



Second Lieutenant Samuel Joseph Ebsary (Regimental Number 501*) lies in St-Sever Cemetery, Rouen – Grave reference B. 1. 29.

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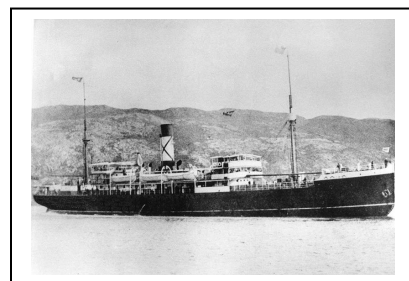
And since officers did not enlist, they were not then required to re-enlist ‘for the duration’, even though, at the beginning, as a private, each had volunteered his services for only a limited time – twelve months.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *store-keeper* with *C. F. Bennett & Co., Wholesale Provisions & Groceries* of Water Street and earning \$700.00 per annum – he was also a former member of the *Church Lads Brigade* - Samuel Joseph Ebsary presented himself for medical examination at a familiar *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John’s, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on September 10 of 1914. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

Eight days before this, on September 2, Sam Ebsary had enlisted at the same *C.L.B. Armoury* – engaged at the daily private soldier’s rate of a single dollar plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*. He was a recruit of the First Draft.

For Private Ebsary and the other recruits there was now to be a period of training on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the East End of St. John’s. During this time and not quite three weeks after enlistment, on September 21, he was promoted directly to the rank of sergeant, then to that of colour sergeant on October 3.

That October 3 was the day on which he and the Newfoundland contingent, to be known as both the *First Five Hundred* and the *Blue Puttees* – it was not yet a battalion - embarked onto the Bowring Brothers’ vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John’s Harbour.



The ship sailed from St. John’s for the United Kingdom on the following day, October 4, via the south coast of the Island where it was to join the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas.

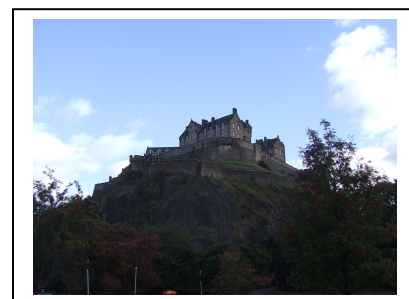
(Right above: *The image of Florizel at anchor in the harbour at St. John’s is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.*)

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



In the United Kingdom Sergeant Ebsary trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain where on October 29 he was further appointed to the rank of company sergeant major; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to the city of Inverness; then at Edinburgh Castle – where the unit was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.

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



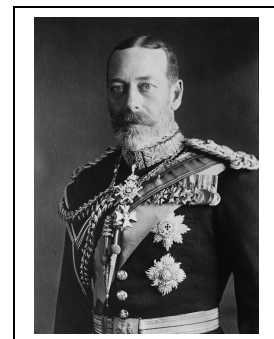
On May 11 the Newfoundlanders were transferred to a tented *Stobs Camp*, in the vicinity of the Scottish town of Hawick, where they were to undergo further training and exercises for some three months.

(Right: *The Newfoundland Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp and about to be presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915 – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



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 inspection by the King, at Aldershot.

Meanwhile, the two junior Companies, 'E' and the later-arrived 'F', were ordered posted to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, where they were to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion*.



(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – photograph from Bain News Services via Wikipedia*)

**On July 10, 1915, 'F' Company had arrived at 'Stobs Camp' from Newfoundland, its personnel raising the numbers of the unit to battalion establishment strength, and thus permitting it to be ordered to active service.*

It was likely during the second week of that final training at Aldershot, on or about August 13, that C.S.M. Ebsary was prevailed upon to re-enlist *for the duration of the war**.

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

Having by the month of July, and with the arrival of 'F' Company, the personnel necessary to form a battalion, the four senior companies of the Newfoundland Regiment, were to become its first such force. The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had thereupon been attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been despatched to *active service*.



