrived, dirt and the afore-mentioned lice, were ever-present in the trenches of the *Great War*.

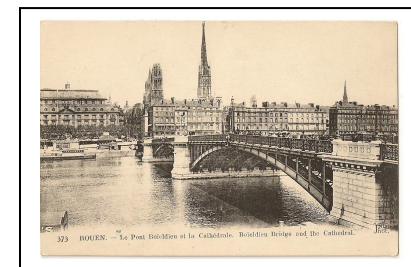
Evacuated at first on November 8 to the 21<sup>st</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Corbie, two days later he was at the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance for treatment before, on the following day again, November 11, he reported...*to duty*...back with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

(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)



The Newfoundlanders at Ville-sous-Corbie were being held in *Corps Reserve* as they were still a depleted force after the engagement of a month earlier – October 12 - at Gueudecourt. On November 16, only five days after his return to his unit on November 11, the Battalion would number one fewer as Sergeant Waterfield, once more incapacitated, was admitted into the 14<sup>th</sup> Corps Rest Station, the victim of an attack of influenza.

While he was there he developed a case of myalgia, diagnosed on November 24, for which he was forwarded to the 36<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Heilly before, on the morrow, he was transferred on board the 14<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Train to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stationary Hospital established at the time at Rouen.



From there three days later he was sent to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convalescent Depot, also at Rouen, to recuperate from his illness, a list to which rheumatism had now been added.

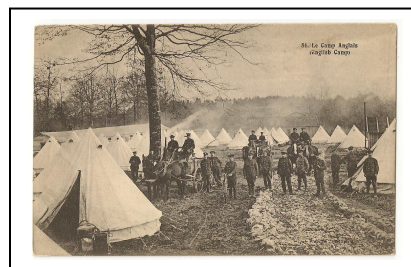
(Right above: *The city of Rouen and the River Seine flowing through the centre of the city under the watchful eye of the venerable gothic cathedral, at or about the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

Some three weeks later again, on December 18, Sergeant Waterfield was discharged *to duty* to the 29<sup>th</sup> Divisional Base Depot at Rouen, remaining there almost a further six weeks before being returned to his unit *in the field*, a return effected on January 27 of 1917 – the year documented as 1916 in his records is – logically - an error of the transcriber.

\* \* \* \* \*

After Sergeant Waterfield's departure on November 8 for treatment for scabies, it was a week afterwards, on November 15, that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to wend its way back up to the front lines.

There it 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.



(continued)

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

It had been on January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered out of Corps Reserve and its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* from where it would make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it was to entrain for the small town of Corbie where it had thereupon taken over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before, and from where at that time Sergeant Waterfield had left for treatment at the 21<sup>st</sup> CCS.

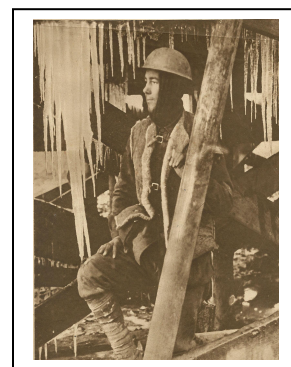
He now re-joined the unit on January 27 of the New Year, 1917, at which time it was completing its first tour on the trenches in 1917.

\* \* \* \* \*

After that recent 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 apparently had already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

Those casualties, however, were only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig somewhat cavalierly referred to as *wastage* as the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches.

In fact, 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 above: *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*)

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



And it was during this period, on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month, that Sergeant Waterfield was appointed Provost – military police – Sergeant. The details of his new duties do not appear among his documents.

(Preceding page: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1<sup>st</sup> 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, early in 1916 – 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 – just over four thousand - 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.



And while the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, the French *Bataille du Chemin des Dames* had been 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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\*.

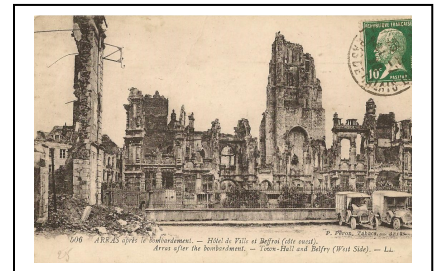
*\*It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

As seen immediately above, Sergeant Waterfield was a later recipient of the Military Medal ‘...for bravery in the field. At Monchy-le-Preux on April 14th, 1917, when an attack had failed and the enemy were advancing on the village, he displayed the greatest of gallantry as one of a small party who were hastily collected to oppose the hostile advance. This party maintained itself in the face of overwhelming odds, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy and completely checked him on this part of the line.’ - London Gazette, 18th June, 1917



After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred 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 5<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies. It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)



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

After a return visit to the 88<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance on April 26, now troubled with recurring scabies, Sergeant Waterfield was transferred to the 37<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station, likely at Godeswaersvalde near the Franco-Belgian frontier, on that same day and then forwarded for further treatment to the 6<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital at Frévent only one day later again.

