

Private Albert Victor Coles (Regimental Number 1813), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Albert Victor Coles presented himself for medical examination and then also enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on September 3, 1915 – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10. He then attested on the following day, September 4.

Private Coles and the other personnel of 'G' Company – apparently in the company of several naval reservists and also some German prisoners (these latter presumably to remain in Canada) - left St. John's by train on October 27, to cross the island to Port aux Basques.

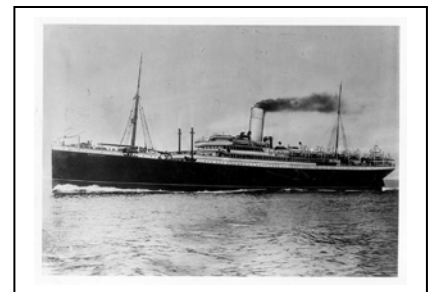
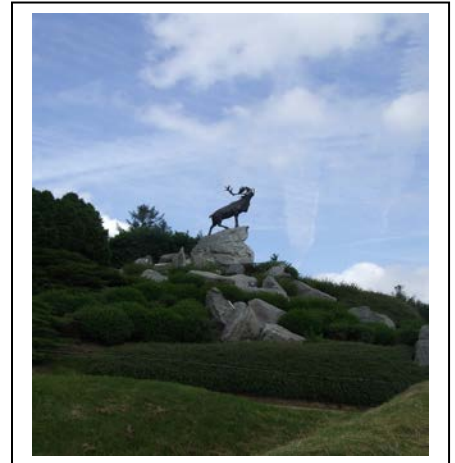
The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry from Port aux Basques, and proceeded by train from North Sydney on to Quebec City.

At Québec the Newfoundlanders boarded His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* (above) on or about October 31 for trans-Atlantic passage. Also travelling to the United Kingdom, having boarded the vessel in Montreal, were Canadian military personnel: the 55th Canadian Infantry Battalion and the 2nd Draft of the (1st) Divisional Signals Company.

After an uneventful crossing, *Corsican* arrived on November 9 in the harbour of the English south-coast naval facility of Devonport.

By the morning of the following day, November 10, the new arrivals had travelled by train and had gone north to Scotland. There they had been temporarily billeted in huts in a military camp at Gales, not far removed from the new Regimental Depot where accommodation for the contingent was as yet not available.

That new Regimental Depot had been established during the 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 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were to be despatched in drafts, at first to serve in Gallipoli and then subsequently to the *Western Front*, where they would bolster the four fighting companies of the 1st Battalion.

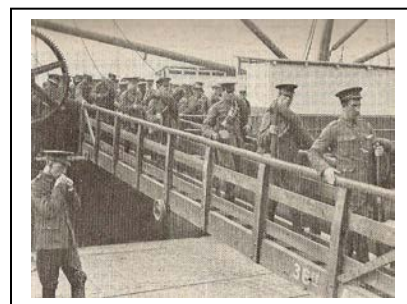


(Right above: *An aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that, on March 3, some four months and a half before his departure to France on *active service*, Private Coles was prevailed upon to re-enlist *for the duration of the War**.

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

On July 16, Private Coles, as a soldier of the 9th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on his way to report to 1st Battalion on the Continent. Arriving on the following day, the 17th, in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, the Draft was posted there for several days of final training and organization* before setting out to rendezvous with the parent unit .



(Right above: *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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

By this date, of course, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had fought at Beaumont-Hamel and by now was desperately in need of re-enforcement. Its remnants had subsequently been ordered withdrawn from the forward area and were regrouping, at the end of the month of July to be sent north, into the *Kingdom of Belgium*, there to serve in the *Ypres Salient*.

It was, in fact, to be in the *Ypres Salient* on August 13 (recorded elsewhere as being on the 14th) that Private Coles' detachment from Rouen, a small group of only nine *other ranks*, reported *to duty* on a day when most personnel of the 1st Battalion was engaged in work under the watchful eyes of the Royal Engineers.



(Right above: *The city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – and eight months before the Newfoundlanders were posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)

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By this time the first companies of the Newfoundland Regiment had been on overseas service for some twenty-two months. The unit had spent the late fall of 1914 and then the subsequent winter at a series of postings: the large British Army Camp on Salisbury Plain; Fort George on the Firth of Moray and close to the city of Inverness; Edinburgh Castle where it had provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles; then finally *Stobs Camp** in the vicinity of Hawick before its four senior Companies were to move south at the beginning of August of that 1915 to Aldershot - and the junior Companies to Ayr where they had formed the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

The four Companies at Aldershot had thereupon trained for two weeks and had been inspected by King George V before, on August 20, having boarded the ocean-liner *Megantic* – requisitioned as a troop transport – for the voyage to the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea and to the fighting in Gallipoli.

(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* – photograph from *Bain News Services* via *Wikipedia*)



Until the late spring of 1915, the Newfoundland Regiment had had insufficient personnel to form a battalion of establishment strength and could therefore not be despatched to a theatre of war for active service. This had all changed with the arrival of 'F' Company at Stobs Camp which had brought the numbers up to – and beyond – the required fifteen hundred and it was not long before the 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, was attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



Apart from a few days in mid-April of 1917, the 1st Battalion was to serve continuously with the 88th Brigade and the 29th Division until the end of that same month.