(Right above: *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 leaving for active service – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)*

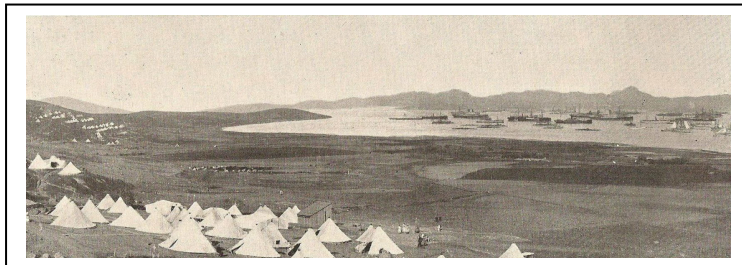
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November 26 would see the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; there was to be a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several 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, would be those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

Sergeant Major Ebsary was to suffer from neither trench-foot not frost-bite but from jaundice, a common affliction at *Gallipoli*. He was evacuated from *Suvla Bay* on December 2, 1915, to the 18th Stationary Hospital established at West Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos perhaps a hundred kilometres distant. From there he was transferred on December 26, Boxing Day of 1915, to the Lowland Convalescent Depot, also at West Mudros, and discharged from there on January 4, 1916, to the Base Depot in the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria.

(Right: *By late 1915, Allied medical facilities as seen in both the foreground and background – a goodly number of them under canvas – were to almost completely surround a congested Mudros Bay and its minuscule harbour. – from Illustration*)



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During the short period of Company Sergeant Major Ebsary's absence, the Newfoundland Battalion had been busy at *Suvla Bay* and elsewhere.

On the night of December 19-20, the British had 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 had 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 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, Indian and the *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – were now to be only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.

(Preceding page: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration*)

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.

**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 – with General Maude - to sail from the Gallipoli Peninsula.*



(Right above: *'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 had evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered, as had been CSM Ebsary, to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, where it would arrive on the 15th of that month. The unit was then to be almost 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*.



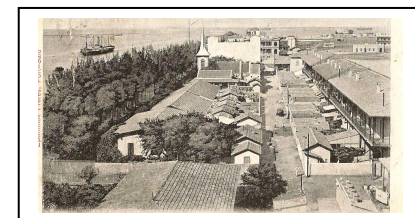
**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.*

(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*)

While confirmation of this does not appear among his documents, it is highly likely that it was to be during the short period spent by the Newfoundland Battalion at the Sidi-Bishr Base Depot, Alexandria, that Company Sergeant Major Ebsary had reported back to duty with his unit and to 'A' Company, then to travel with it to Suez.

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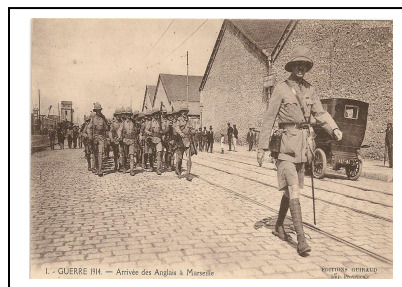
After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1st Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage through the *Suez Canal* en route to France. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseilles, on March 22.



(Preceding page: *Port Tewfiq at the southern 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*)

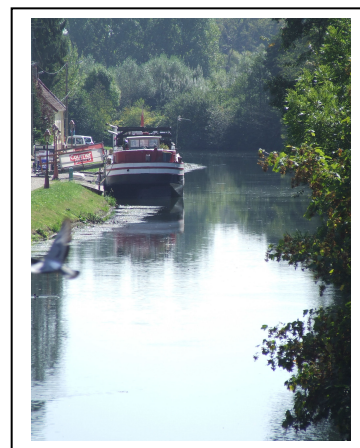
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.



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 then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to become a part of their history.

(Right: *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 re-enforcements 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.

**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 above and right: *Two views of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photographs from 2009(?)*)



(continued)

Having then been withdrawn, at the end of that April after the completion of their first tour in the trenches to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders were soon to be preparing – this to include the construction of a light railway in the Louvencourt area - for the now-impending British campaign of that summer to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, flowing sedately – as it still does today – through the region on its journey to the sea.

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

(Right: *A view of 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 French commune, not a village**. – photographs from 2010 and 2015)

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



Although on the nominal roll of the Newfoundland Battalion on July 1, 1916, the first day of *the Somme*, Sergeant Major Ebsary did not figure in the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel. The likelihood is that he was among the fourteen officers and eighty-three *other ranks* held back at Louvencourt in the ten per cent reserve. This detachment was not called to the field until late in the day when the fighting had all but abated.

**These men answered a roll call of the following day as did those who had fought the battle and survived it unscathed. Where the documentation shows ‘with Battalion’ on July 4, this is the date on which the roll call of July 2 was eventually officially recorded.*

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such was at the time 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 - were thus to remain 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 would then be a further two days before the unit marched further again to the rear area and to their billets in the village of Maily-Maillet.



