



Lance Corporal Joseph Dobbin (Regimental Number 2538) is interred in Duhallow A.D.S. Cemetery: Grave reference, IV. H. 9.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *miner* earning a monthly thirty-one dollars Joseph Dobbin was a volunteer of the Ninth Recruitment Draft. He presented himself for medical examination on April 18 of 1916 at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury** 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*.

****The building was to serve as the Regimental Headquarters in Newfoundland for the duration of the conflict.***

On the day of that medical assessment, the same April 18, and at the same venue, Joseph Dobbin would enlist, and was engaged...*for the duration of the war**...at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was to be appended a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

****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 – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.***

A further twenty-four hours were now to follow before there then came to pass, once more at the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On that nineteenth day of April he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, Joseph Dobbin became...*a soldier of the King.*

Private Dobbin, Number 2538, would not now sail to the United Kingdom until a lengthy period of thirteen weeks and a day had then elapsed. How he was to spend this prolonged interval after his attestation appears not to have been documented. It may be that he was to return to work and to spend time with his family and friends at home in the Conception Bay community of Wabana Mines, Bell Island, but, of course, this conclusion is a little bit speculative and he may perhaps have chosen – or *been chosen* - to remain in barracks to be billeted and trained in the capital city*.

****A number of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the capital city, or those who had no friends or family to offer them board and lodging, were to be quartered in the curling rink in the area of Fort William in St. John's, a building which was at the time to serve as barracks.***

It was to be the vessel *SS Sicilian* which would carry Private Dobbin and his draft overseas. Apparently it was a detachment two-companies strong, thus five-hundred Regimental personnel, that sailed from St. John's on July 19, 1916, in the company of a contingent of Newfoundland Royal Naval Reservists and some three-hundred civilian passengers since the vessel was on a scheduled commercial route from Canada to the United Kingdom.



(Right above: *Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when 'Sicilian' was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War. During the Great War she was apparently requisitioned as a troopship on only one occasion: in October of 1914 she was a vessel of the armada which transported the (1st) Canadian Division overseas to the United Kingdom. She otherwise continued to work commercially between Great Britain and Canada for her owners, the Allan Line and later Canadian Pacific, at times carrying soldiery if and when her schedule allowed.*

The ship carried Newfoundland military personnel eastwards across the Atlantic three times, all in the year 1916.)

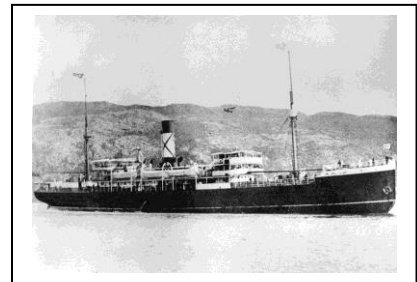
Upon the arrival of *Sicilian* in British waters, the ship proceeded to the south-coast Royal Naval port of Devonport where the first contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment had landed with the (1st) Canadian Division in October of 1914. Having arrived in port during the last days of July, from there the reservists left for naval barracks, Private Dobbin and his comrades-in-arms now boarded a train for the journey north to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot.



(Right above: A no-longer bustling Devonport Harbour, today bereft of its former importance – photograph from 2012)

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Some two years prior to that September 9 of 1916, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914, the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and were formed into 'A' and 'B' Companies.



During that same period the various authorities in both Newfoundland and the United Kingdom had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

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

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

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

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



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

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of 'D' Company to arrive – they via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty*...at Edinburgh, and then 'E' Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4*.



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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

(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.*)



(continued)

(Right below: *An aerial view of Ayr, likely from the period between the Wars: Newton-on-Ayr, where were quartered the 'other ranks', is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right.* – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)

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



(Right: *The High Street in Ayr as shown on a postcard of the time, the imposing Wallace Tower – it stands to this day (2017) - dominating the scene* – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo)

The later arrivals to the United Kingdom, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were eventually to form the nucleus of the yet-to-be-formed first re-enforcement drafts for the 1st Battalion.



