



Captain* James John Donnelly, MC, is buried in Bancourt British Cemetery – Grave reference XII. B. 6.

****Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were not considered as enlisted. These officers thus had no Regimental Number allotted to them.***

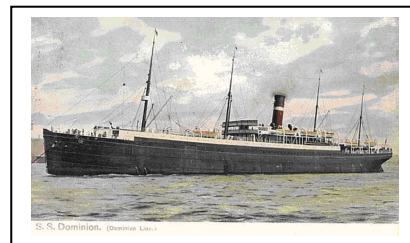
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And since officers did not enlist, they were not then required to re-enlist 'for the duration', even though, at the beginning, as a private, they had volunteered their services for only a limited time – twelve months.

His occupation prior to military service in the Newfoundland Regiment recorded as that a draper for *G. Knowling Company*, and earning as much as seventy dollars a month, James John Donnelly had also been an active member of the *Catholic Cadet Corps* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland.

Rather than enlist he was to request and receive an Imperial Commission and an accompanying appointment to the rank of lieutenant from the Governor of Newfoundland, Sir Walter Davidson, on January 26, 1915.

Lieutenant Donnelly would embark for overseas service via the sealing tender *Neptune* onto the SS *Dominion*, anchored off Bay Bulls because of ice conditions. He departed Newfoundland on February 5, as the officer commanding the Number 11 Platoon of 'C' Company, these being the first reinforcements for the Newfoundland contingent in Scotland.



(Right above: The image of the steamer Dominion - launched in 1894 as the 'Prussia' - is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. An older vessel, she was to be requisitioned during the latter part of the Great War as a store and supply ship. She survived the conflict to be scrapped in 1922.)

**There appears to be some confusion in some sources as to whether these troops were 'C' or 'D' Company. However, 'D' Company was to go overseas some time later on 'Stephano' to Halifax and then on Orduña to Liverpool.*

(Right: The photograph of personnel of 'C' Company on board the 'Neptune' on the way to the harbour at Bay Bulls is from the Provincial Archives.)

Having disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool, the Newfoundlanders entrained for Edinburgh, the first Newfoundland Regiment contingent having by this time been posted to the historic Castle in Scotland's capital city. There they were to provide the garrison, thus being the first overseas unit ever to do so.



Lieutenant Donnelly and the other new-comers reported to duty at Edinburgh Castle on February 16. Some three months later, during the middle of spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the Newfoundlanders moved to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.



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(Preceding page: *Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from its position on the summit of Castle Hill.* – photograph from 2011)

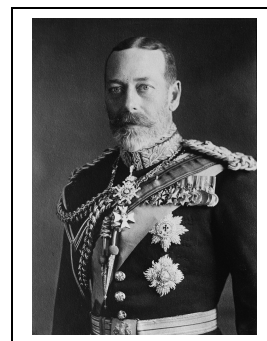
(Right below: *The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915.* – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent received the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength*. The now-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered eligible to be sent on ‘active service’.



**This was approximately fifteen hundred, enough to furnish four ‘fighting’ companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot. This force, now the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



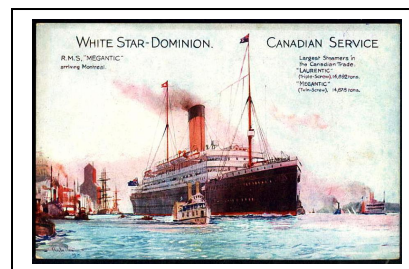
Meanwhile the two junior Companies, the later-arrived ‘E’ and aforementioned ‘F’, were sent to Scotland’s west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

(Right above: *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 from *Bain News Services* via the *Wikipedia* web-site.)



(Right above: *Some of the men of ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915* – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)

On August 20, 1915, Lieutenant Donnelly and the Newfoundland unit embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks. There, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, the 1st Battalion landed at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



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(Preceding page: *The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

(Right: *Kangaroo Beach, where the officers and men of the 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is to be seen in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on 'A' Beach. – photograph taken in 2011*)



(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: *A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where the 1st Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011*)



Lieutenant Donnelly of 'C' Company was to be the senior officer involved in a skirmish which occurred in early November at a place remembered as *Caribou Hill* – although the whereabouts of the site itself seem to have been forgotten. It was for this action that three personnel of the unit were awarded the 1st Battalion's first decorations of the Great War.

