



Lance Corporal Joseph Warren Wells (Regimental Number 1147), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

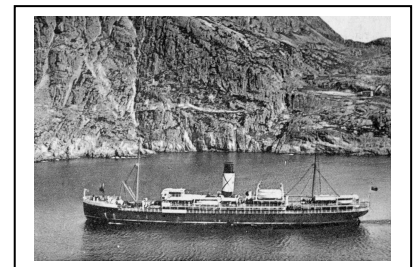


His occupation prior to his military service recorded as that of a *printer* with the *Daily News* working for forty-five dollars monthly, Joseph Warren Wells presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on February 16 of the year 1915. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

Six days were to pass following his medical assessment before he returned to the *CLB Armoury* on February 22 to enlist – engaged at the private soldier's rate of a single dollar per diem plus a daily ten-cent *Field Allowance*.

However, whereas attestation for others had come several weeks after enlistment, he was now to wait only a further twelve days, until February 27, before *that* final formality, the swearing of the *Oath of Allegiance* would come to pass. At that time Joseph Warren Wells thereupon became...*a soldier of the King*.

For Private Wells, Number 1147, there was now to be yet another, but ultimate, waiting period of three weeks before he would be summoned to...*overseas service*. How he occupied himself during that time is not recorded among his papers; he may, of course, have temporarily returned to work, but this is only speculation.



(Right above: *The image of the Bowring Brothers' vessel 'Stephano', sister-ship of 'Florizel', as she passes through 'the Narrows' of St. John's Harbour is from the Provincial Archives.*)

Unlike the two previous contingents to have departed Newfoundland (see below) for...*overseas service*, Private Wells' 'D' Company was not to sail directly to the United Kingdom. On March 20 it embarked onto the Bowring-Brothers' vessel *Stephano* for the short voyage to Halifax, capital city of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, where it was thereupon to board a second vessel, the newly-launched *Orduña* for the trans-Atlantic crossing*.

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(Right: *The image of Orduña is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel was not to be requisitioned during the Great War but would be used by the Cunard Company to operate on its commercial service between Liverpool and New York.*)



Having then sailed from Nova Scotia on March 22 for Liverpool, Private Wells and his draft landed there eight days later, on the 30th. Once disembarked in Liverpool, the two-hundred fifty men and officers of 'D' Company were thereupon transported on the same date by train directly to Edinburgh, the Scottish capital, to join the Newfoundland Regiment's 'A', 'B' and 'C' Companies.

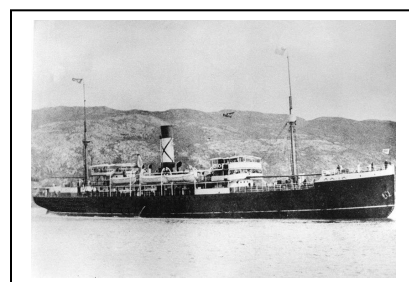


(Right: *From its vantage point on Castle Hill, the venerable fortress overlooks the city of Edinburgh where in 1915 the Newfoundlanders were to provide the first garrison to be drawn from outside the British Isles. – photograph from 2011*)

These units were by this time stationed at the historic Castle, 'A' and 'B' having recently been posted from Fort George and 'C' having arrived directly from home (see further below). After 'D' Company's arrival at the end of that month of March, the Newfoundlanders were now to remain at Edinburgh for the following six weeks.

* * * * *

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 – these to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.



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

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after a recruit's enlistment and/ or attestation. To become known to history as the *First Five Hundred* and also as the *Blue Puttees*, on that day they had boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.



The ship had sailed for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, via its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

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

Only days after ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 ‘C’ Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent* - would arrive directly from Newfoundland.