Ayr was a small town on the west coast of Scotland whose history precedes the year 1205 when it was established as a Royal Burgh (Borough) by the crown of Scotland, an appointment which emphasized the importance of the town as a harbour, market and, later, administrative centre. By the time of the Great War it was expanding and the River Ayr which had once marked the northern boundary of the place was now flowing through its centre; a new town to the north (Newton-on-Ayr), its population fast-increasing, perhaps encouraged by the coming of the railway, was soon to be housing the majority of the personnel of the Newfoundland Regimental Depot.

That November 15 of 1915 was to see not only the departure of the 1st Re-enforcement Draft to the Middle East and to the *Gallipoli Campaign* but also, only five days prior, the arrival from home of 'G' Company which would take up its quarters at *Gailes Camp*, some sixteen kilometres up the coast from Ayr itself – but over sixty if one went by road.

A further seven weeks plus a day were now to pass before the first one-hundred officers and men of 'H' Company, having sailed in mid-December as recorded in an earlier paragraph, were to present themselves at the Regimental Depot on January 4, some of them, unfortunately, to be affected, even fatally, by the measles epidemic of the time.

After that there was then to be an interlude of three months plus several days before the second detachment of 'H' Company reported on April 9, 1916, to the Regimental Depot.

Note: Until as late as the spring of 1916 it had been the intention to form a 2nd Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment to fight on the Continent. In fact it would seem that the last-mentioned contingent of one-hundred sixty-three recruits was to form the nucleus of that

unit, while the personnel already at the Depot by this time would form a reserve battalion to serve as a re-enforcement pool for both the fighting units.

It could not have been long before a change of plan came about as very soon men of that contingent (the second half of 'H' Company) were being sent to strengthen the 1st Newfoundland Battalion already on the Continent – maybe Beaumont-Hamel had something to do with it.

Then towards mid-summer, of course, and as seen above, it was the turn of Private Dobbin and his detachment to report to the Regimental Depot in Scotland.

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The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to eventually serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were despatched in drafts, at first to *Gallipoli* and later to the *Western Front*, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *Wellington Square (see following paragraph) seen here almost a century after it hosted the officers of the Newfoundland Regiment – photograph from 2012)*

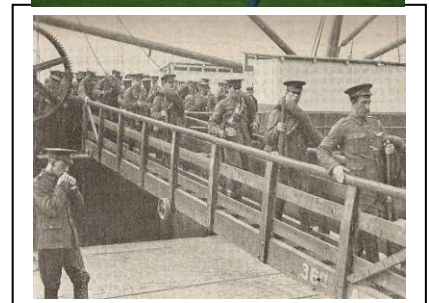
At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to be able to accommodate the number of new arrivals – plus men from other British regiments which were still being billeted in the area...and the measles epidemic which was to claim the life of several Regiment personnel – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in the town-centre of Ayr itself, and the *other ranks* had been billeted at Newton Park School and otherwise in the grandstand or a tented camp at the newly-built racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr – on the far side of the river.

(Right: *The new race-course at Newton-upon-Ayr - opened in 1907 – where men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they would replace some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photograph from 2012)*



The 12th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Private Dobbin one of the detachment's rank and file - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 11 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the *Western Front*.

The contingent subsequently disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, October 12, and spent time at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, in final training and organization*, before making its way to a rendezvous with the parent 1st Battalion.



(Preceding page: *British troops disembark at an earlier date in the Great War at Rouen on their way 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.*

Private Dobbin's contingent was to comprise a single officer and two-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* by the time it reported for duty at the *Bernafay Wood Camp* on October 22. Still in the area of Gueudecourt, the Newfoundland Battalion had been relieved in the front line three days before, on the 19th, but only to provide working parties to repair damaged roads and to construct new ones. Only days later, the Battalion had returned to the forward area.



(Right above: *Bernafay Wood a century later – not being close to the front lines, the wood may have resembled what is seen here – photograph from 2014*)

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By the time that Private Dobbin joined the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment on that October 22 of 1916, the first contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment had already been serving overseas for a little more than two years. The 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been formed – in the spring of 1916 - and as seen in a prior paragraph, twelve reinforcement drafts had already been dispatched from Ayr to supplement the strength of the 1st Battalion (see immediately below).

As for Joseph Dobbin, he had by this time been a soldier of the Newfoundland Regiment for one-hundred eighty-six days.