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

After its travels eastward, a journey which had included a two-week stay at the *British Abbassia Barracks* in the outskirts of the Egyptian capital city of Cairo, on the night of September 19-20 the Newfoundlanders had disembarked at *Suvla Bay* on the Gallipoli Peninsula to re-enforce the British troops already landed there.

Suvla Bay was to be a sobering experience for all involved there, perhaps particularly for the British who would be forced to withdraw from there exactly three months after the arrival of the 1st Battalion. Surrounded by a semi-circle of hills held by the Turks who – contrary to British expectations – had fought very well, the British forces, poorly led by second-rate senior officers, plagued by dysentery and surprised by floods followed by frost-bite, re-embarked on the night of December 19-20 and sailed away.

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(Right: 'Kangaroo Beach', where the 1st Battalion landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, 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 from 2011)



The Newfoundlanders, having formed a part of the rear guard, were to be among the last to leave the beaches.

Two days later the 1st Battalion would be transferred to Cape Helles on the western tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula where the British had still been holding on. They were soon, however, on January 8-9, to be abandoning Cape Helles as well* and to be sailing back to Egypt.



****The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment once more supplied personnel for the rear guard, and it was Lieutenant Owen Steele from St. John's who was the last soldier to step into the final boat to leave Gallipoli behind.***

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



(Right: The same 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces and by the Newfoundlanders who were again among the last soldiers to leave the beach: vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture above are still to be seen – photograph from 2011)

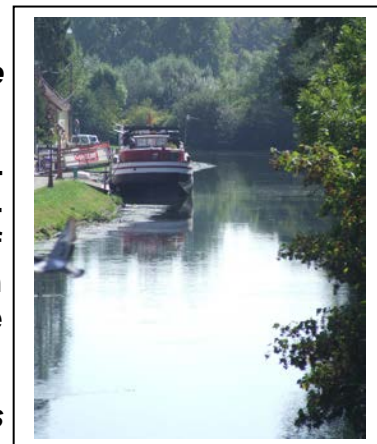


Having then spent two months in Egypt in the area of Suez at the southern end of the Canal of the same name, the 1st Battalion was now to be transported back to France where the 29th Division, it had finally been decided, was to fight on the *Western Front*. Having embarked on March 14, the ship carrying the Newfoundlanders had docked eight days later in the French Mediterranean port of Marseilles.

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

From Marseilles the 1st Battalion would take a train for the three-day journey northwards to the nondescript community of Pont-Rémy where it had alighted at two o'clock in the morning of March 25 for the long march to its billets. An even longer march had now been in the offing before their destination was to be reached.

(Right: The Somme seen from the bridge at Pont-Rémy as it flows through the community – photograph from 2010)



On April 13 the Newfoundland unit had marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy and two kilometres behind the Front - where the Newfoundlanders had been billeted, had welcomed re-enforcements on the 15th and, on the evening of that same day, had been introduced into the British lines of the *Western Front*, there to be immediately set to work to improve the communication trenches.

The Newfoundlanders would also soon be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for that meandering river over which they had marched those three weeks before at Pont-Rémy: *the Somme*.

(Right below: *A part of the re-constructed trench system in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)

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*.



**Perhaps ironically, the majority of the Battalion's casualties was sustained while advancing 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*. It had been the biggest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps worse, it was to continue for the next four and a half months.



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

(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village. – photographs from 2010 & 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.



Such had then been the dire condition of the attacking forces that it was feared a German counter-assault might well annihilate what had survived of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*. The remnants had thus remained in the trenches, at night searching for the wounded and burying the dead. It was to be July 6 before the Newfoundlanders were to be ordered back to Englebelmer and a further two before the unit had marched to 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 re-enforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported *to duty*. They had been the first to arrive following the disaster at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion 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 battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into 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.



It was there, as seen on a previous page, that Private Coles' small draft was to join the parent unit on August 13-14.

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

On September 18, the 1st Battalion was preparing to leave the relative security of their quarters in Ypres and to relieve the Iniskinning Fusiliers in the left line of defences. While no infantry action was to be documented, the Regimental War Diary entry of the day reported that the front line was being heavily bombarded by enemy trench mortars.



The son of Matthew Coles (deceased May 13, 1921) former fisherman – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay – and of Sarah Coles (née Whelan, deceased June 16, 1906) of Savage Cove in the Straits of Belle Isle, he was likely brother to Susannah and Mary.

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(Right above: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

Private Coles was reported as having been *killed in action* while serving with 'A' Company on that September 18, 1916.

At home, it was the Reverend G.H. Maidment who was requested to bear the news to his family.

Albert Victor Coles had enlisted at the declared age of twenty-two years and eight months: date of birth at Savage Cove, White Bay, Newfoundland, February 22-23, 1893 (from Newfoundland Birth Register).

Private Albert Victor Coles was eligible for the British War Medal (on left) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

