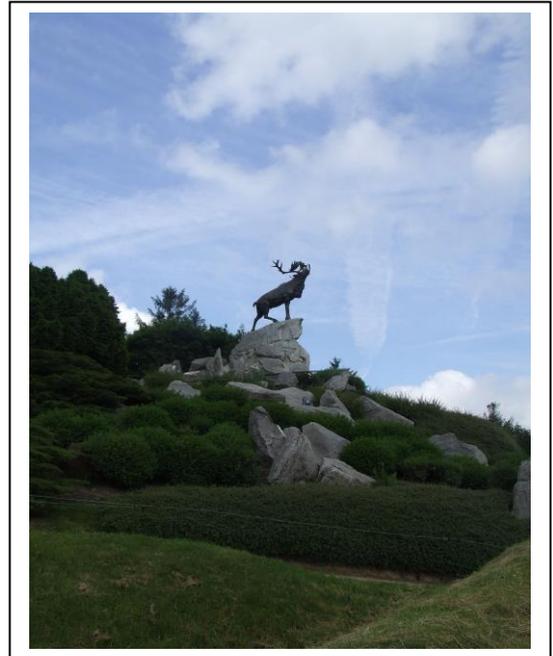




Private Almer (elsewhere found as *Elmer*) Dicks (Regimental Number 3539), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *sailor* earning a monthly thirty dollars, Almer Dicks was a volunteer of the Fourteenth Recruitment Draft. He presented himself for medical examination on March 12, 1917, 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.*

It was to be on the day of that medical assessment, March 12, and at the same venue, that Almer Dicks would enlist. He was thus 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.

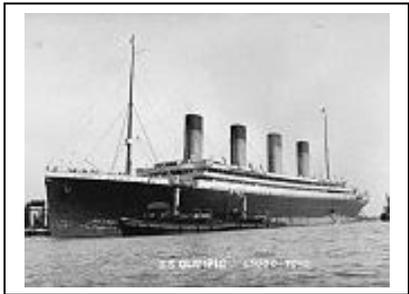
**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.*

Only some few hours were now to follow before there then came to pass, while still at the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On that same twelfth day of that month of March he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, Almer Dicks became...*a soldier of the King*.

There were now to pass ten weeks less two days after his attestation before Private Dicks, Number 3539, was to leave Newfoundland for *overseas service*. 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 temporarily to work and was perhaps to spend time at his home at Harbour Buffett in Placentia Bay, although of course this is only speculation and he may well have chosen – or more likely *been* chosen - to remain in barracks in St. John's, even though there was apparently little in the way of military training to be undertaken*.

****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.***

Those ten weeks since attestation having passed, Private Dicks was to be one of a contingent of three officers and one-hundred eighty-two *other ranks* – a draft to which had been appended ninety-nine recruits of the newly-formed Newfoundland Forestry Unit - which sailed from St. John's on May 19 having embarked onto the Bowring Brother's vessel *Florizel*, to reach Halifax some two days afterwards.



From there the Newfoundlanders were to traverse the Atlantic on an unspecified ship*, although it may well be that the transport in question was to be one of the largest ocean-going vessels of its day: *Olympic*.

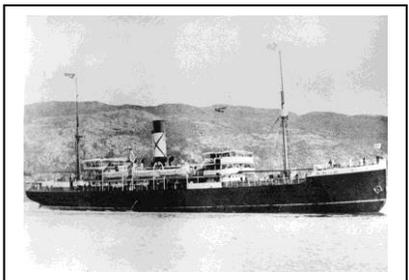
(Right above: *The White Star liner Olympic – sister ship to the ill-starred Titanic and also Britannic which, as a hospital ship, had been sunk in November of 1916 – had been requisitioned to serve as a troop transport during the war. She sailed on this occasion on June 2 from Halifax with as many as six-thousand Canadian military personnel on board and as there appear to have been no other departures on or about this date, she may also have accommodated the Newfoundland contingent. – from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site)*

****It could just also have been – both sailed on May 21 – either Tunisian or Missanabie.***

Once having arrived and dis-embarked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on June 9 – this the date on which *Olympic* docked – Private Dicks and his contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland to report there to the Regiment Depot.