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

* * * * *

As seen in a previous paragraph, for the month of April and the first days of May of 1915, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies, now united, were to furnish the garrison – the first troops from outside the British Isles to do so - of the guardian of Scotland’s capital city. Then, during the first week of May, ‘E’ Company was to report there...*to duty*...from home. Four days later again, on May 11, the Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

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

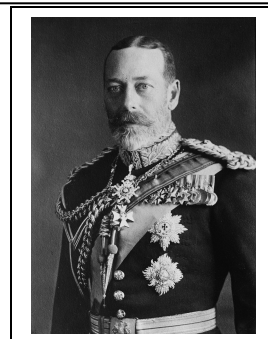
It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent would eventually receive the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength*. The now-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered available to be sent on ‘*active service*’.

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



**This was approximately fifteen hundred, sufficient to furnish 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



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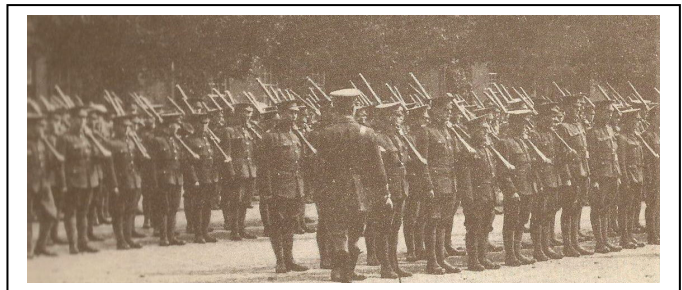
Meanwhile the two junior Companies, 'E' – last arrived at Edinburgh - and the aforementioned 'F', were ordered transferred to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

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

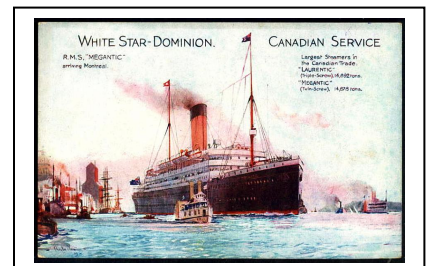
It was while the Newfoundland Battalion was in training during those weeks at Aldershot, on August 16 that Private Wells would be prevailed upon to enlist for the duration of the conflict

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

(Right: *Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment on parade at Aldershot in August of 1915, prior to the unit's departure to active service on the Gallipoli Peninsula* – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)



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



On August 20, 1915, Private Wells and his Newfoundland unit, he by now a soldier of the Battalion's Machine-Gun Section, embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks.

There, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, the 1st Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

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



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



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



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, was proving to be little more than a debacle:

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



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

(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.**

November 26 of 1915 would see perhaps the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; there was to be a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm strike the Suvla Bay area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be the priority.

There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

During the days that had followed, the British positions at *Suvla Bay* – and thus also those of the Newfoundland unit – were becoming yet more and more untenable and thus on the night of December 19-20, the entire area would be abandoned – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.

(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)



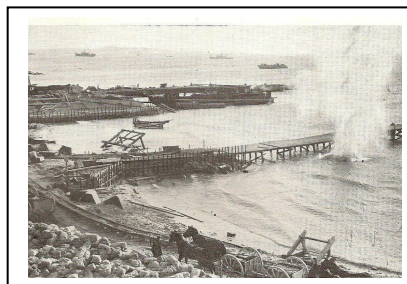
Some of the Battalion personnel were to be evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away; but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the Newfoundland Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(Right: 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)



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

The British, Indian and *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – was by then only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.



This final operation took 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 to sail from the Gallipoli Peninsula.*

(Right: 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in 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)



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Immediately after the British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit would be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria. On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* arrived there with the 1st Battalion on board.

The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16th, on her 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.

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



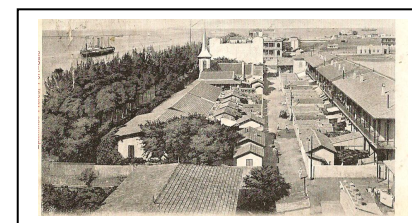
There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division was yet to be decided*.

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

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



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the Newfoundland Battalion boarded His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.



