

A photograph of his grave is as yet not available.

Private William Joseph Duke (Regimental Number 1306) is interred in Alexandria (*Chatby*) Military and War Memorial Cemetery.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman* earning one-hundred twenty dollars per annum, William Duke presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on March 22 of 1915. It was a procedure which would pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

William Duke was now to return to the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road on March 24, two days following his medical assessment, on this second occasion to enlist. He was thereupon engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was added a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*.

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It was to be a further six days, the date March 30, before he was to undertake his attestation, to swear his *Oath of Allegiance*, the concluding official formality. At that moment William Joseph Duke became...*a soldier of the King*.

There now passed a period of three weeks and two days before, on April 22 of 1915, Private Duke, Number 1306, embarked in the harbour of St. John's for...*overseas service...with the two-hundred forty-nine officers and...other ranks...of 'E' Company* onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* en route for Halifax.

There appear to be no details of how or where he may have spent that final waiting-period before taking ship for...*overseas service*; Private Duke may have returned temporarily to his home in Fox Harbour, Placentia Bay, perhaps even to work – but this is mere speculation.

Having arrived in Halifax, on April 24 at eleven-thirty in the evening the detachment began its trans-Atlantic passage on board the trans-Atlantic liner *SS Missanabie* from Nova Scotia to Liverpool. The vessel arrived in that English west-coast port-city on May 2 or 3 – the two dates are recorded although the second may well have been the date of disembarkation.



The Newfoundlanders on this occasion had sailed from Halifax in the company of the Canadian Army Service Corps *Railway Supply Depot*.

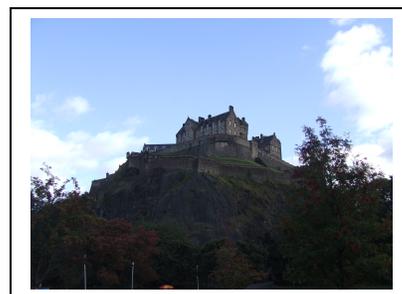
(Right above: *The image of 'Stephano' passing through the Narrows of St. John's Harbour is shown by courtesy of the Provincial Archives.*)

(Right: *The image of 'Missanabie' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries website. The vessel was of the Canadian Pacific Line and, although transporting troops during the Great War, did so as part of her commercial services which continued during the conflict. On September 9, 1918, she was torpedoed and sunk off the south coast of Ireland with the loss of forty-five lives.*)



From Liverpool the contingent travelled northwards by train to the Scottish capital, Edinburgh where, on May 4, 'E' Company joined 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies which had already taken up station as the garrison at the historic Castle, the first troops from outside the British Isles ever to do so.

(Right: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011*)

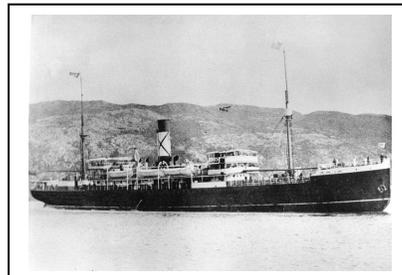


Private Duke's 'E' Company, however, was to have but a few days to savour the charms of the Scottish capital.

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Some seven months before that May 4, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's for the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits – these to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

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.



(Right: *The image of Florizel at anchor in the harbour at St. John's is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.*)

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.



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

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, as recorded beforehand, it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.

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.

**This contingent, while a part of the Newfoundland Regiment, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

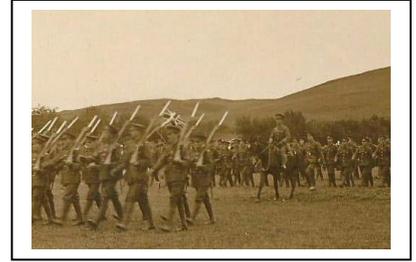
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Seven days after the arrival of Private Duke's 'E' Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit was dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

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It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent would eventually receive 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*. On that date the newly-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thereupon available to be ordered on...*active service*.



(Preceding page: *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)

**This was approximately fifteen hundred, sufficient 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 *Camp 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.



(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.)

Meanwhile the two junior Companies, ‘E’ – as seen, the last arrived at Edinburgh - and the aforementioned ‘F’, were ordered transferred to Scotland’s west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

Private Duke, however, although having left Newfoundland as a soldier of ‘E’ Company, was not to be posted to the Regimental Depot but to southern England.

When he had been apprised of this change in plans seems not to be recorded – nor why he was selected - but Private Duke was one of the few from ‘E’ Company who were to swell the ranks of the units posted to *Aldershot* - thus he became a soldier of ‘D’ Company. And it was during the period while he was at *Camp Aldershot*, and as was the case with the great majority of the Newfoundland troops there, that Private Duke was prevailed upon to re-enlist...*for the duration of the war*. This he did on August 15*.