* * * * *

Some two years and ten months prior to that month of June of 1917 when Private Dicks was to find himself in Scotland, 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 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 in October of 1914 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. 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.



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

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: *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*, under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.

(Right: *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*)



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

This had been an all-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.**

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 by that time become the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, had been transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England.



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

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: *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 taken from the Bain News Services as presented by the Wikipedia web-site.*)

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 first re-enforcements to be dispatched to the 1st Battalion.



(Right: *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*)

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 centuries later 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.



(Right above: *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.*

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

A further seven weeks plus a day were now to pass before the first one-hundred personnel 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 to be affected, even fatally, by an ongoing 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 designated 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.

A further draft from Newfoundland arrived at Ayr towards mid-summer, this comprising a two-company detachment and some naval reservists, sailors who, having disembarked from *Sicilian* in Devonport, were to remain there in England.

Some weeks later again *Sicilian* would sail from Newfoundland once more to arrive in England in the first week in September, 1916, with two-hundred forty-two recruits on board. By the 5th day of the month the new-comers, formerly 'C' Company of the 3rd Battalion stationed back in St. John's, had reported to the Regimental Depot.

There was now to be a particularly protracted interval before any large numbers re-enforcements were to arrive from Newfoundland – a problem which was later to affect the capabilities of the parent 1st Battalion fighting on the Continent.

The main cause of the difficulty, as seen further above, would be those troops which had been dispatched from St. John's and had reached Halifax on board *Florizel* at the end of January, 1917, only to be then held there for some three months before they were to arrive in Scotland where the regulation fourteen weeks of training then awaited them – although in the case of most of this draft, this period was to be much shorter than prescribed.

Another fifty or so recruits would arrive a week later, perhaps on *Olympic*, from Halifax via Liverpool and yet a further one-hundred eighty-five at the beginning of June, this the draft of which Private Dicks was a soldier - but the number of potential recruits to be found in Newfoundland was by now diminishing.

There was to be only a single exception to the above sequence of departures of re-enforcement contingents from Newfoundland and their arrival at the Regimental Depot in Scotland and that was the draft of March 17. Because of the quarantine in Windsor, Nova Scotia, imposed upon those who had sailed from home on January 31 of 1917, this subsequent contingent, comprising for the most part the Eleventh Recruitment Draft, had thus leap-frogged the Windsor Draft to dock in Liverpool and report to Ayr three weeks and two days ahead of it.

By this time the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment serving on the Continent, particularly after the fighting of April 14 at Monchy-le-Preux (see further below), was becoming critically short of personnel and the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was becoming hard-pressed to find replacements for these losses.

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, and was 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 seen here almost a century after it hosted the officers of the Newfoundland Regiment – photograph from 2012)

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



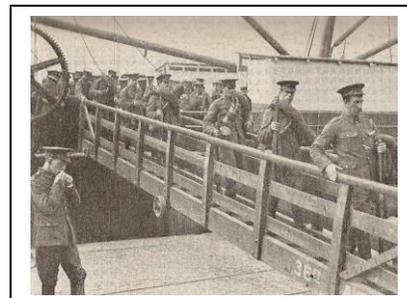
At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to be able to accommodate the number of new arrivals – plus men from other British regiments which were still being billeted in the area...and a measles epidemic which was to claim the life of several Regiment personnel – but by the spring of 1916, things 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 if not, in the grandstand or a tented camp at the newly-built racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr*.

****Not that Private Dicks was to spend all of time at Ayr. During the summer months of 1917, the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.***

It was not to be until on or about December 2 of that 1917 that Private Dicks was to take ship again, on this occasion on his way to France He thus passed through the English south-coast port-city of Southampton, one of the one-hundred eleven *other ranks* of the 34th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr.

By that time, the majority of the recruits of the Fourteenth Recruitment Draft in whose company he had enlisted, had already crossed the English Channel to serve on the Continent; however, Private Dicks had instead been admitted into the *Heathfield Hospital* at Ayr from November 3 to 19, there to receive medical attention for a suspected case of diphtheria.