Lieutenant Donnelly would be a recipient of the Military Cross for his role at *Caribou Hill*: *'...for conspicuous gallantry and determination on the night of 4th/5th November, 1915, on the Gallipoli Peninsula. He occupied, with eight men, a knoll, to which our firing line was extended the next day. By his coolness and skill in handling this small party, which was reduced to five by casualties, he repelled several determined Turkish bomb and rifle attacks on his front and flanks, and held his own during the night.'* – London Gazette, 23/12/1915



(Right: *A photograph taken at the time of 'Caribou Hill', scene of the engagement described above: Since then the site has been difficult to re-trace and to identify, even though the terrain has apparently not changed a great deal since that time. – by courtesy of the Provincial Archives*)



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Less than two weeks after this episode, on or about November 16 of 1915, Lieutenant Donnelly was admitted into the 54th Casualty Clearing Station at *Suvla Bay*, there to be diagnosed as suffering from a...*serious*...case of jaundice.

From the *Gallipoli Peninsula* he was then evacuated – possibly via the medical facilities at Mudros Bay on the Greek island of Lemnos some fifty kilometres distant - to hospital on the British-held Mediterranean island possession of Malta. There he was admitted on November 26, having made the passage on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Nevasa*, and with the diagnosis of his complaint revised to...*slight*.



(Right above: *The image of HMHS Hospital Ship 'Nevasa' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Having begun the Great War as a troopship, in January of 1915 she was to be fitted out as a hospital ship, a role she played throughout the conflict. In the war of 1939-1945 she reverted to being a troopship once more.*)

After further medical treatment and convalescence, Lieutenant Donnelly was discharged on December 22 from St. Andrew's Military Hospital, Malta, to *active service*, and embarked for the British Base Depot at Sidi Bishr, Alexandria, on board His Majesty's Transport *Peregrine*.



The date on which he re-joined the Newfoundland Battalion appears not to have been documented.

(Right above: *one of several British military hospitals, today abandoned, on the island of Malta: Independent since 1964, Malta was a British possession at the time of the Great War. – photograph from 2011*)

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Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion was to serve but, even since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, would prove to be little more than a debacle: Flies, dust, disease, the frost-bite and the floods – and of course the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command* had ever anticipated – were eventually to overwhelm the British-led forces and those of the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.



(Right above: *An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at Suvla Bay – from Provincial Archives*)

****Many of the commanders chosen were second-rate, had been brought out of retirement, and had little idea of how to fight – let alone of how to win. One of the generals at Suvla, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.***

November 26 was to see 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, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

On the night of December 19-20, the British abandoned the 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 were 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 was to be transferred only two days later to the area of **Cape Helles**, on the western tip of the **Gallipoli Peninsula**.



(Right above: **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 and the **Anzac** forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at **Gallipoli** – were now only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the **Peninsula** could be undertaken.

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 above: **'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was 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)

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Immediately after the British had evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, arriving there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to the vicinity of Suez, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.



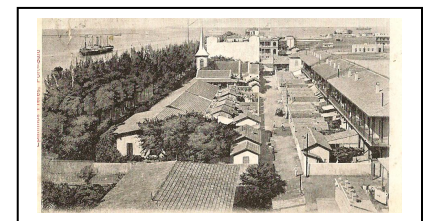
**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.*

(Right above: 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 from Illustration)

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As seen in an above paragraph, it was likely – in fact almost certainly - during this period spent at Suez that Lieutenant Donnelly had returned to the Newfoundland Battalion. And it was also during this time that he was promoted to the rank of captain on February 15, 1916, a promotion which was retroactive to August 16 of the previous year, four days before the Battalion had embarked for the Middle East.

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 through the *Suez Canal* en route to France. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseilles, on March 22.



(Right above: Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal as it was just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

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



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 Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.