The four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', had become in the summer of 1915 the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment and had thereupon been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. The force had soon been dispatched from *Camp Aldershot* to...*active service*.



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

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



On August 20 of 1915, the Newfoundland Battalion had embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks. There, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, the 1st Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



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



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

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

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would now serve but, even ever since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, had been proving to be little more than a debacle:

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

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



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

(Right: This is Anzac Bay in the fore-ground with the Salt Lake in the centre further away. The bottom of Suvla Bay is just to be seen on the left and adjacent to the Salt Lake, and further away again. The hills in the distance and the ones from which this photograph was taken were held by the Turks and formed a horse-shoe around the plain surrounding the Salt Lake - which was where the British and Newfoundlanders were stationed. – photograph from 2011)



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



There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number.

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

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

By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.



Some of the Battalion personnel had thereupon been evacuated to the nearby island of *Imbros*, some to *Lemnos*, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

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

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

(Right: 'W' Beach at Cape Helles under shell-fire only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration)



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

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



(Right above: 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in that January of 1916 and by the Newfoundlanders who were to be the last soldiers off the beach: Vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011)

Immediately after the evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the 1st Battalion had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria and beyond.

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



(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.*)

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

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

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



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1st Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.

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

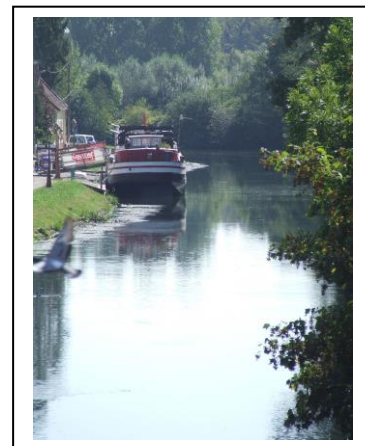


Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille.

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.

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



It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge which they had then traversed on their way from the station.

But some three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.

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

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



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

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****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 below: Beaumont-Hamel: Looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which stands atop part of the German front-line defences: The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 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 had soon been 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: A view of Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?))

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



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

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

It was to be the greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage of the...*First Battle of the Somme*...was to continue for a further four and a half months.



(Preceding page: *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.

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that any German counter-assault might well annihilate what had managed to survive of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*.

The few remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion – and of the other depleted British units – had thus remained in the trenches perhaps fearing the worst, and at night searching for the wounded and burying the dead. It was to be July 6 before the Newfoundlanders were to be relieved from the forward area and to be ordered withdrawn to Englebelmer.



There were then a further two days before the unit had marched further again to the rear area and to billets in the village of Maily-Maillet.

(Right above: *The re-constructed village of Maily-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John’s East.* – photograph from 2009)

There at Maily-Maillet on July 11, a draft of one-hundred twenty-seven re-enforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported...*to duty*. They had been the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion was still to number only... *11 officers and 260 rifles...*after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

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

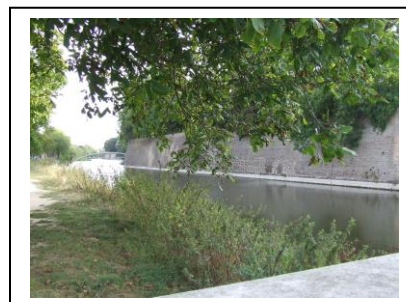
A second re-enforcement draft from Rouen had then arrived days later, on July 21, while the Newfoundland Battalion was at Acheux and then, only three days afterwards – at the very time day that the Prime Minister of Newfoundland had visited the unit – a third draft of sixty other ranks had arrived in Beauval and reported... *to duty*.

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



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

(Right: *The same re-constructed city ramparts as shown above, here viewed from just outside the city and from the far side of the moat which still to this day partially surrounds it – image from 2010*)



(Right below: *Canadian trenches in Sanctuary Wood, not far removed from the Newfoundland Battalion's positions during August and September of 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

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



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

(Right: *Railway Wood, the Newfoundland positions at the time, almost a century later – a monument to the twelve Royal Engineers buried alive there may just be perceived on the periphery of the trees – photograph from 2014*)



(Right below: *The already-battered city of Ypres seen here towards the end of the year 1915 – and some eight months before the Newfoundlanders were to be posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)



And it was to be there in *the Salient* in the sector of a place called *Railway Wood*, that the parent Newfoundland Battalion would soon be serving after its transfer had been completed from France.