Private Dicks' draft disembarked in Rouen on the River Seine on December 4 and made its way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot established in the vicinity, for a few days of final training and organization* before making its way to a rendezvous with the parent 1st Battalion.



(Right: *British troops at an earlier time of the Great War 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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Following those above-mentioned days of final training, a further draft of fifty-five *other ranks* dispatched from Rouen – Private Dicks one of that number - eventually reported...*to duty*...on December 11. By then the Newfoundland Battalion had left behind it – as of December 4 - the theatre of the *Battle of Cambrai* (see further below).

* * * * *

By the time of that December of 1918, the first contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment had already been serving overseas for some three years and two months. The 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been formed – in the spring of 1916 - and multiple drafts had been dispatched from Ayr and Barry to supplement the strength of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment (see immediately below).

(Right: *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.*)



As for Almer Dicks, by that December 11 he had been a soldier of the Newfoundland Regiment for two-hundred seventy-four 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*.

(continued)

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



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



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 below: *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: *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.

(continued)

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.

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



**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: '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 British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit 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.



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

(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 again in 1940 for government service in the Second World War. In 1950 she was broken up.*)

(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 and published in Illustration*)



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

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*)

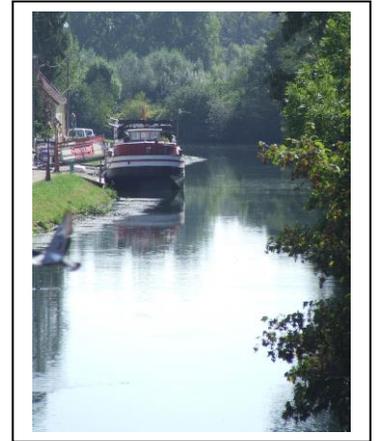
The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.



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.

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

It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled 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.



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.

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

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

On April 13, the entire Newfoundland 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 above: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)*)

(continued)

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.

**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: *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 to the right in the photograph – photograph from 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.



(Right above: *Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park – photograph from 2009(?)*)

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

**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.*



(continued)

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 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 four and a half months.

(Preceding page: *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.

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 the shattered survivors 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 Mailly-Maillet.

(Right above: *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 at Mailly-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 above: *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*)

(Right: *The same re-constructed ramparts as shown above, viewed from just outside the city walls and the far side of the moat which still partially surrounds the place – image 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 north and enter the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

(Right: *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*.

(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*)

***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.**

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

(continued)



(Preceding page: *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*)

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.*

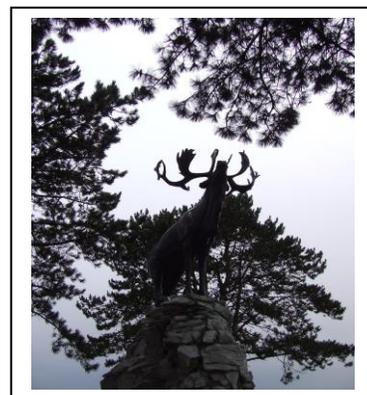
Just four days after unit's return to France from Belgium, on October 12 of 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to take to the offensive; it was at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.



(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*)

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

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



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*)

On October 30, the Newfoundland unit had eventually retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving continuously in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks retired to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the Battalion had started to wend its way back to the front lines.

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

Back at *the Front* the Newfoundland unit had continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties, almost all likely due to enemy artillery – during the late fall and early winter. It was to be a period interrupted only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas season, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.



The parent unit had therefore begun to retire in anticipation thereof once again from *the Front* on December 8, although a goodly number of its personnel, two-hundred-sixty *other ranks* - more than fifty per cent of its strength at the time - was to be seconded on December 11 for several days' work at Carnoy and at Fricourt.

The afore-mentioned Christmas festivities – apparently a turkey dinner washed down with...*real English ale*...- having been completed, it was not to be until a further sixteen days had passed that on January 11 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.

