



Lance Corporal Walter Ernest Alexander (Regimental Number 1504) lies buried in Beauval Communal Cemetery – Grave reference B. 39.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as being that of a fireman (likely the one heating the boiler of a railway locomotive rather than the one fighting fires) and earning a monthly \$54.00, Walter Ernest Alexander presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's and also enlisted - at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 - on April 30, 1915. He then attested on the following day, May 1*.



He had also apparently previously experienced life in the military, having served with the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment.

****A second source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.***

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Private Alexander embarked on board His Majesty's Transport *Calgarian* (previous page – original photograph from the *Provincial Archives*) on June 20 in St. John's Harbour and sailed (*almost**) directly to the United Kingdom. He was one of the two-hundred forty-two men of 'F' Company and eighty-five naval reservists to take passage on that day.

**Apparently the ship took nineteen days to make what was usually the journey of about a week. Not only was Calgarian escorting three submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders apparently even having the time to cross the straits to spend a few hours in North Africa. She reached Liverpool on July 9.*



(Right above: *the Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background.* – from a vintage postcard)

On the day after its arrival in the United Kingdom, 'F' Company marched from the railway station and reported *to duty* at Stobs Camp near the Scottish town of Hawick on the evening of July 10. It was an important moment: the Newfoundland Regiment, as of that day counting fifteen hundred personnel, was now at fighting strength and could be posted on *active service*.



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

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

'E' and 'F' Companies – the latter having arrived at Stobs Camp on July 10 - were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were to form the nucleus of the newly-formed 2nd (*Reserve*) Battalion. The Depot was to become his home for the following seven months, both as Private Alexander and, as of November 11 when he received his promotion, as Lance Corporal Alexander.

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



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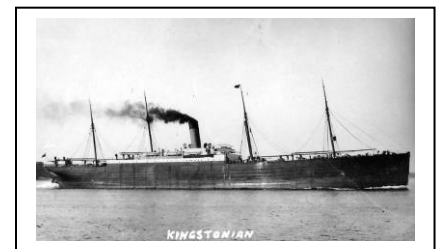
(Previous page: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

It was not until March 13 of the following year, 1916, that Lance Corporal Alexander, as a non-commissioned officer of the 2nd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the naval establishment of Devonport on the English south coast, en route – although no-one knew it at the time – for France.

The Newfoundlanders - somewhat surprisingly - were to travel by way of Egypt*. By that time Lance Corporal Alexander had re-enlisted at Ayr, on February 1, some six weeks before his departure from there.**

**At the time there was some confusion as to whether 1st Battalion would stay in the Middle East or not, and this draft apparently had orders to set sail for Egypt. However, there was surely a bureaucratic foul-up as 1st Battalion embarked in Egypt on only the following day for passage to France. The two ships presumably passed each other in the Mediterranean Sea, going in opposite directions.*

One can only suppose that the ship from Devonport was carrying supplies, equipment and/ or other personnel that were needed in the Middle East and therefore could not be turned around – either that or the vessel had no radio. The 1st Draft then voyaged to Marseilles from Alexandria on HMT Kingstonian (right).



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

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

The draft of one-hundred forty *other ranks*, under the command of Captain Ledingham, having disembarked in the French Mediterranean port of Marseilles on April 3, joined 1st Battalion on April 8 in the small town of Louvencourt where the parent unit – still on its march towards the front - had already been billeted for two days.



Five days later, on April 13, 1st Battalion marched into the village of Englebelmer – situated at some three kilometres behind the front - where the Newfoundlanders were billeted, welcomed re-enforcements from Rouen on the 15th and, on the evening of that day, were ordered forward into the British lines to work in some of the communication trenches.



(Preceding page: *part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the meandering river that flowed – and today still flows – innocuously through the southern part of the region to which it lends its name, *the Somme*.

The son of Robert Alexander*, woodman and engine-driver, and Annie Alexander – to whom he had willed his all - of Holly Hill, Bergh Apton, Norwich, England, he was also brother of Harry and Edith, and half-brother to Robert. He himself is recorded as native to England but also as being a resident of Boswarlos on the Port au Port Peninsula. There he had a friend, a Miss Maud Harvey to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay.

**Robert Alexander was remarried in 1890, after the death of his first wife, to Sarah Anne (Annie) Hatch, a widow.*

Lance Corporal Alexander was reported as *wounded in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, incurring shrapnel wounds to the head while serving with the Re-enforcement Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*.

He was evacuated from the field and subsequently admitted into the 4th Casualty Clearing Station at Beauval on July 2. He was reported by the Officer Commanding the 4th CCS as having *died of wounds* on July 5.

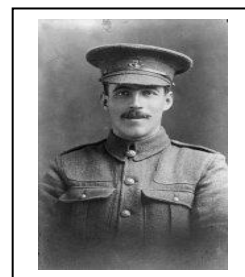
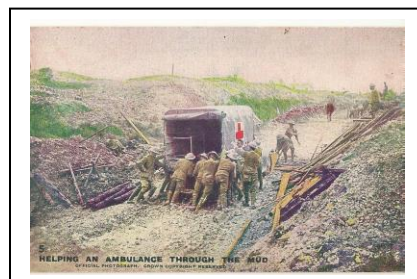
(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel - looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences - The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph from 2009*)

(Right: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and manpower – from a vintage post-card*)

Walter Ernest Alexander had enlisted at twenty-three years and six months of age – born on October 23, 1891 at 10 pm.

(*The photograph of Lance Corporal Alexander has been donated to the Grand Banks Genealogy web-site by John Ling.*)

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Lance Corporal Walter Ernest Alexander was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