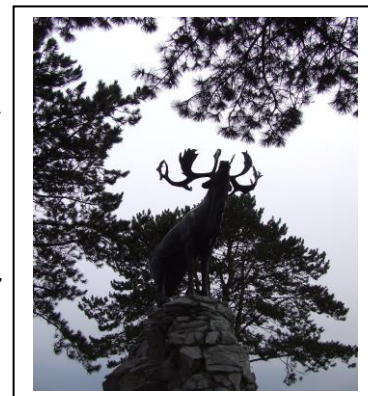
On October 8, 1916, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return southwards. The unit was thereupon to be transported by train back into France, back into the area of the...*First Battle of – the Somme*.

Just four days after unit's return to France from Belgium, on October 12 of 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to take to the offensive; it was at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.



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

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



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

After the action of October 12 the Newfoundland Battalion was not then to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it had furnished 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 Infantry Brigade of which, of course, the Newfoundland unit was a battalion.



(Right above: *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*)

And it had been, of course, during the days following the aforesaid action, on October 22, that Private Dobbin and his draft from Rouen had reported...*to duty*...with the Newfoundland Battalion at the *Bernafay Wood Camp*.

* * * * *

Eight days after Private Dobbin's arrival at the afore-mentioned *Bernafay Wood Camp*, on October 30 the Newfoundland unit was on its way towards rear positions away from the Gueudecourt area where the Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks in the area of the community of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing.

By that October 30, the Battalion had been serving almost continuously in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day. It was now not to be until November 15 that the Newfoundlanders were to commence wending their way back to the front lines.

Back in the forward area on or about November 17, the Newfoundland unit continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the next few weeks of the late autumn.

It would be a period to then be broken by a several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas season, encamped well behind the lines, in close proximity and to the south-west of the city of Amiens.

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



The Christmas festivities of 1916 having been completed – turkey dinner washed down with...*real ale*...apparently – it was not to be until a further sixteen days had passed, January 11, that the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* to make its way on foot to the town of Airaines.

From Airaines only days later, the unit then entrained from there for the small town of Corbie where it thereupon was to take over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before. Days later again the unit continued its progress back up to the forward area and to...*active service*.

Their recent six-week Christmas of 1916 respite by that time a thing of the past, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to...*active service*...on January 23, although they apparently had already returned to the trenches of the *Western Front* by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatalities – of 1917.

It was now the beginning of the winter period. As had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the *Great War* – that of 1916-1917 would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable – there was to be a shortage of fuel and many other things - for most of the combatants of both sides.

It would also be a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were to be kept busy, particularly, so it seems - from at least Canadian medical documentation - with thousands of cases of dental work.

This period also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and the recent weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion these exercises were to be at least partially undertaken in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.

On February 18 the 1st Battalion began a five-day trek back from Coisy to the forward area where it was to return to the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. It was at a place called Saily-Saillisel and the reception given to it by the Germans had proved both lively – and deadly: after only two days the Battalion had incurred four dead, nine wounded and three gassed without there having been any infantry action. The Newfoundlanders were to be withdrawn on February 25...to return just three days later.

They carried with them orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Sully-Saillisel...to be carried out on March 1.

(Right: A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, his 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*)



(Right below: 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(?))

In fact, the sole infantry activity which was to *directly* involve the Newfoundland unit during that entire period – from the action at Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917 – was to be that sharp engagement fought 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.



After the confrontation at Sully-Saillisel, the Newfoundland Battalion retired to the rear area by train, to an encampment at Meaulté. There, and later at *Camps-en-Amienois* – even further behind the lines – the Newfoundland unit was to spend almost the entire remainder of that month.

After Sully-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 come from Ayr, 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 commenced 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*)

(continued)

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

On April 9 the British Army 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.

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*.



(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen in 1917, from the western, 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*)

(Right: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the remains of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed village. – photograph from 2009(?)*)



**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 the debacle of April 14, the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux for but a few days. 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.