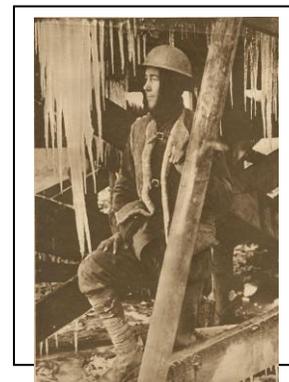
From the railway station there it had then entrained for the small town of Corbie where it thereupon took over billets which it already occupied for a short period only two months before. Days later again the unit had continued its progress, once again on foot, back up to the forward area and to...*active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

That recent six-week Christmas respite spent far to the rear by now 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 by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatalities – of 1917.

And it had been by then 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 had 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 had been at least partially undertaken from February 4 to 18 in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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*)

On February 18 the 1st Battalion would begin a five-day trek back from there to the forward area where it was to go back into the firing-line on February 23 to relieve a unit of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. It had been at a place called Sully-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans would be 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 withdrawn on February 25...to return three days later.



The Battalion had by then been carrying with it orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Sully-Saillisel...to be carried out on March 1.

(Right above: *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(?)*)

The aforesaid planned raid of the German positions at Sully-Saillisel was to go ahead a little later than scheduled as it appears that the enemy had also made plans. The reciprocal infantry action(s) had thus continued for the better part of two days, March 2 and 3.

In fact, that sharp engagement at Sully-Saillisel was to be the sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during the entire period from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917. The action would also serve to 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 had been ordered retired to the rear by train, to an encampment at Meaulté. There, and later at *Camps-en-Amienois* – even further behind the lines and where the unit had spent the preceding Christmas period – the 1st Battalion would spend almost the entire remainder of the month.

The month of March would be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events.

They had 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: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from The War Illustrated*)



(continued)

(Right: *The remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War, in early 1916 – from Illustration*)



On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had commenced making 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: *The Canadian National Memorial which has stood atop Vimy Ridge since 1936 – photograph from 2010*)



On April 9 the British Army had 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.



(Right: *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*)

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 had proved to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war: four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone*.



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

After the debacle of April 14 the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had 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 had 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.

There had been 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 had 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* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This had in fact been an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies.

It apparently had not been 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.

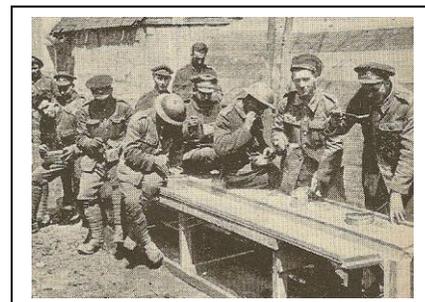
And the Newfoundlanders had also sustained further casualties: ten...*killed in action*, three ...*missing in action*, and forty-eight...*wounded*.



Late on that evening of April 23, the 1st Battalion had been ordered to retire 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* had by that time been proceeding to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-month – May 15 - but the Newfoundland unit was not to be further involved in any co-ordinated offensive action – it had been too exhausted; this now would be a period when the 1st Battalion was to be posted in a nondescript fashion on the *Arras Front*, in and out of the quieter trenches.

On May 7 it had been 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.

(Right: 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 had retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and in training for the upcoming British summer offensive – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

The Newfoundlanders, then having moved across the Franco-Belgian frontier at the end of June and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, were to spend only their first few days, enough time to receive re-enforcements, at *Caribou Camp*.

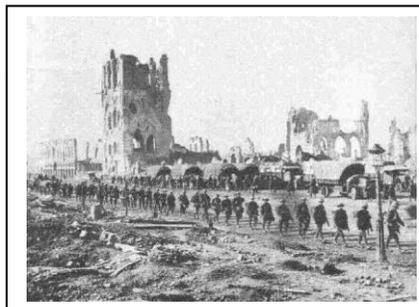


The unit's next posting, on July 5, was to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.

The Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of the *Canal* for a week before it was withdrawn to prepare for the upcoming battle to commence on July 31.