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

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

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



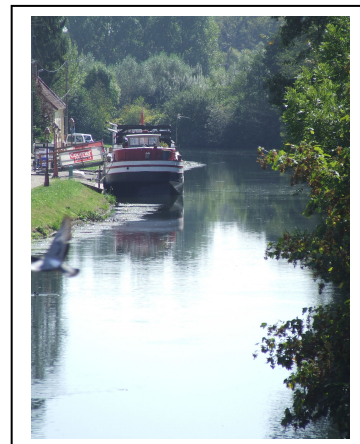
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train found its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled 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 then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.

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

On April 13, the 1st Battalion subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive reinforcements 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 aforementioned arrival on the *Western Front*, two of the four Companies – 'A', and 'B' – were to take over support positions from a British unit* before the entire Newfoundland unit was then 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 to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders were soon to be preparing for the upcoming British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, that flowed – and still does so today – through the region.



(Right: *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*)



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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 adjacent: 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.*



(Right above: *Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from Le Miroir*)

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

It was to be the greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage of *the Somme* was to continue for 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...?*)

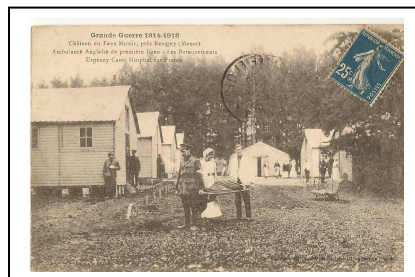
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Private Wells was one of the all too many wounded at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, during the fighting of the first day of...*First Somme*. He was at first evacuated to the 87th Field Ambulance with injuries inflicted by gun-fire to the left knee and thigh.



From the 87th FA, on July 3 he was forwarded on to the 26th General Hospital at the coastal area of Étaples.

(Right: A British field ambulance, of a much more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card)



Private Wells was subsequently was taken by an unspecified hospital ship to England on July 5 and upon arrival was admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital, in the Borough of Wandsworth, on the following day.

Excerpt from report from the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth: 6th July 1916 – 22nd July 1916 - GSW* left thigh - From France. Entrance & exit wounds...

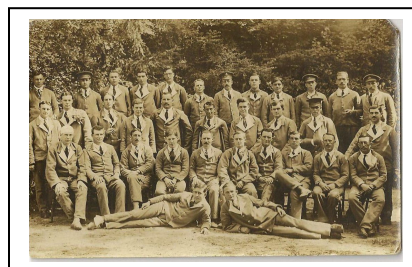
*GSW – gun-shot wound usually denotes an injury inflicted by artillery fire, thus likely from flying shrapnel.

(Right: The main building of what was to become the 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War had initially been opened, on July 1st of 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010)



(Right below: A party of Newfoundland patients dressed in hospital uniform but unfortunately otherwise unidentified, is seen here convalescing in the grounds of the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

After treatment at Wandsworth and then convalescence – the latter spent at the Brooklands Convalescent Home, Weybridge, commencing on July 13 – Private Wells was granted the customary ten-day furlough allowed to military personnel upon release from hospital – in his case from July 22 to 31. On the succeeding day, August 1, Private Wells reported as ordered...to duty..., to a posting at the Regimental Depot where he was to remain stationed for two months.



At the end of this summer of 1915, the once-Royal Borough of Ayr on Scotland's west coast was to begin 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 above: An aerial view of Ayr, likely from the period between the Wars: Newton-on-Ayr, where were quartered the 'other ranks', is left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)

(Right below: *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.*

On October 3 of 1916 the 11th Re-enforcement Draft, Private Wells numbered among its ranks, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to France. On October 4 the ship docked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot where the draft was now to spend several days in final training and organization* before moving on to join the parent Newfoundland Battalion...in the field.



(Right: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

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



That rendezvous occurred on October 14-15, two days after the costly engagement – two-hundred thirty-nine casualties in all, for little gain - at Gueudecourt. Two-hundred sixty-six...*other ranks*...from the Base Depot at Rouen – Private Wells again one of that number – arrived as far as the Battalion transport lines on the 12th; however, according to the unit's War Diary, the new-comers were to make their way into action only three days later, on the 15th, when they moved forward and were parcelled out to the four depleted fighting companies.