When the thirty-nine *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen reported to the 1st Battalion on April 18, they were to be just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers.

(continued)

There were by that time only two-hundred twenty *other ranks* in number plus twelve officers serving with some two-hundred personnel of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. Those of the 1st Newfoundland Battalion would spend the 19th salvaging equipment and burying the dead.

They then remained *in situ* until the 23rd.

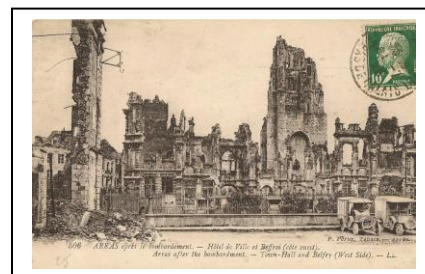


(Right above: *Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras.– photograph from 2007*)

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* had been 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 sector of the 1st Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

And the Newfoundlanders also sustained further casualties: ten...*killed in action*, three ...*missing in action*, and forty-eight...*wounded*.



Late on that evening of April 23, the Newfoundlanders retired the dozen or so kilometres 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**)

The *Battle of Arras* was by then proceeding to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-month, but the Newfoundland unit was not to be further involved in any co-ordinated offensive action – it was simply too exhausted; this now would be a period when the 1st Battalion moved in a circular fashion on the *Arras Front*, in and out of the trenches.

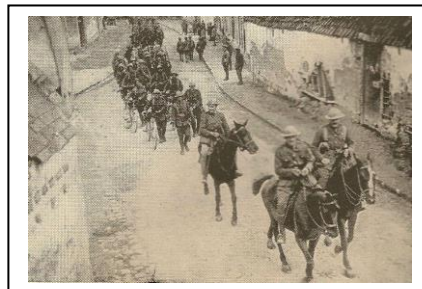


On May 7 the unit was on the move once again and marching to different billets in Berneville where it was to be the subject of a war journalist and photographer.

(continued)

(Right below: Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – as cited immediately above - in early May, perhaps the 7th, of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated*)

At the outset of June, the 1st Battalion 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.

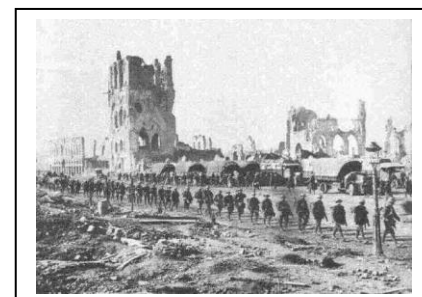


The Newfoundlanders were then soon once again to be moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city. There during the first weeks of July, the 1st Battalion was to be engaged in and near the front line to the north of Ypres, strengthening trenches close to the *Yser Canal*.



(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)

(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)**



The historic city of Ypres is situated in the low-lying area of Belgian *Flanders* which was the only part of the Belgium to be unoccupied un-occupied by German forces during the Great War. This had been the region selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917.

Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.



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

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army. 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 do so fighting their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Belgian Flanders.

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



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

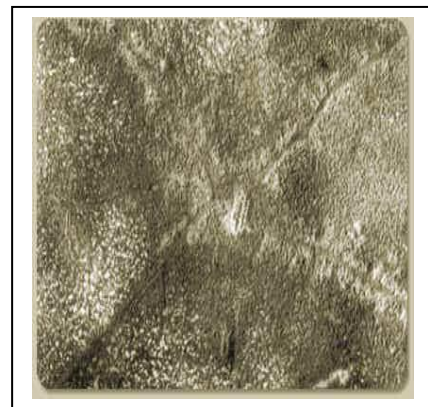
At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost would be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

(Right: *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*)



Following the action at the *Steenbeek* there had then been four weeks of relative calm which was for the Newfoundland Battalion to begin on August 24 with a four-day withdrawal from the forward area to *Penton Camp* to the north-west of Poperinghe. This reprieve would continue while the British forces re-enforced and re-organized after a month of fighting that had not gone as well as the British High Command had optimistically anticipated.