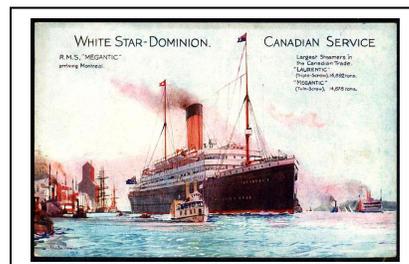
**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for a limited period of a single year. As the War progressed, however, this would likely cause problems and they were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits signed on for the ‘Duration’ at the time of their original enlistment.*

(continued)

(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.)*



(Right: *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.)*

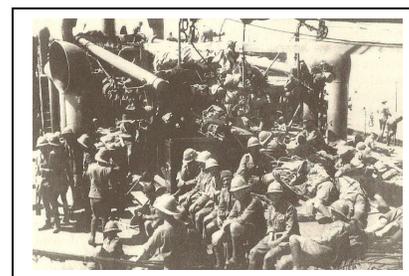


On August 20, 1915, Private Duke and his 1st Battalion embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks. There, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks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



(Right: *Kangaroo Beach, where the officers and men of the Newfoundland Battalion 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 below: *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)*

When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* on that September night of 1915 they were to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.



Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion was to serve but, even ever since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, had been proving to be little more than a debacle:

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



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 their allies, the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.

****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.***



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

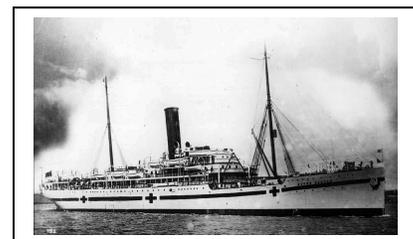
(Right: *This is Anzac Bay in the fore-ground with the Salt Lake in the centre further away. The bottom of Suvla Bay is just to be seen on the left and adjacent to the Salt Lake, and further away again. The hills in the distance and the ones from which this photograph was taken were held by the Turks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



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One month after having set foot on the sand and rock – mostly the latter – of *Kangaroo Beach*, on October 20 Private Duke was evacuated from the Newfoundland positions at *Suvla Bay* onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Dover Castle*, having been diagnosed as suffering from dysentery.

(Right: *The image of HMHS *Dover Castle* in her war-time hospital ship garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Requisitioned early during the Great War, she served until May 26 of 1917 when she was torpedoed and sunk with the loss of seven members of her engine-room crew.*)



On October 26 he was admitted into the 21st General Hospital in the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria. Just less than a month later, on November 23, he was pronounced as being...*dangerously ill*..., enteric fever having by that time been appended to the diagnosis.

Then, only a scant two days later again, on the 25th, apparently incorrectly, he was reported as being...*out of danger*.

(continued)

December 2, 1915

Mrs. Mary Duke
Fox Harbour, P.B.

Regret to inform you that Record Office, London, today reports that No. 1306, Private William Duke, previously reported out of danger after attack enteric, is again dangerously ill enteric Twenty-first General Hospital Alexandria November twentythird.

J.R. BENNETT
Colonial Secretary

The son of Michael Duke and of Mary Duke (née *Whiffin*)*, of Ram's Island, Placentia – she later re-married, to Carrigan, after the death of her two sons – and to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents, he was also brother to Sophie-Joseph, Margaret, Angelina-Joseph and to John-Joseph** (and apparently others according to the letter to be found further below).



*The couple had married on November 21 of 1891.

Private Duke was reported as having...*died of sickness*...in hospital, the cause finally cited as *meningitis*, on December 23, 1915. At home it was the Reverend Father Ashley who was requested to bear the news to his mother.

William Joseph Duke had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty years: date of birth at Ram's Island, Placentia, Newfoundland, on May 26, 1894 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

**His brother Private John Joseph Duke, Regimental Number 1964, was to later die at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916 (see elsewhere in these files).



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

(The photograph of Private Duke is from the Provincial Archives.)

Private William Duke 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).



The following letter was likely addressed to the Ministry of Militia in St. John's:

Placentia

Dec 18, 1920

Dear Sir

I am writing to see if you can allow me a little favour as you no I have my sons pay John and William. They were both my sons the two of them went and got killed. I got no pay from John this long while, and now they are after taking William from me. I have a big hearty boy (at home) and he is almost blind and I am trying to get him in the hospital and I cant.

Their father died when they were small and left nine, and when they got big they went off to the war and they got killed and that left me almost homeless. Two years after I got married, but the man I married had his own to look to. I do not care how little you send me, just enough to help the blind boy, and I have a little girl not able to earn for herself so will you please try to help me a little, by doing so you will oblige

Mrs Mary Carrigan

Their names were John and William

My address, Mrs James Carrigan

Town Side, Placentia

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 6, 2023.