



Second Lieutenant John Roy Ferguson (Regimental Number 882), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of both *lumberman* and *sealer*, John Roy Ferguson presented himself for medical examination in the central Newfoundland community of Millertown on December 8, 1914. Apart from some dental problems which were to be corrected within the following few weeks, it was a procedure which pronounced him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.



The records then show him enlisting a month later, on January 4 of the New Year, 1915, having arrived from Millertown on the same day. It was at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, that John Roy Ferguson was to be engaged – for the period of one year** - at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar to which was to be added field allowance of ten cents per diem.**

****The building was to serve as the Regimental Headquarters in Newfoundland for the duration of the conflict.***

*****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.***

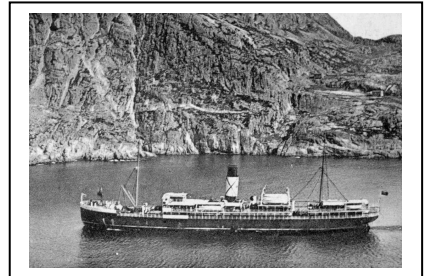
He was now to await a further few hours before undergoing the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On the same fourth day of the New Year – and at the same venue - he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, John Roy Ferguson became...*a soldier of the King*.

Private Ferguson, Regimental Number 882, was now to await for a period of eleven weeks less a day before departing from Newfoundland for *overseas service*; how exactly he was to spend that time appears not to have been documented among his files. It may be that he returned home temporarily to Millertown, although as he recorded Springdale Street in St.

John's as his address, it would suggest that he was to remain there, at the residence of his parents, for at least some of that period, a time during which, on February 24-25, he was to receive a first promotion, to the rank of sergeant – perhaps directly from that of private soldier, as there is no record of him being appointed as either lance corporal or corporal.

On March 18, two days before sailing from St. John's, there was to come a second advancement, to that of company sergeant major – in his case, of 'D' Company whose temporary commanding officer, Captain Eric Ayre, had particularly requested his services – and even asked Governor Davidson for confirmation thereof.

On March 20, 1915, having marched down to the harbour in St. John's, CSM Ferguson and his 'D' Company were now to embark onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* for the two-day voyage to Halifax from where the two-hundred fifty officers and *other ranks* were then to take trans-Atlantic passage.



(Right above: *The photograph of the SS Stephano passing through The Narrows is from the Provincial Archives.*)

It was on March 22, the day on which 'D' Company arrived in Halifax, that the detachment then almost immediately boarded the Cunard ship *Orduña*, still plying its commercial routes. She sailed later on that same day to dock in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool eight days afterwards, on March 30. There the new arrivals from Newfoundland were to take a train for the journey northwards to Edinburgh, capital city of Scotland, where, on the same March 30, 'D' Company was then to report...*to duty*...at the historic castle.



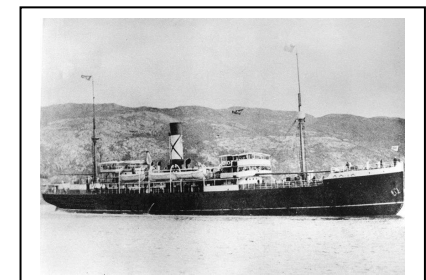
(Right above: *The image of the Cunard Liner Orduña is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

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Some seven months prior to that month of March of 1915 when CSM Ferguson 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: *The image of 'Florizel' at anchor in the harbour at St. John's in October of 1914 is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.*)



(continued)

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

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 below: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – 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 CSM Ferguson's 'D' Company to arrive – as seen, via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty*...at Edinburgh, before 'E' Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4*.



**These five Companies, while a contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment, did not yet constitute a battalion and would not do so until some two months hence – as will be seen below.*

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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, according to a letter penned by the aforementioned Captain Ayre - 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*)



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

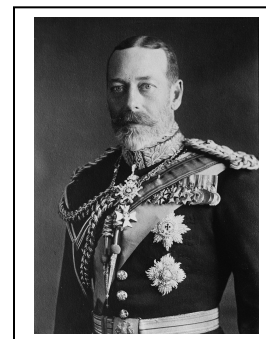
This was to be an all-important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength* of a battalion which could be posted on...active service.

**A number sufficient for four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

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



From *Stobs Camp*, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August 'A', 'B', 'C' and CSM Ferguson's '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.



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*.

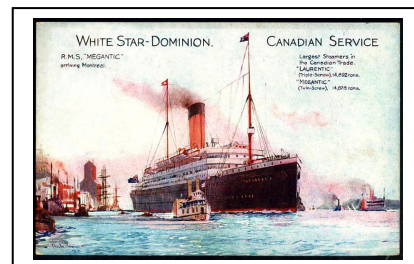
(Right above: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – the photograph is taken from the Bain News Services as presented by the Wikipedia web-site.*)

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 join the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.



(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*)

On August 20 of that 1915, the Newfoundland Battalion had embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Plymouth-Devonport onto the requisitioned White Star passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to serve in the fighting against the Turks.



(Right above: *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: 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)



There, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea a month later – and by that time 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*.

On the date of the unit's coming ashore at *Suvla Bay*, September 13, Corporal Edgar was promoted on a third occasion. Thus it was as a sergeant that he set foot on the sands of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(Right: 'Kangaroo Beach', where the officers and men of the 1st Battalion of the 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: 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 ships at *Kangaroo Beach, Suvla Bay*, they were to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would now 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:

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.

(continued)

(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*)



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.