(Right above: *The Yser Canal to the north of the city of Ypres (today Ieper): In July of 1917 the Newfoundlanders were stationed in the vicinity of this spot, 'A', 'C' and 'D' Companies to serve in the front lines and also in the immediate reserve on the east bank of the waterway (to the right in the photograph), with 'B' Company and HQ remaining on the western side. – photograph from 2013)*

The low-lying area of Belgian *Flanders*, in which the Newfoundland Battalion was stationed in that July of 1917 – this being the only part of that country unoccupied by German forces - had been 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 principal objectives.



(Preceding page: *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*)*

(continued)

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.

(Right above: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – Passchendaele field in the fall of 1917 – from Illustration*)



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

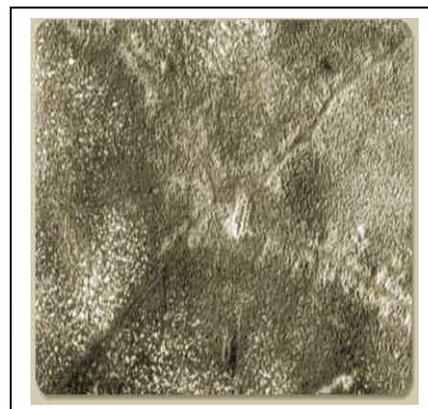
At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost would be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

A week and a day following the mid-August engagement at the *Steenbeek* there had then been four weeks of relative calm which, for the Newfoundland Battalion, were to begin on August 24 with a four-day withdrawal from the fighting and the forward area to *Penton Camp* to the north-west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe.



This reprieve continued while the British forces re-enforced and re-organized after a month of fighting that had not been proceeding as well as the British High Command had optimistically anticipated.

(Right above: *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*)



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

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

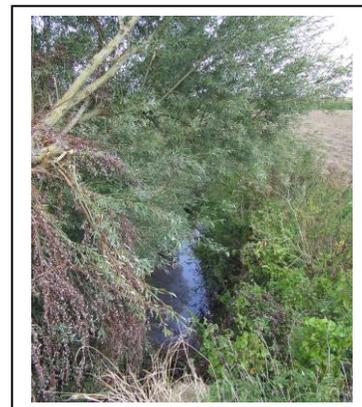
Once back in their trenches in late September and early October the personnel of the Newfoundland unit had prepared for their next concerted attack on German positions. It would come two weeks later and it would come at the *Broembeek*,

Two days following the affair at the *Broembeek* and having been relieved, on October 11 the Newfoundlanders had marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe to be transported to *Swindon Camp* near Proven.

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

Having remained there at *Swindon Camp* for a further five days to be both re-enforced, as seen, and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the Newfoundlanders were once more to board a train.

By ten-thirty on the evening of that above-mentioned October 17 the Newfoundland Battalion had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and was then to march the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.



The unit was still there at Berles-au-Bois three weeks less two days later when, on November 17, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to be ordered yet again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it had begun to move further eastward, by this time on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while on the move, the Battalion would be issued as it went with...*war stores, rations and equipment.* For much of the night it had marched to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, had moved up into its forming-up area.

From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten that morning, and with bugles blowing, the 1st Battalion had 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 had used tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities were again be squandered. There had been no troops available to exploit what was, 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 thus once again had been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of the communities 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*.

(Right: *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: *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. And as seen in an earlier paragraph, it had been during this period while withdrawn to Humbercourt, that Private Dicks and his re-enforcement draft dispatched from Rouen had arrived to report...*to duty...with the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.*

* * * * *

The unit now re-enforced 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 the arrival of the New Year.

The weather was now to oblige during those days at Fressin where the Newfoundland Battalion was now posted for a further sixteen days; there the *gods* would allow the Newfoundlanders a reminder of home: snow – perhaps a bit too much at times apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, after that snowy Christmas period, 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 below: *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*)

Their time was to be divided into the usual 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 posting – although the arrangement was very flexible – and at times there were to be further and longer withdrawals to the rear for training, re-organization and what was often to be called *rest*...although it hardly ever was.



From January 5 until 17, the Newfoundlanders were billeted or encamped in the area of Zudausques, a village of the French commune of the same name, located some forty kilometres to the west of the frontier with Belgium. On that latter date the 1st Battalion took a train early in the morning to cross into Belgium and the Ypres Salient.

