

PRISONERS OF WAR (POWS)

There were 170 Newfoundland POWs in the Great War; almost one-third of these were captured on a single day—14 April 1917—at Monchy-le-Preux. Newfoundland POWs who were released following the war were debriefed; many of their personal accounts are included in their military service files, available at the Provincial Archives.

POWs existed on near-starvation rations, supplemented by parcels from the home front. Sick or wounded POWs received inadequate care, often resulting in life-long disabilities. POWs, except officers, who were exempt under the Hague Convention, were expected to do manual labour, frequently under harsh supervision.

At least 36 Royal Newfoundland Regiment soldiers died while POWs and were buried behind enemy lines.



Whitfield Bannister (# 889)

Home: Port Rexton
Age when captured: 22
Place and date of capture: Monchy-le-Preux, 14 April 1917

"...here [Fort MacDonald] our hardships began. 100 of us, including 4 Newfoundlanders, were put in a small cell in the fort. This cell was dirty, ill-smelling, with no ventilation; we had to sleep on the concrete floor just as we were with no extra covering of any kind. Our food consisted of 1 slice of black bread with a bowl of dried vegetable water. We had no water to wash with and were not allowed to smoke. The latrine was a barrel in a corner of the cell, and this was for the use of the whole cell-full of 100 men. We worked from 5am to 7pm daily with a break of 20 minutes at noon. Our great coats had been taken away from us, also our cardigan jackets, razors and similar articles....Food was scarce the whole time, and we just had enough to keep body and soul together. No water was given us to wash with, and consequently we got very dirty and lousey both inside and out."

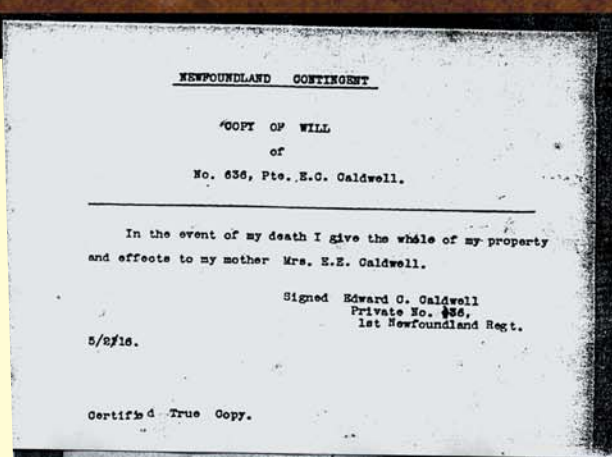
Pte Whitfield Bannister.
Wounded.



Edward Charles Caldwell (# 636)

Home: Brigus
Age when captured: 22
Place and date of capture: Monchy-le-Preux, 14 April 1917

After the war Caldwell studied engineering at McGill University in Montreal.



...(Following capture) "I was working under our own shell fire all the time on the railway dumps and construction work. We had no blankets or greatcoats and were very badly off for food. Our guards were very strict with us and we were kept hard at work all the time."

Pte. E. Charles Caldwell
Wounded.



Arthur F. Jesseau (# 249)

Home: Bay of Islands
Age when captured: 22
Place and date of capture: Monchy-le-Preux, 14 April 1917

Millenfosse POW camp: "We had a hard time of it here; the officer in charge was very cruel to us and was always finding excuses to punish us for the least thing. Except for the parcels of food I don't know how we could have stood it. The sentries did not hesitate to use their rifle-butts and bayonets, and even fired upon our party on several occasions when we attempted to pick up raw turnips or cabbages close to the side of the road along which we were marching."

On escaping: "There were 4 of us altogether. We were out for about 8 days when we arrived near Mons [Belgium] and between Nouvelles and Mons we hid ourselves in the civilian houses....we saw the Canadians advancing and we went and met them. They refused at first to allow us through as we were in civilian clothes, and they were on the lookout for spies."

Jesseau was mentioned in Despatches:

1/10/17. A. JESSEAU
London Gazette 1/6/17
Daily Orders 1st No. 4/4/17
with Private Status.
"A most patient, successful and patient soldier. By his skill he has done his best for the cause. He was captured in action better to locate a soldier, he was shot in the arm. He did not return for the war when 1/17. Jesseau promptly killed him."