Depleted...because on that same October 12, the Newfoundland Battalion had been engaged in an attack on the German positions at a place called Gueudecourt (see further below).

* * * * *

Fifteen weeks before Private Wells was to return...*to duty*...and right after the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the shattered attacking British forces that it had been feared that any German counter-assault at that time might well annihilate the few of the British Expeditionary Force who had managed to survive the holocaust of that day.

The remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion – and of the other depleted British units - had thus remained in their 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 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion had still numbered 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 establishment 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.

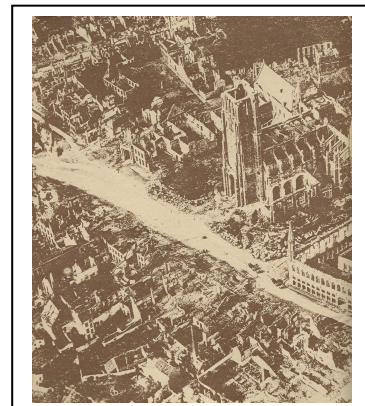
(Right: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



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 nonetheless incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

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*.

(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.

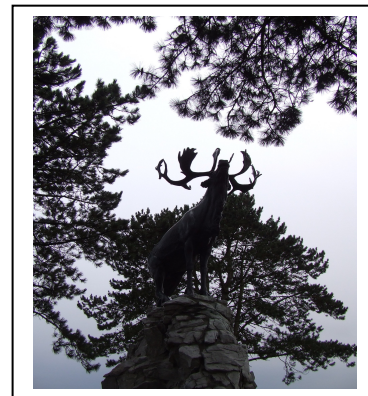
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The encounter had proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

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

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



The Newfoundland Battalion was not to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it would supply two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires and the Worcestershires, of the 88th Brigade.

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



On October 30, the Newfoundland unit had eventually been retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving 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 began 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 to be 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 above: *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 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.

(continued)

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 a few of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig somewhat casually referred to as *wastage* as the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches.

(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 of the trenches at Sully-Saillisel during the winter of 1916-1917. – from *Illustration*)

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 Sully-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.

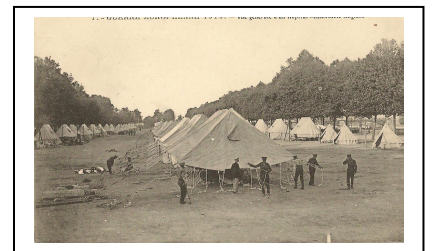


(Right above: *The fighting during the period of the Battalion's posting to Sully-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time.* - photograph from 2009(?))

* * * * *

Only days before this last-mentioned action, Private Wells had been wounded while in the trenches in the area of Sully-Saillisel, again being slightly injured* by gun-fire. Although reported on the 24th, it may well have occurred on the evening before, while 1st Battalion was moving forward into the trenches. On the 24th – which is cited on other documents – the Regimental War Diary records *fairly quiet* whereas the entry for the 23rd reports... *Casualties: 1 killed, 3 wounded, 1 gassed.*

He was evacuated to the 60th Field Ambulance and, on the same day, on to the 2/2 London (55th) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown on the 24th, and on the 27th, three days later, was admitted into the 1st Australian General Hospital at Rouen for further treatment. Private Wells was released to *duty* at the Base Depot, Rouen on March 6.



(Right above: *a mobile casualty clearing station being established somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card*)

**It should be remembered that these were the days before anti-biotics, a time when the risk of infection was great, and when infection could be more dangerous than the wound itself. It was now to be five weeks and three days before Private Wells would re-join the Newfoundland Battalion...in the field.*

When he did, as one of a small re-enforcement draft dispatched from Rouen, it was to be in the environs of a second seemingly innocuous French community which, one hundred years after the event, remains engraved in Newfoundland history: Monchy-le-Preux:

* * * * *

After both Private Wells' departure for medical care towards the end of February and then, a week later, the confrontation with the enemy at Sailly-Saillisel, the month of March had been 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 had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band come from Scotland, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



(Right above: *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 above: *The remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War, in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

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



On April 9 the British Army had launched 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* was to be yet a further disaster.