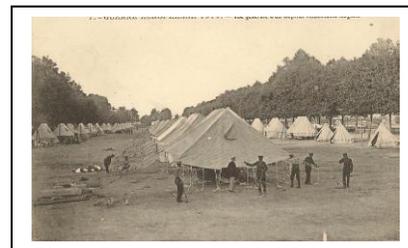
By the end of the following day it had marched up to the forward area to its posting at Haslar Camp from where twelve days it was to be based and at times to be ordered moved into support and Front-line positions – and to provide working-parties for the inevitable work on defences.

* * * * *

Private Dicks, however, instead of digging trenches, on January 27 of the New Year, 1918, went to the 89th Field Ambulance instead, with a common problem: PUO (*Pain of Unknown Origin*). On the same day he was forwarded to the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearing Station at the Rémy Sidings, Poperinghe.



(Right above: *A British field ambulance, of perhaps a more permanent nature than some: The Field Ambulances were often responsible for the Rest Stations, the establishment pictured here perhaps being one of those. – from a vintage post-card*)



(Right: *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 early years of the War – from a vintage post-card*)



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

From the Australian CCS Private Dicks was transferred to the 20th General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers on February 3, to be sent to the 6th Convalescent Depot a week later, on the 10th.

(continued)

Apparently he was soon again to be forwarded, moved to the 14th Convalescent Depot at Trouville, on February 13.

Presumably by now his problem had been diagnosed, although his files still seem to give no hint of any medical complaint.

(Right: *The railway station of the conjoint centres of Dannes and Camiers, though which many thousands of sick or wounded – or convalescent – military personnel passed during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



Having been discharged to the Base Depot in Rouen from convalescence on either March 27 or 29, it was then about a week later, on April 4, that Private Dicks re-joined the 1st Battalion of the by-then *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* once again at *Haslar Camp*.

* * * * *

In the meantime, and after Private Dicks' departure for medical care, the Newfoundland Battalion was to remain in the forward area for another week before being withdrawn to an encampment to the west of Ypres.

The eight-day posting to *Brake Camp*, Vlamertinghe, from February 4 to 11 (*inclusive*) was to be a busy one: work-parties, training, inspections by...*the Brass...*, the awarding of decorations and the announcement that the Newfoundland Regiment had been designated, as of January 25 of that 1918, to be the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment*, had been some of the highlights of that particular period before it moved westward over the Franco-Belgian frontier to be quartered in and about the community of Steenvoorde.

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

Only days later, on February 19 the Newfoundland Battalion had marched to the eastward into the town of Poperinghe (today *Poperinge*) where it was to be billeted for eight more days and once more employed in the seemingly never-ending construction and amelioration of nearby defences.

During the late autumn of 1917 and the early part of the winter that followed, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the *Great War*: the Allies were at the time 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 - whereas the Germans had had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians on the *Eastern Front* had by then allowed them.



It had been expected that they, the Germans, would launch a spring offensive - which they were to do – in fact they were to unleash a number of them*.

****There were 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 Newfoundland unit had been serving in March and April when at *the Front*, the personnel of the Battalion would continue to dig and wait. 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 had 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 had been stationed; they had 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 had seemed unstoppable.

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

While there had been turmoil elsewhere on British and French fronts, the northern sector was to remain calm, at least until the time of the arrival on April 4 of Private Dicks in a re-enforcement draft from Rouen.

The calm in question, however, was not to last for very long.

* * * * *

For a number of reasons, after two weeks the southern German offensive had begun to falter and would eventually halt; but then, just days after that, a second offensive, *Georgette*, was to be launched in the northern sector of the front, in Belgian Flanders, where now were the Newfoundlanders – and the recently re-joined Private Thomas: the date, April 9. Within only two days the situation of the British had become desperate.

On the day after the first heavy bombardments of April 9, and as the Germans approached the northern French towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were to be deployed to confront 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*, would instead be ordered to board buses at three o'clock in the afternoon, thereupon to be directed southward, towards the French border town of Nieppe.