From hospital he would be discharged back to his unit on May 4.

That month of May was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders would move 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 – *officially* the last day of the *Battle of Arras* – had been limited, apart from the marching.

(continued)



At the outset of June, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and in 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 7<sup>th</sup>, of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)



\* \* \* \* \*

By the beginning of June, however, Sergeant Waterfield was no longer serving with the Newfoundland Battalion in the field. Having been deemed as...*unfit*, on May 23 he was despatched to the 29<sup>th</sup> Divisional Base Depot at Rouen.

Eight weeks plus a single day later, Sergeant Waterfield was on his way back to the United Kingdom, having been granted a ten-day furlough, from July 18 to 28.

Ten days or not, it was not to be until July 31 that he reported back to the Base Depot where he was to remain for a further forty days.

(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*)



He eventually was to re-join the Newfoundland unit on September 9, one of a draft of twenty-three *other ranks* to report...*to duty*...on that day. It was the time of a three to four-week pause during the British offensive in Flanders and the Newfoundland unit was re-enforcing and re-organizing at *Proven Camp* behind the lines near the Belgian town of Poperinghe.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some five weeks after Sergeant Waterfield's departure in early June to the Divisional Base Depot at Rouen, the Newfoundland Battalion had 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.

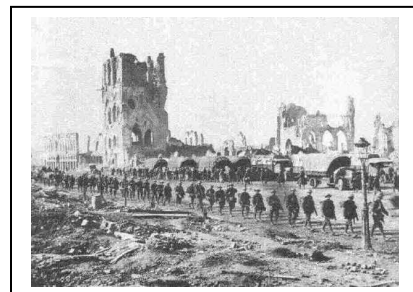
(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right – photograph from 2014*)



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.

(continued)

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



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

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army. This had been or was also to be the case with the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians, all of whose troops had floundered or would soon flounder their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Belgian Flanders.



By this time of course, as recorded on a preceding page, Sergeant Waterfield had returned – on September 9 – to service with the Newfoundland unit.

\* \* \* \* \*

(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*)

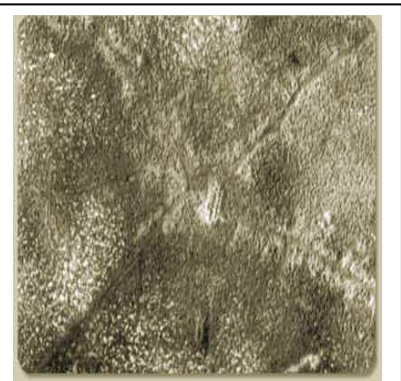
Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9. At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at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



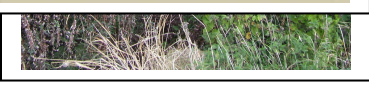
(continued)

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

The son\* of Joseph Shottle Waterfield, confectioner and an employee of Rennie's Bakery on McBride's Hill, and of Jess Waterfield (née Day) of 48, Freshwater Road in St. John's (both originally from Halifax, Nova Scotia) and by 1921 of Power Street in the city, he was also husband of Annie Waterfield (née Courtenay, also found as Courtney)\*\* – the young couple's own address cited as nearby 54, Pennywell Road. He was, as we know, brother to Arthur, to Edith-Jean and to perhaps one other sibling



\*Joseph Ross Waterfield declared himself as having been born in Nova Scotia.



\*\*The couple had married in St. John's on December 30 of 1914 after his enlistment.

Sergeant Waterfield was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 9, 1917, while serving with 'C' Company during the fighting at the *Broembeek*.

Joseph Ross Waterfield had enlisted at a *declared* nineteen years of age; however, his marriage certificate cites his age on that occasion as having been twenty-one.

(Preceding page: *The Broembeek, the stream here pictured as tranquil and innocuous, had overflowed its banks in the autumn of 1917, transforming the surrounds into a morass. – photograph from 2010*)

Sergeant Joseph Ross Waterfield, MM, 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).

(continued)



**Mrs. J. B. Waterfield  
48, Freshwater Road,  
City**

**October 30, 1917**

**Dear Mrs. Waterfield,**

**The Military Medal won by Sergeant Waterfield is at present in the custody of this Department. A letter from the Pay & Record Office, London, states that Sergeant Waterfield wished his medal to be delivered to you. I should be glad to know if you would wish this medal presented at some public meeting, or if you would prefer to have it sent to you privately.**

**I have the honour to be  
Madam,  
Your obedient servant,**

**(Sgd.) ..... Major, C.S.O.**

**Dept. of Militia**

*Major W. R. Rendell  
Major C.S.O.  
Dept. of Militia*

*Dear Sir;*

*Having received your notification concerning my husband's Military Medal, owing to his recent death, I prefer to have it sent to me privately.*

*Yours most respectfully (sic),*

*Mrs. J. R. Waterfield*

**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 29, 2023.**