

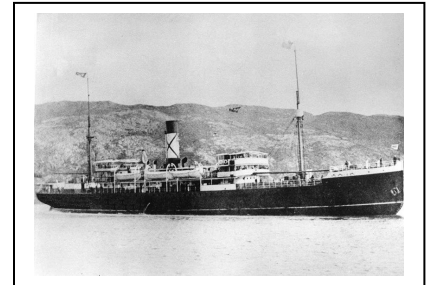
Sergeant Stewart Small Ferguson (Regimental Number 95), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *civil engineer* earning an annual salary of \$1200.00, he had previously served for four years with the *Newfoundland Highlanders*\*.



*\*One of the four paramilitary corps for young men, the Highlanders were sponsored by the Presbyterian congregation. The other corps were the Church Lads Brigade (Anglican), the (Roman) Catholic Cadet Corps and the Methodist Guards.*

Stewart Ferguson enlisted at the CLB Armoury on September 2, 1914, a recruit of the First Draft. He then attested on October 1 before embarking for England on October 3 of the same year onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel*. The ship sailed on the morrow, October 4, in order, off the south coast of the island, to join the convoy carrying the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.*)

Private Ferguson received a first promotion, to the rank of lance corporal, on September 21, 1914, some two weeks prior to leaving Newfoundland.

In the United Kingdom Lance Corporal Ferguson trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England, then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness - at Edinburgh Castle – where it provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles and where he was promoted to the rank of corporal on April 23, 1915 - and later again at *Stobs Camp* near the town of Hawick.



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



(Right above: *The Newfoundland Regiment parades at Stobs Camp and is presented its Colours on June 10, 1915. – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)*

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies\* were then sent south to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot; meanwhile the two junior Companies were sent to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, where they were to form the nucleus of the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion.

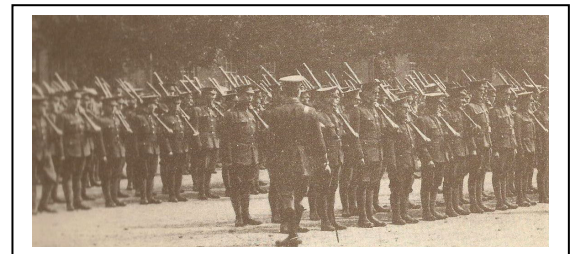
(Right: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – photograph from Bain News Services via Wikipedia)



*\*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. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, comprising those four Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.*

By that time having attained the rank of sergeant - of 'B' Company - on July 10 (or perhaps 17) of 1915, it had then been during that period spent at Aldershot that Sergeant Ferguson had been prevailed upon, on August 13, to re-enlist *for the duration of the war*.\*.

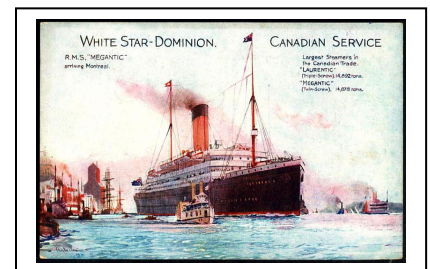
*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*



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

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

On August 20, 1915, Sergeant Ferguson and his comrades-in-arms embarked onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks where, a month later – having spent two weeks billeted in British barracks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, he disembarked with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.



(Right: Kangaroo Beach, where the officers and men of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Sergeant Ferguson was to serve in the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)***

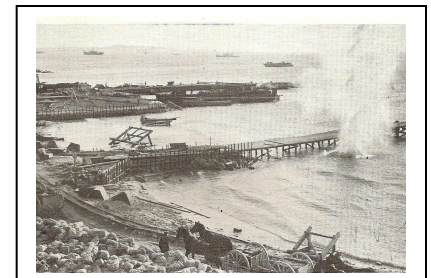


On the night of December 19-20, the British abandoned Suvla – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, formed a part of the rear-guard. Some of the Battalion personnel was evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was 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 and the Anzac forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps also served at Gallipoli – were now only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the Peninsula was undertaken. The operation took place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion providing some of the rear-guard for the second occasion as well\*.



***\*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 above: 'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration)***

***(Right: 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces and by the Newfoundlanders who were the last soldiers off the beach: vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011)***



***(continued)***

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



When the British evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, Sergeant Ferguson and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were sent to Alexandria, arriving there on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. The Newfoundlanders were immediately transferred southward to Suez, one of the ports at the southern end of the canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders as, at the time, the subsequent destination of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division had not yet been 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: *Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

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



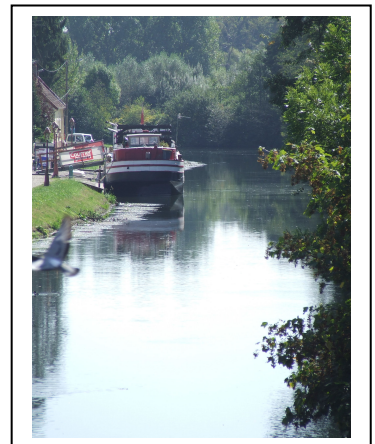
On March 14, the Newfoundlanders embarked through Port Tewfiq, also at the southern end of the *Suez Canal*, for the French port of Marseilles, and disembarked there on March 22, en route to the *Western Front*.

Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train arrived at 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 travelled unused in a separate wagon. De-training at the local station at two in the morning, the Newfoundlanders still had a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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

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 marched on their way from the station. Some three months later *the Somme* would become a part of their history.

On April 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where they would be billeted, would receive reinforcements and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the trenches of the *Western Front*.





The Newfoundlanders would also soon be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for that meandering river, *the Somme*.

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

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.*

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 killing of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.



(Right above: *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: *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 with the *Reid Nfld. Company*, and Isabella Ferguson (née *Small*) of 67, Springdale Street, at the time of enlistment - 273, the Southside, St. John's was their address circa 1920, and Leslie Street the following year, 1921 (and perhaps Clarendville in or about 1917) - he was also brother to at least Mabel, to David and to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant John Roy Ferguson\* of the Newfoundland Regiment\*\*.

***\*The parents and at least sons Stewart and John emigrated to the Dominion of Newfoundland from Scotland but few, if any, details appear to be available.***

**Sergeant Ferguson was reported as *missing in action* on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel on the first day of *the Somme*. Some six months later, on December 31, he was officially...*presumed dead*.**

**Stewart Ferguson had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-three years: date of birth in Dundee, Scotland, February 9, 1891 (from *Ancestry.ca*)**

**(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 from 2009)**

**(Right above: A grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after the attack at Beaumont-Hamel – from...)**

***\*\*His brother, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant James Roy Ferguson (Regimental Number 882) also died at Beaumont-Hamel and, having no known final resting-place, is also commemorated on the bronze under the Caribou in the Newfoundland Park.***

**(Right: The family memorial in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John's commemorates the sacrifice of both Stewart Small Ferguson and John Roy Ferguson. – photograph from 2011)**



**(The above photograph of Private(?) Ferguson is by courtesy of the Provincial Archives.)**

**Sergeant Stewart Small Ferguson was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 13, 2023.