They would 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, would be obliged 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.

Then, as the 1st Battalion 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*.*

'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening – were to be equally heavily involved.

(Right: *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 had been a difficult eleven days for all of the 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never had materialised and the front had finally been 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: *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*)



What exact role Private Dicks played at the time is not known – although one source suggests that he may have been a soldier of 'C' Company.

* * * * *

By April 20 the fighting was over for the Newfoundlanders and on the following day, by then relieved by French infantry, they marched to the rear, to a camp on an aerodrome on the road leading towards the community of Steenvoorde.

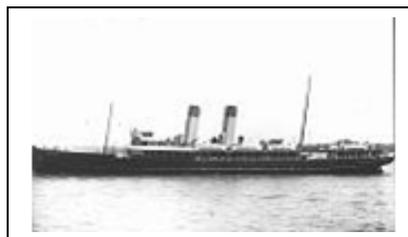
However, Private Dicks was no longer with the Newfoundland Battalion, having been evacuated to the 62nd Casualty Clearing Station at Watten. He had reported sick, suffering from pyrexia (a *high fever*) on April 19, the day before.

Diagnosed at the CCS as having contracted a case of mumps, he was subsequently forwarded to the 14th Stationary Hospital at Wimereux on either the 20th or 22nd of April. There it was decided to evacuate him back to the United Kingdom and, on May 2, having been removed from the *seriously ill* list only four days previously, Private Dicks was placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. Denis* for the short cross-Channel journey.



(Right above: *The French coastal resort of Wimereux which, in conjunction with nearby Boulogne was to be an important medical complex during the conflict, seen here at some time just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right: *The image of a peace-time 'St. David' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel was a ship built in 1906 to service the crossing from Wales to Ireland for the Great Western Railway but that role was cut short by the Great War which saw 'St. David' and three sister-vessels employed as hospital ships on the cross-Channel routes. She survived the War and returned to her former work until 1933 when she was scrapped.*)



Once having arrived in England on that same day, his schedule was no less hectic: he was transported from the ship to the 3rd London General Hospital in the southern Borough of Wandsworth; then he was forwarded on the morrow, May 3, to the *Grove Military Hospital* in Tooting – a neighbouring London suburb. There he was to stay for a month.



(Right above: *The main building of what was to become the 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War had originally been opened, on July 1st of 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *A party of Newfoundland patients dressed in hospital uniform but otherwise unfortunately unidentified, is seen here convalescing in the grounds of the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



(continued)

(Right: *One of the very few remaining buildings from the era of the Great War which still serves today as part of Grove Hospital in Tooting – photograph from 2010*)



Discharged on June 5 to be thereupon granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded service personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom, Private Dicks was finally ordered posted to 'H' Company at the new Regimental Depot near Winchester on June 14.

The 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment by then had moved quarters from the Royal Burgh of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down Camp in the southern county of Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer had already been undertaken during the latter part of January, 1918, and so it was to there that Private Dicks was posted – and there that he received his orders to re-join the British Expeditionary Force and the 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *Troops on the march through a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from The War Illustrated*)

On September 23 Private Dicks passed, a soldier of the 52nd Re-enforcement Draft from *Hazely Down Camp*, once again through the port-cities of Southampton and Rouen – and thus those almost-inevitable days of final preparation - on his way back to the *Western Front*. He reported...*to duty*...to his unit on October 6, just as the Newfoundland Battalion was pulling back out of the line after days of fierce fighting in the vicinity of the village of Ledeghem.

* * * * *

Well over five months before Private Dicks' return...*to duty*...and only days after the crisis of the German spring offensive had passed, on April 24 - and having been relieved in the forward area by troops of a French infantry regiment - the Newfoundland Battalion had said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the 88th Brigade and 29th Division. On the following day there was to be a recessional parade.

The 1st Battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was to later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 it was to move a world away from Belgian Flanders where it had just fought during the crisis of the German spring offensive. It was now to be stationed on the west coast of France.