(Right above: *The re-constructed village of Maily-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 reinforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – reported *to duty*. They would be the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional manpower having arrived, 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.*



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 – was ordered moved north and to enter into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

(Preceding page: *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*)

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

It was there in *the Salient*, on August 8, 1916, that Company Sergeant Major Ebsary was granted an Imperial Commission and the accompanying appointment to the rank of second lieutenant; the promotion was retroactive to July 1, 1916, undoubtedly because of the high casualty rate among junior officers at Beaumont-Hamel.

In a more personal vein, there was apparently more than just a martial side to his nature: Second Lieutenant Ebsary was a more-than-fair player of the accordion, as he apparently proved on the evening of September 8 – or thereabouts - when a dinner for Company officers was hosted by 'D' Company in its quarters at the *Horn Works* in Ypres.

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 would nonetheless incur casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

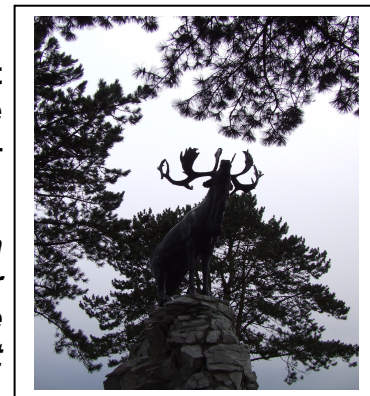
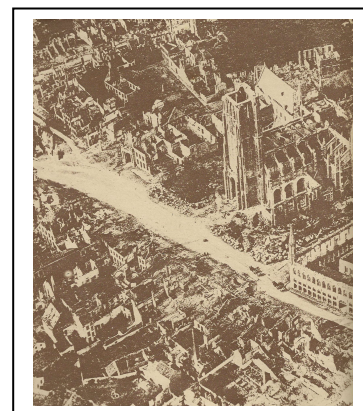
Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the 1st Battalion followed orders to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

(Right: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916: 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 to be at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.

The assault was on a two-company front, with Second Lieutenant Ebsary's 'A' Company in the first wave on the left; but the encounter proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

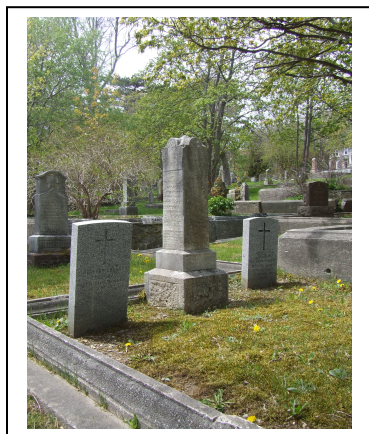
(Right above: *This is the ground over which the 1st Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)



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

It was during this attack that Second Lieutenant Ebsary was wounded, incurring severe injuries to both thighs, the left leg and right hip. To where he was immediately evacuated for treatment seems not to be recorded, but he was eventually admitted into the 8th General Hospital in Rouen on October 14...*dangerously ill.*

The son of Newman McCawley Ebsary, fireman*, and of Sarah Ann Ebsary (née *Hinds* or *Hynes*)** – to whom he had allocated a daily eighty cents from his pay - of 89, the Southside, in St. John's, he was also brother to Florence-Isabelle, Herbert-Newman, Elizabeth, William-Alexander-Hynes and to Frederick-Ernest (see below).



Second Lieutenant Ebsary was at first reported as *wounded in action* while serving with his 'A' Company on October 12. He *died of wounds* in the Eighth General Hospital at Rouen on October 15, 1916.

**Whether employed to tender the fire in a railway locomotive or a coal-fired steam-ship, or whether to fight fires is not recorded.*

***The couple had married circa May, 1880.*

(Right above: *A family memorial in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John's commemorates the sacrifice of Lieutenant Samuel Joseph Ebsary and also that of his brother, Private Frederick Ernest Ebsary.* – photograph from 2015)



Samuel Joseph Ebsary had enlisted at thirty-two years of age: year of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, circa 1882.

His brother Private Frederick Ernest Ebsary, Regimental Number 1138, had already *died of sickness* on September 3 of 1915, in Gallipoli.



(Right above: *The gravestone of Private Frederick Ernest Ebsary in Hill 10 Cemetery at Suvla Bay* (see elsewhere in these files).)

(*The photograph of Private(?) Ebsary is from the Provincial Archives.*)

Second Lieutenant Samuel Joseph Ebsary 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.