(concentrate)

(Preceding page: *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 .*

After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux until the morrow. 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.

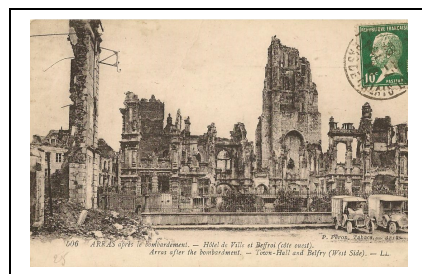
Private Wells, as related above, had by then already reported back to duty with the 1st Battalion on April 13, the day before the attack at Monchy-le-Preux. But this detachment – two officers and fourteen...other ranks...apparently played no role during the engagement and probably no role until the 18th when the two-hundred-or-so able-bodied survivors and re-enforcements of the Newfoundland unit were ordered moved forward from the area of Arras – to where they had retired on April 15.

* * * * *

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* was 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 retired, again 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 above: *A small party of the remaining Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from The War Illustrated*)

That month of May was a period when the Newfoundlanders would move hither and thither on the *Arras Front*, never far from Arras itself. 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* – was limited, apart from the marching.

At the outset of June, the 1st 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 7th, of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)



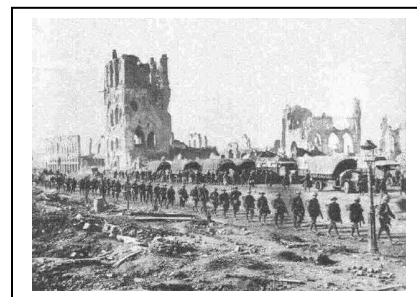
The Newfoundlanders had then soon once again been moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.

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



Some three weeks after the arrival of Private Wells' Newfoundland Battalion in Belgium and on a day when the Newfoundlanders had just withdrawn from the trenches to move to the new *Proven Camp* some kilometres to the north-west of the town of Poperinghe, Private Wells received promotion, on July 18, to the rank of lance corporal.

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was now 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 larger cogs of 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.

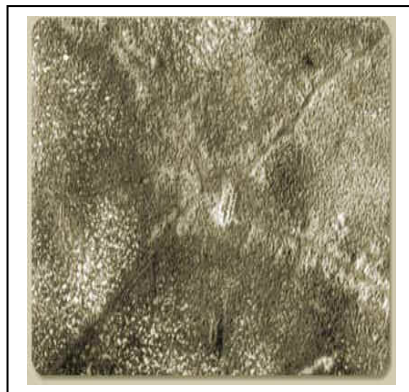
Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at...*Third Ypres: Passchendaele*...was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9.

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*.

(Right: *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*)



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



Lance Corporal Wells was reported as having been...*killed in action*...on August 14, 1917, while serving with 'D' Company during the course of a heavy German artillery barrage – eight killed twenty-five wounded - at the *Steenbeek*, Belgium, while the 1st Battalion was moving forward up into the firing-line.

His parents are not named*, but a sister is: in his will, Sarah Porter of 211, LeMarchant Road in St. John's (she later of 40, Pleasant Street, also in St. John's) was his beneficiary and also recipient of an accumulated fifty cents per day from his pay in the event of his death. His own address was recorded on his enlistment papers as the same 211, LeMarchant Road.

**It is possible that his parents were William John Wells, general dealer, of the North Side, Twillingate, and of Mary Jane Wells who are recorded as having a son Joseph Warren, born 1887, and also a daughter Sarah born in 1889. However, finding confirmation for this supposition has been excessively difficult.*

Joseph Warren Wells had enlisted at a *declared* twenty-five years of age.

(continued)

Lance Corporal Joseph Warren Wells was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – February 6, 2023.