



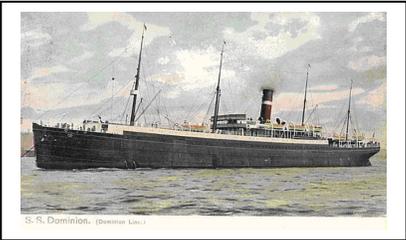
**Private Buchanan William Freebairn (Regimental Number 724) lies in Santa Marija Cimiterju (Addolorata) on the island of Malta – Grave reference E. EA. E. 673.**

**His occupation prior to military service being recorded as that of a *clerk* earning seventy-five dollars a month, Buchanan William Freebairn presented himself for medical examination on December 8 of 1914, at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*. He was a recruit of the Second Draft.**

A week plus a single day later, Buchanan William Freebairn was to return to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, there to enlist – engaged at the private soldier’s daily rate of a single dollar a day plus a ten-cent *Field Allowance*. It appears that he was also to attest on that same December 16.

Now for Private Freebairn, Number 724, there was to be a seven-week waiting period, a few days of which he was to spend in the city, boarding with a Mrs. Ryan of 227 Theatre Hill. It was the Newfoundland tax-payer who subsidized the six days in question. The remainder of the time was likely spent at home, although this is not recorded among his papers.

On the fourth day of February of 1915, the first reinforcements – this was ‘C’ Company - for the Newfoundland contingent – it was not yet at battalion strength - which by this time was serving in Scotland (see further below), were to embark via the sealing tender *Neptune* onto the *SS Dominion* – the vessel having anchored to the south of St. John’s, off Bay Bulls, because of ice conditions.



The vessel was then to sail - and Private Freebairn thus departed Newfoundland for overseas service - a day later again, on February 5, for trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom.



(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 above: *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 unit from overseas ever to do so.



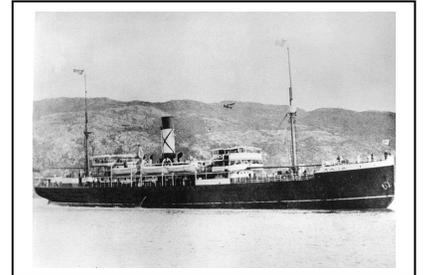
Private Freebairn and the other new-comers reported to duty at Edinburgh Castle on February 16.

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

\* \* \* \* \*

Five to six months before that time, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of some 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 - 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 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.



The ship would sail for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

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

(Right adjacent: *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 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 – and where 'C' Company and Private Freebairn, as also cited beforehand, would arrive from Newfoundland on February 16 of 1915.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some three months later, on May 11, and three weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit was ordered moved to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered eligible to be sent on 'active service'.



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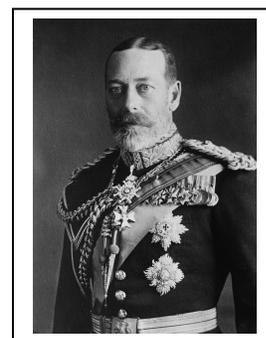
(Preceding page: *The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915.* – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

*\*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 Aldershot. This force, now the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

Meanwhile the two junior Companies, ‘E’ – 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 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* – the photograph is from *Bain News Services* via the *Wikipedia* web-site.)



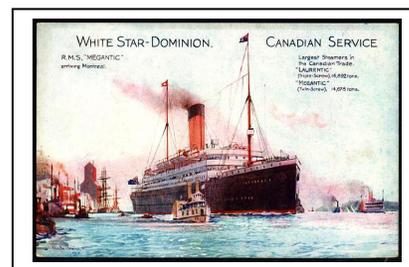
It was during this period at Aldershot, on August 15, that Private Freebairn was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion for the *duration of the war\**.

*\*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 personnel of ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.)

On August 20, 1915, Private Freebairn 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion landed at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



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

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

**(Right: 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.**

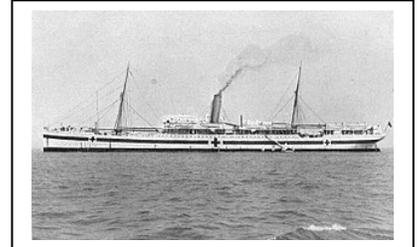
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Just over three weeks after having set foot onto the sand and stone – mostly the latter – of *Kangaroo Beach*, on or about October 13 Private Freebairn was to be evacuated from the Newfoundland Battalion positions at *Suvla Bay* and taken on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Glenart Castle*.

He was suffering from pyrexia (a high temperature).

(Right: *The image of Glenart Castle in her war-time hospital-ship garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Built in 1900 as 'Galician', she was re-named in 1914 to 'Glenart Castle' prior to being requisitioned for her role as a hospital ship. The vessel was not to survive the conflict as she was torpedoed and sunk on February 26 of 1918.*)



The vessel, having sailed on October 15, was to set course and transport him to the British-held Mediterranean island of Malta – with perhaps a brief stop at *Mudros Bay* and Harbour on the Greek island of Lemnos. Upon his arrival on the island, Private Freebairn was admitted on the 20<sup>th</sup> into hospital.

(Right above: *One of the many now-abandoned British medical facilities which still stand on the island of Malta – independent since 1964 – photograph from 2011*)



The son of Dr. Robert Jardine Freebairn and of Sarah Bradshaw Freebairn (née *Boyle*)\* – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Ferryland at that time, he was also brother to Charles A. (*Charlie*)\*\*, to Kate-Jardine and to Jessie.

*\*The couple was married on January 1 of 1889.*

*\*\*Enlisted May 29, 1916. Honorary Second Lieutenant (before his Commission he was Number 2811 of the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment), he was wounded at Monchy-le-Preux on April 14, 1917, and at Masnières on November 20 of the same year. After recuperation from his second injury, he was to serve with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Reserve) at which time he was promoted to officer rank. He survived the Great War and returned home in 1919.*

Private Freebairn was reported as having *died of sickness*, of dysentery, in hospital on Malta on October 23, 1915.

Buchanan William Freebairn - apparently his nickname was *Chan* – had enlisted at a declared twenty-one years of age: date of birth in Tilt Cove, Newfoundland, on August 29, 1893 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

He shares his tombstone with Private V. Merrick of the South Lancashire Regiment and Private P. Heally, of the Cameronians (*Scottish Rifles*).

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**Private Buchanan William Freebairn 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 9, 2023.**