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



There were to be numerous casualties on both sides of No-Man's-Land, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although it appears that no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. A goodly number, however, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite*.

**In the Gallipoli Campaign, casualties of this nature and caused by disease, particularly dysentery, greatly outnumbered those due to enemy action.*



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

By this time, the situation in the area where his 1st Battalion was serving had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire effort at *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*.

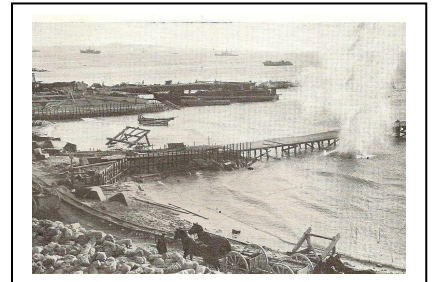
(Right: *Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed Achi Baba, positions which were never breached: The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011*)



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.

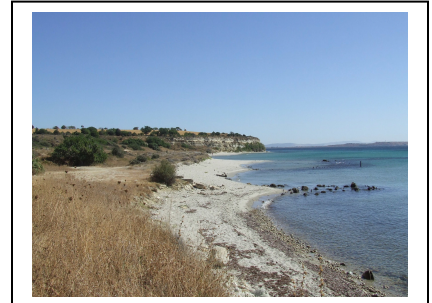
This final operation would take place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion to furnish part of the British rear-guard on this second occasion also.

(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.

(Right: 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.)



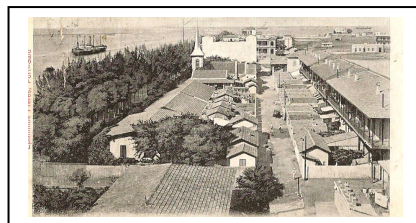
(Right: The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*. The men of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both *Suvla Bay* and *Cape Helles*. – photograph taken from the battleship *Cornwallis* and published in *Illustration*)



There they were 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 already becoming a theatre of war.***

After what was to be a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez and the Red Sea, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the Newfoundland 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 above: *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.

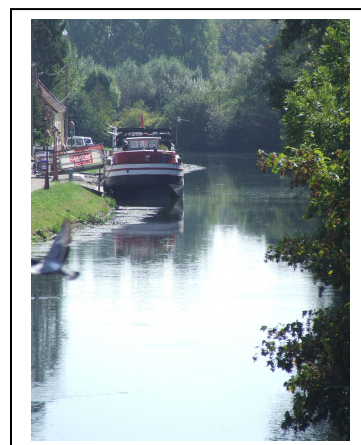
(Right: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseille. – from a vintage post-card*)



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 Marseille.

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 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 1st 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*.



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

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 the forward area on April 22. The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for that same meandering river, *the Somme*.



(Right above: *A further part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)

It was now that another promotion was now forthcoming for CQMS Ferguson: on June 5 he received an Imperial Commission and was thereupon appointed to be Second Lieutenant Edgar – his pay now increasing to the rate of two dollars per diem. This was the date on which, in fact, *twelve* second lieutenants were to be commissioned, having just completed a finishing course for officers at the *Bull Ring* at Étaples, on the west coast of France.

It is not certain, however, that Lieutenant Ferguson had been one of that number, instead perhaps having been commissioned *in the field* – but this is maybe a point of little import.

(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*)



**Perhaps of interest is 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: *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*.



****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.***

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

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.

(Right: 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.



The son of Daniel Ferguson (*General Road Master* for the *Reid Railway*) and of Isabella Ferguson (*née Small*) of 67 Springdale Street, St. John's - 273, the Southside, St. John's was their address circa 1920, and Leslie Street the following year, 1921 (and perhaps in the meantime, Clarendville in or about 1917) - he was also brother to Mabel; to David, railway engineer; to Nellie; and to Stewart Small Ferguson*, who was also killed at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916.

Husband to Jeannette Herbert Ferguson (*née Herbert* - the couple had married in Grand Falls on September 25 of 1913), she by 1916 living in Grand Falls - his own place of residence at the time of his enlistment recorded as Millertown – and to whom he had allocated a daily seventy cents from his pay – he was also father to Ray, born in March of 1915.

(Right: The War Memorial in the community of Grand Falls-Windsor honours the sacrifice of Lieutenant Ferguson. – photograph from 2010)



(continued)

Lieutenant Ferguson was reported as having been...*killed in action*...on July 1, 1916 – likely while serving with ‘B’ Company - during the fighting of the first day of *The Somme*.

James Roy Ferguson had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-six years: thus far the exact date of his birth – the year cited in the 1891 Scottish Census as 1889 – in Dundee, Scotland, has proved to be elusive.

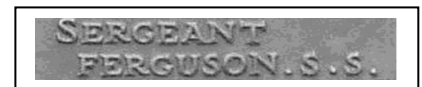
(Right: A family monument in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John’s commemorates the sacrifice of Lieutenant and of Sergeant Ferguson. - photograph from 2010)



(Right: The War Memorial in the community of Whitbourne also honours the sacrifice of both Stewart and Roy Ferguson. – photograph from 2013)



**His younger brother Sergeant Stewart Small Ferguson, Regimental Number 95, also died at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916. Neither does he have any known last resting-place and thus is also commemorated on the bronze at Beaumont-Hamel – see elsewhere in these files for his story.*



Lieutenant John Roy Ferguson was entitled to (left to right) the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

(The above photograph of Private(?) John Roy Ferguson is from the Provincial Archives.)



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 1, 2023.