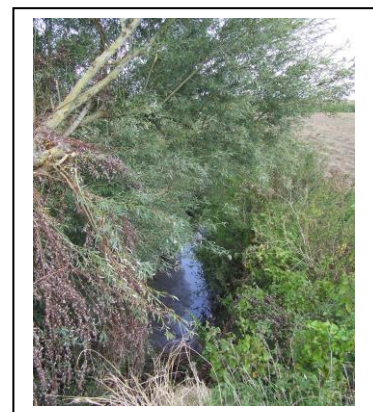
(Right: *The once-village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)



The Newfoundland unit would go back to war during the last days of what had been a fine month of September, in contrast to what had gone before – but, as the fighting at *Passchendaele* had started once more...so had the rains.

The offensive re-commenced for the 1st Battalion on September 25, although the unit had incurred four wounded two days prior to that date due to long-range artillery fire. Back in their forward trenches they prepared for their next concerted attack on German positions. It would come some two weeks later and it would come at the *Broembeek*.

(Right: *An innocuous, placid stream shown here, in 1917 the Broembeek was a torrent which would flood the surrounding terrain, transforming it into a quagmire. – photograph from 2009*)



It was to be only two days after this above-mentioned confrontation that the 1st Battalion then marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe from there to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of Proven. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit was once more to board a train.

By ten-thirty that same evening, the Newfoundland Battalion had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and would now march the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.

It was then on November 17 – having spent four weeks and three days at Berles-au-Bois - that the 1st Battalion was to be ordered once again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it began to move further eastward, now on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while still on the move, the unit would be issued as it went with...*war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of that night it marched up to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the Newfoundland unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, was to move forward into its forming-up area. From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten, bugles blowing, the 1st Battalion advanced to the fray.



(Right above: *The Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

This new offensive – apparently initially conceived to be no more than a large-scale raid - the so-called *Battle of Cambrai*, was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders to be directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle was to begin well for the British who would use tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities were again be squandered. There were no troops available to exploit what had been, admittedly, a hoped-for yet unexpected success, and by the close of the battle, the Germans had counter-attacked and the British had relinquished as much – more in places - territory as they had originally gained.



The Newfoundland Battalion had thus once again been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing and Masnières where a Caribou stands today and in the area of the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who had advanced into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day*.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of the 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether its capture was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012)*

**At five-hundred fifty-three all ranks – not counting the aforementioned ten per cent reserve - the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment even at the outset of the operation was operating at just over fifty per cent of establishment strength: not that it would have been any consolation had it been known, but a goodly number of battalions in all the British and Dominion forces – with perhaps the exception of the Canadians - were encountering the same problem.*



(Right above: *A number of graves of soldiers from the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery. Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, has identified them as being Canadian. – photograph from 2010)*

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

At the beginning of January of 1918, after that snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of the 1st Battalion had returned to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time. There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.



(Right above: *By 1918 Ypres was looking like this; some of these broken buildings had been a school which had served as a shelter for troops in the earlier days of the conflict. – from a vintage post-card)*

* * * * *

On February 26, 1918 – a second, perhaps more trustworthy, source has the date as early as January 14 - Private Dobbin was seconded to the 88th Brigade* Trench Mortar Battery. He was to serve in that unit until April 26 when he re-joined the Newfoundland Battalion.

**It will be remembered that the 88th (British Infantry) Brigade comprised four infantry battalions of which the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was one. It also had its own Machine Gun Company and Trench Mortar Battery to which personnel from the four infantry battalions was often seconded temporarily.*

(Right: *These are French trench mortars from the Great War, similar to those used by British forces. Here they are seen in the entrance to the Invalides Army Museum in Paris although they have since been removed from there.*)



To exactly what sector of the *Front* the 88th Brigade Trench Mortar Battery and Private Dobbin were subsequently posted appears not to be recorded in the available files. However, mortars are short-range weapons, thus they were never very far from the forward area and, as the name suggests, for the most part were installed within the trench system. Moreover, the 88th Brigade fought for the most part as a cohesive unit, so that Private Dobbin was unlikely to ever have been far removed from the positions of the 1st Battalion.

By the time that Private Dobbin returned to serve with his Newfoundland Battalion a further campaign had been fought.