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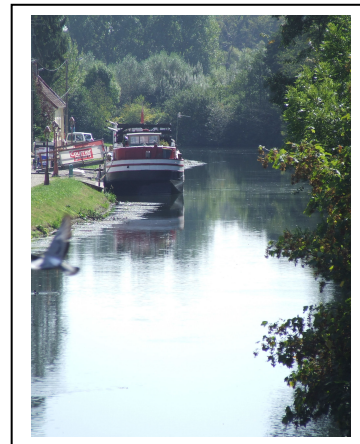
Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they had then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to become a part of their history.

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

On April 13, the 1st Battalion subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive reinforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

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 was to then be ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.



On May 20, 1916, Captain Donnelly and Lieutenant Colonel Hadow, Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, attended an investiture at Buckingham Palace, the former to receive his Military Cross, the latter a Distinguished Service Order.

**It should be said that 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: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel* – photograph from 2009(?))



The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the 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.

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*.



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

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



**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.*

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 largest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.

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

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

Although his name is to be found on the nominal roll of the Newfoundland Battalion on July 1, 1916, the first day of *the Somme*, Captain Donnelly was not to figure in the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel. According to a letter that he later wrote, he had been an officer of the ten per cent reserve – fourteen officers and eighty-three men – a force held back at Louvencourt which would re-join the 1st Battalion *in the field* later in the day after much of the tumult had abated.

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**The well-known roll-call of July 2 of those who survived the battle unscathed was not officially recorded until two days later. The roll call of those who had been in the ten per-cent reserve of fourteen officers and eighty-three men held back for most of the day at Louvencourt was apparently also recorded only later. Thus the inscription 'With Battalion 4/7/16' on certain records.*

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 a German counter-assault might well annihilate what had managed to survive 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.



It had then been 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 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 having reported, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1st Battalion - still under battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.

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



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 incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the 1st Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

(Right: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916: it is described as the ‘Ville morte’*. – from *Illustration*)

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

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

(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)

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

The son of William Donnelly (deceased December 19, 1907) and of Bridget Donnelly (née *Jordan*)* of 169, Gower St. in John's, he had also been brother to Mary-Bridget, to William-Bernard, to Rose, to Francis-Joseph, and to Michael-Joseph – this last to whom he had allotted a daily ninety cents from his pay (later transferred to his mother) - and who was soon to die, in June of 1919**.

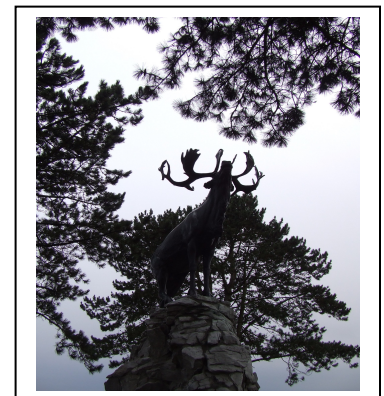
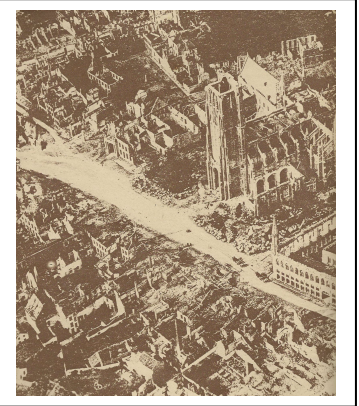
*The couple had married on July 15, 1873.

***Michael Joseph was the last of the Donnelly children to die, according to a written statement made by their mother, Bridget in August of 1919.*

Captain Donnelly was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 12, 1916, on the day of the assault at Gueudecourt during *First Somme*. He had been the officer leading ‘C’ Company, fighting on the Battalion’s right, and had been killed upon reaching the enemy trench.

Captain Donnelly died at thirty-four years of age: date of birth in St. John’s, Newfoundland, October 23, 1882 (from Roman Catholic Parish Records).

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In January or early February of 1920, the remains of Captain Donnelly were exhumed from the site of their original burial and transferred to where they repose today.

(Preceding page: *The photograph of Captain Donnelly is from the Books of Newfoundland.*)

Captain James John Donnelly, MC, 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) (right).



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 – February 11, 2023.