

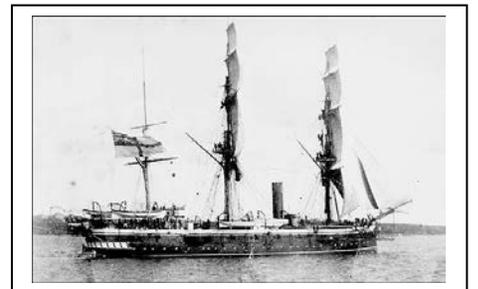
Private Harrison Crocker (Regimental Number 1186), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation previous to his military service recorded as that of a fisherman working for *Hollett Brothers* of Burin, and earning \$300.00 per annum, Harrison Crocker presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on March 6, 1915. He then enlisted two days later – engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem - on March 8, before attesting eight days later again, on March 16.



This was apparently the second occasion on which Harrison Crocker was to enlist into His Majesty's Armed Forces. The records of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve show that he had presented himself on January 8 of 1914 – some eight months before the onset of the Great War – for both a medical examination and *...to be enrolled as a Seaman...and that...if approved, I undertake 28 days drill immediately on board HMS Calypso**.

**This formation had been created in 1902 as at that time the independent Dominion of Newfoundland possessed no military force of its own. The British Admiralty had thereupon designated an elderly cruiser superfluous to its needs, HMS Calypso, to become the training vessel for this new force and she was eventually stationed in the harbour in St. John's – in 1916 she was re-named Briton as a new Calypso was being commissioned at this time.*



(Right above: *The image of HMS Calypso on board which Seaman Crocker drilled for twenty-eight days during the winter of 1914 prior to the Great War, is from the Provincial Archives.*)

The volunteers for service up until the outbreak of the Great War were for the most part fishermen who, as did Seaman Crocker, dedicated some weeks of each year – during a period when there was no fishing to be undertaken – to training on board Calypso.

(Credit for photograph of Seaman Crocker – see further below)

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The only indication among his papers to suggest why the military service of Harrison Crocker during the Great War was spent in the Newfoundland Regiment rather than in the Naval Reserve is that of the brief entry written in large pencil across his naval enlistment form: *22 August 1914...was unfit*

Seven months later he was deemed fit enough to re-enlist, into the Newfoundland Regiment.

Private Crocker of 'E' Company embarked in St. John's on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* (right above – from the *Provincial Archives*) some two months later again, on April 22, 1915.

The ship sailed to Halifax where his contingent took ship on His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right) for the crossing to Liverpool – the ship departed Halifax on April 25 and docked eight days later, on May 3. Also taking passage on the vessel were the Railway Supply Depot and the Field Bakery of the Canadian Army Service Corps.



From Liverpool the Newfoundlanders travelled by train to Edinburgh where they arrived on May 2. 'E' Company was to have but a few days to savor the charms of the Scottish capital.

Only nine days later, on May 11, the entire Battalion was posted for training from Edinburgh to a tented Stobs Camp near the Scottish town of Hawick.



(Right: *the Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp on June 10, the day it received its Colours* – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

From Stobs, some thirteen weeks later again, in early August, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the senior Companies now become the 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.

When he was apprised of his transfer seems not to be recorded, but Private Crocker was one of the few from 'E' Company who were to swell the ranks of the units posted to Aldershot - thus he became a soldier of 'A' Company. It was during the period while he was at Aldershot, and as was the case with the great majority of the Newfoundland troops, that Private Crocker was prevailed upon to re-enlist *for the duration of the war*. This he did on August 15*.

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****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 August 20, 1915, Private Crocker took ship on board the requisitioned passenger liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting in Gallipoli where, a month later – of which two weeks had been spent billeted at the British barracks at Abbassia, near the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, 1st Battalion landed on the beach at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

(Right above: The image of the White Star liner *Megantic* in her pre-War livery is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

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

(Right: ‘Kangaroo Beach’, where 1st Battalion landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still visible in the foreground on ‘A’ Beach. – photograph from 2011)

(Right: almost a century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where Private Crocker served during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

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

On the night of December 19-20, the British abandoned their positions and withdrew from Suvla Bay, the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, forming a part of the rear-guard on that occasion.

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1st Battalion was transferred two days later to Cape Helles on the western tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The Newfoundlanders were soon, on the night of January 8-9, to be abandoning Cape Helles as well.

(Right: '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 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)



When the British evacuated the entire Gallipoli Peninsula in January of 1916, 1st Battalion was sent to Alexandria, arriving there on the 15th of that month. From there the Newfoundlanders were transferred, almost immediately, south to Suez where they were to await further orders. To that point it seems that the theatre of the future posting of 29th Division was still uncertain.

(Right: The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The Newfoundlanders, employed as the rear-guard, were among the last to leave on two occasions. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)



On February 27, Private Crocker was admitted into the 18th Stationary Hospital at Suez for attention to venereal disease. He was discharged *to duty* on April 8 to the 29th Base Depot in Alexandria. Only three days later, on the 11th, he was admitted into Reception Hospital and transferred immediately to the 17th General Hospital at Alexandria, his problem having returned and now deemed as severe.



(Right above: a main thoroughfare in the Egyptian city of Alexandria at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

(Right: British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles.)

By this time 1st Battalion had already sailed for – and disembarked in – the French Mediterranean port of Marseilles. Private Crocker followed, embarking at Alexandria on May 30, reaching Marseilles on June 6, then proceeding to the Base Depot at Rouen.



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He reported *to duty* with 1st Battalion – one of a draft of sixty-six *other ranks* to do so, most of them from the Regimental Depot at Ayr - on the day that some eight-hundred personnel marched from Louvencourt to the front to do battle on the morrow. The date was June 30*.

The son of Samuel Crocker – also fisherman - and Emily Crocker (née *Peddle*) – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of seventy cents from his pay - of Heart's Delight, Trinity Bay, he was also brother to Heber**, to Wallace, 20; to Ananias, 18; to William, 12; to Chesley, 10; to Jane, 6; Clide (sic) and to Earle, 4 (ages in or about 1919).



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

Private Crocker was at first reported as *missing in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'A' Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*.



However, a letter subsequently submitted on September 29 of that same year by the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion, Grenadier Guards, cited the identification of his remains and their burial on or about September 22. The record of Private Crocker was thus amended so as to read *killed in action*.

Harrison Crocker had enlisted at nineteen years of age: date of birth at Hearts Delight, Newfoundland, according to Church of England Parish Records, September 24, 1895.

**In fact, June 30 was originally the date for which the attack had been planned: bad weather had resulted in its postponement for twenty-four hours. Had the original date of the attack been adhered to, Private Crocker's contingent may have arrived too late to play a role in the fighting.*

**Private Heber Crocker, Regimental Number 2412, survived the conflict.*

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

Private Harrison Crocker was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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(Right below: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village (see below). – photographs from 2010 & 2015)*

**In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists as such today – at the time comprising two communities and the land lying between them: 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, and where the action of July 1 was fought, was on land that today still lies between Beaumont and Hamel.



Addendum: I would like to acknowledge the information afforded to me by Mr. William Harrison Crocker Jr., great nephew of Private Crocker, his cousin Scott Murray (also a great-nephew of Private Crocker), and also his father, William Harrison Crocker Sr., who provided the photograph of Seaman Crocker in uniform.