* * * * *

In the meantime, during the first weeks of the interval of Private Dobbin's secondment, the Newfoundland unit's time was to be divided into the usual routine postings: the front-line trenches, behind them the support positions and, yet further to the rear again the various reserve sectors. The troops would move in a rotating pattern which would see them spend approximately a week in each area – although the arrangement was very flexible – and at times there had been further and longer withdrawals to the rear for training, re-organization and what was often to be called rest...although it hardly ever was.

The eight-day respite at *Brake Camp*, Vlamertinghe, from February 4 to 11 inclusive was to be an example of the last-mentioned: work-parties, inspections by...*the Brass...*, the awarding of decorations and the announcement that the Newfoundland Regiment was now, as of January 25 of that 1918, the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment*, were some of the highlights of that particular period.

**The title had been granted on January 25, 1918, in a War Office Letter (Number 058/4282 (AG 10)) – Document Collection 145.2R21 (D6).*

During this interim, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the *Great War*: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them. It was expected that they would launch a spring offensive - which they did: in fact they were to unleash several of them*.



(continued)

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

(Preceding page: Some of the countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders had built a tram-line in January and had been stationed for a week and then five days in March and likewise for five days in early April – photograph from 2011)

In the area of Zonnebeke, the sector where the unit was to be serving in March and April when at *the Front*, the personnel of the Newfoundland Battalion would continue to dig. While the Germans were to go to the offensive elsewhere on earlier dates, the blow would not fall in the northern area until April.

As suggested in the above paragraphs, the Germans, by this time re-enforced, would do as was expected of them: Ludendorff's armies launched a powerful thrust against the British on March 21, the first day of that spring of 1918, although not in the North where the Newfoundlanders were stationed; they struck at first in the area of - and just south of - *the Somme*, there to overrun the battlefields of 1916 and well beyond. For a while their advance appeared unstoppable.



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

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

On the day after the first heavy bombardments of April 9, and as the Germans approached the frontier towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were to be deployed to meet them. On that April 10 the Newfoundlanders, having been due to come out of the line and to move back to the area of *the Somme*, were instead to board buses at three o'clock in the afternoon, thereupon to be directed southward, towards the border town of Nieppe.

They were to be in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, just three hours later.

(Right: The area of La Crêche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station – photograph from 2010.)



The British were pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12th of April the Newfoundland Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, had to make a series of desperate stands.

On April 12-13 – the dates in the 1st Battalion’s War Diary are not clear - during the defensive stand near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of ‘C’ Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of ‘C’ Company thereupon took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with ‘A’ Company, was to forestall a later enemy attack. ‘B’ and ‘D’ Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening – were equally heavily involved.



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

The period from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of the 1st Battalion’s personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough would never materialise and the front was eventually stabilised*.



**The 88th Brigade – and therefore the Newfoundland Battalion – was to be seconded to the 34th Division from the 29th Division during this critical period.*

(Right above: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving the 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there stand several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

The Regimental War Diary cites...*the remainder of ‘C’ Coy. under Capt. Paterson, M.C. and Hqrs. took up a position along a light railway line and prepared to fight to a finish. ...there can be no doubt that it was Hqrs., ‘A’ & ‘C’ Coys. that by their resistance saved what would have been at least a very serious position for the whole 34th Division*.*

The German advance having been held and the danger passed; on April 24 the Newfoundland Battalion had said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the 88th Brigade and 29th Division and on the morrow there had been a recessional parade.

The unit was to later be deployed to another unit, a Scottish infantry division, but for the summer of 1918 it would be ordered moved a world away from Flanders where, as seen in the preceding pages, it had just fought during the crisis of the German spring offensive, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

And, as related in a previous paragraph, April 26 was the date on which Private Dobbin was to return...to duty...with the Newfoundland Battalion after having served some three months with the 88th Brigade Trench Mortar Battery.

* * * * *

(continued)

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – the Newfoundland Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four *other ranks* – had taken a train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étapes, where they had arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening.

Their day, however, had not yet been at an end: there was still a two-hour march ahead of them before the Newfoundlanders would reach their new quarters. On the following day, April 30, they had been on the march again, a further eight kilometres to the community of St-Josse where they were to remain for the next ten days.