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – the 1st Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four *other ranks* – had boarded a train in Belgium for the journey to 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 to be 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 was to remain posted at St-Josse until May 10 when it had then marched a further six kilometres inland, to the south-east to the community of Écuire. There it was to relieve 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 the new role at the Headquarters masked the reality that the 1st Battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was no longer capable of serving in the field. And 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.

**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.*

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 Équihe* – 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 above: A sparsely-populated community of Équihe at or about the time 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 9th Scottish Division. 1st 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 Ingoigem).

(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.***

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 again a conflict of movement.



(Right above: *The re-constructed Belgian village of Dadizeele (Dadizele) to the north of which the Newfoundlanders dug in on the evening of September 29, 1918 – photograph from 2013*)

****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.***

The advance continued but now the 1st Battalion of the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* was to be involved in days of fighting just outside the village-become-strong-point of *Ledegghem*. Despite set-backs, the Germans were still a force to be reckoned with: it would take two weeks to clear *Ledegghem* of them and would cost the Battalion a further three-hundred casualties.

And, as related in an earlier paragraph, it had been at this juncture, after a first confrontation and withdrawal at the village of *Ledegghem*, that *Private Dicks* had re-joined the Newfoundland unit on October 6-7 after it had spent a long night retiring after having been relieved from the place.

* * * * *

(Right above: *The re-constructed village of Ledegghem, Belgium almost a century later – photograph from 2009*)



The offensive, despite this stiff opposition, was nonetheless relentless. On the night of October 19-20, the 1st Battalion, having by-passed *Courtrai* – today *Kortrijk* – had crossed the *Lys Canal* under fire just to the east of the city on barrel bridges and on the morrow was advancing towards the village of *Vichte* where it would be halted by both the Germans and an order to retire.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The Lys – both canal and river – at a point not far from the crossing-place – right to left - of October 19-20, 1918 - The Harlebeke Caribou (see below) stands about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010)*

After a four-day withdrawal to rest in the area of Harlebeke – where apparently the billets were terrible – on the evening of October 24 the Newfoundland unit moved forward again in preparation for a further attack the next morning on the village of Vichte.



By the evening of that October 25 the village had fallen and the Newfoundlanders retired for the evening.

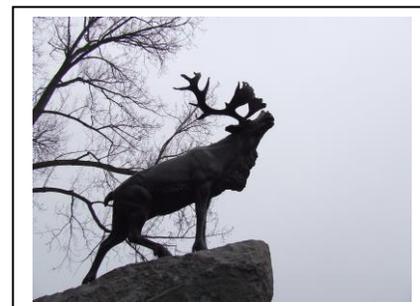
(Right above: *The area of the railway line and embankment – seen at the far end of the field – where the Newfoundland Battalion was to encounter heavy opposition during its attacks on the village of Vichte – photograph from 2010)*

The next day's attack on Ingoyghem was to be its last offensive operation of the Great War. On the evening of the morrow the 1st Battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was to march away from the fighting for the last time.



(Right: *The valley of the Scheldt as seen from Ingoyghem, the Newfoundlanders' furthest point of advance on October 26, 1918 – photograph from 2010)*

The son of Frederick Dicks, fisherman, and of Clara Dicks (née *Upshall**, deceased from tuberculosis March 9, 1904) – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Harbour Buffett, Placentia Bay, he was also brother to Lydia-Ann-Reynalds.



**The couple had married in the community of Harbour Buffett on November 23 of 1895 (this from a copy of Vital Statistics); a second source has the year as 1894.*

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

Private Dicks was reported as...*missing in action*...on October 25, 1918, during the fighting on ground in-between the Belgian villages of Vichte and Ingoyghem.

Some thirty weeks later, on May 27, 1919, he was officially...*presumed dead*. (His file also cites...*believed killed in action*.)

Almer Dicks had enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years and five months. He died on the day before the Newfoundland Battalion marched away from the Front for the last time.

****His second wife was Sarah (also née Upshall) – the couple married on April 23, 1908 - with whom he had two daughters, Annie and Harriett: this needs confirmation.***

Private Almer Dicks 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 – March 11, 2023.