St-Josse is at a distance of some five or six kilometres from the coast and about ten kilometres from the well-known sea-side resort of Le Touquet with its fine beach, Paris-Plage. During the next week, and at times afterwards during its next posting, the Battalion would avail of this luxury.

The Newfoundland Battalion remained posted at St-Josse until May 10 when it then marched a further six kilometres inland to the south-east to the community of Écuire where it relieved the troops responsible for the safety and security of the nearby British General Headquarters at Montreuil-sur-Mer and of Douglas Haig, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



(Right above: *Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ – from Illustration*)

The cosmetic honour of this new role masked the reality that the 1st Battalion of the by-then Royal Newfoundland Regiment was no longer capable of serving in the field.

**Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that 1st Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

While it is true that a number of re-enforcement drafts arrived at Écuire during this period, for the most part their numbers were to be in single digits. Even when it later returned to...*active service*...the unit was still below strength.

The posting to Écuire completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders were encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihen* – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.



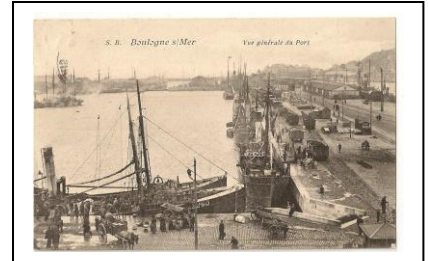
(Right: *A sparsely-populated community of Équihen at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)

****On July 1, 2 and 3, the eleven officers and three-hundred twenty-three other ranks – well under establishment strength - of the Newfoundland Battalion had marched into Equihen Camp from Écuirens. There the unit was to be visited on July 3 by the Right Honourable D.W.F. Lloyd, the new Prime Minister of Newfoundland.***

(Right below: *The French port of Boulogne at or about the period of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The Newfoundlanders returned to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28th Brigade of the 9th Scottish Division. The Newfoundland Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the Ypres *Salient*, it was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today *Ingoogem*).



On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2nd British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive**. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge. After almost four years of stalemate, it was once again to be a conflict of movement.

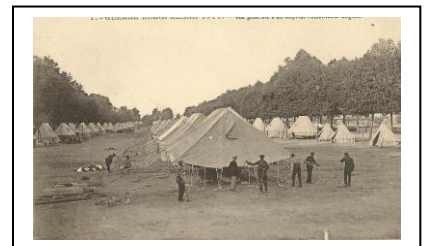
Just prior to this return to...*active service*..., on September 11, Private Dobbin had received promotion and elevated to the rank of lance corporal.

****This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3rd Somme.***

(Right: *British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days Offensive – from Illustration*)



On the morning of October 14, in the area of the village of Ledeghem, the British forces attacked in a fog so dense that recognition and identification for a while was altogether impossible. It was during this action that Lance Corporal Dobbin was wounded, being thereupon evacuated to the 44th Casualty Clearance Station at Brielen with serious injuries to both legs inflicted by gun-fire.



(Right above: *A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the earlier years of the War – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)

The son of David Dobbin, messenger, and of Catherine Dobbin (née *Roberts**) – to whom he had allocated a daily seventy cents (later reduced to fifty) from his pay and to whom he had willed his all - of Wabana Mines, Bell Island - the family apparently having migrated by 1910 from Pilley's Island, Green Bay South, – he was also brother to Thomas J. Dobbin, to Michael, John, Ann, Josephine, Luke, Frances, Mary, and to David Jr..



**The couple had been married on Pilley's Island on October 31 of 1893.*

(Right above: *The re-constructed village of Ledeghem, Belgium, as it is – was - almost a century later – photograph from 2009*)

Lance Corporal Dobbin was reported as having...*died of wounds...*at one o'clock in the morning at the same 44th CCS on October 18, 1918.



Joseph Dobbin had enlisted at a *declared* nineteen years and four months of age: date of birth on Pilley's Island, Newfoundland, January 31, 1897 (from a delayed Newfoundland Birth Registration paper of 1934 via *Ancestry.ca*).

(Right above: *The Caribou at Harlebeke – commemorates the crossing of the Lys Canal and the sacrifices of this last campaign of the Great War. – photograph from 2012*)

Lance Corporal Joseph Dobbin was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also 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 3, 2023.