



**Private Thomas Joseph Grouchy (Regimental Number 1771) lies in Étapes Military Cemetery: Grave reference XXIX. F. 8.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of both jeweller and watchmaker with *T.J. Duley & Company*, Thomas Joseph Grouchy was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 10 of 1915 for a medical examination. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being...*fit for Foreign Service*.**

**(continued)**

On the morrow of that medical assessment, August 11, he was to return to the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, there to enlist. Thomas Joseph Grouchy was thereupon to be engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar, to which was to be added a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

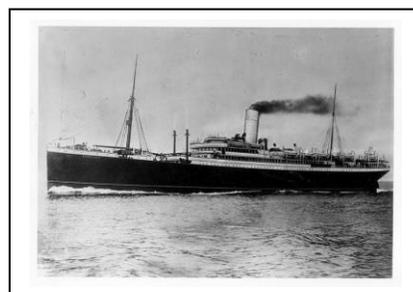
And it was then to be only twenty-four hours afterwards again that there then came the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On the following day, August 12, he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, at which moment Thomas Joseph Grouchy thereupon became...*a soldier of the King*.

A further, and lengthier, waiting-period was now in store for the recruits of this draft, designated as 'G' Company, before they were to depart from Newfoundland for...*overseas service*.

Private Grouchy, Regimental Number 1771, was not to be again called upon until October 27, after a period of eleven weeks less a day. Where he was to spend this intervening time appears not to have been recorded although he possibly returned temporarily to his work and surely would have been able to spend time with family and friends on William Street in the city - but, of course, this is only speculation.

On the above-mentioned date of October 27, 'G' Company left St. John's by train to cross the island to Port aux Basques, the other passengers on board reportedly having included several naval reservists and also some German prisoners-of-war. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry – documented as having been the *Kyle* - and afterwards proceeded again by train from North Sydney as far as Québec City.

There the Newfoundlanders joined His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* for the trans-Atlantic voyage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9. The vessel had departed Montreal on October 30 with Canadian troops on board before stopping at Québec: the 55<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion and the Second Draft of the (1<sup>st</sup>?) Divisional Signals Company.



(Right above: *The image of Corsican is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Launched in 1907 for the Allan Line, one of the largest private shipping companies of the time, she spent much of her early career chartered to the Canadian Pacific Line which in 1917 was to purchase the entire Allan Line business. She was employed as a troop-ship during much of the Great War which she survived – only to be wrecked near Cape Race on May 21, 1923.*)



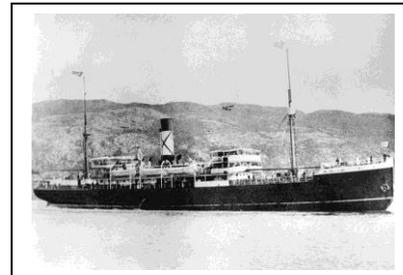
(Right: *The once-busy Royal Navy facility and harbour of Devonport almost a century after the Great War – photograph from 2012(?)*)

(continued)

By the morning of November 10, Private Grouchy's 'G' Company had again travelled by train, to Scotland where it had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gales, not far removed from the evolving Newfoundland Regimental Depot at Ayr where accommodation for the new arrivals was as yet not available.

\* \* \* \* \*

More than a year prior to that November 10 of 1915, 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 above: *The image of 'Florizel' at anchor in the harbour at St. John's is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.*)

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.

The ship had sailed 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 below: *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 it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.



*\*It was to do so at Devonport through which 'G' Company would pass eleven months later.*

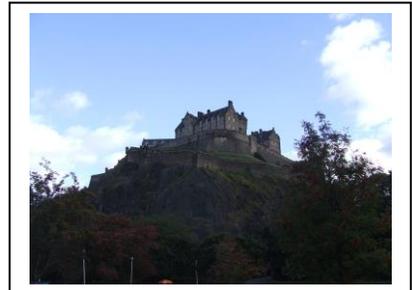
Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of 'D' Company to arrive – they via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty...*at Edinburgh, and then 'E' Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4\*.

(continued)

*\*These five Companies, while a contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment, did not as yet comprise a battalion and would not do so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

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

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 - the unit had been dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all 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)*



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

This had been an 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 to furnish 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 'D', the four senior Companies, having now become the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 from Bain News Services via 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 soon to be formed 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) 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)**



**(Right below: The High Street in Ayr as shown on a postcard of the time, the imposing Wallace Tower – it stands to this day (2017) - dominating the scene – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo.**



**The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer and the early autumn of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 – that the new-comers were to be sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion\*.**

***\*The first such draft was, in fact, to depart from Ayr for service on the Gallipoli Peninsula days after the arrival in Scotland of Grouchy's 'G' Company, on November 15.***

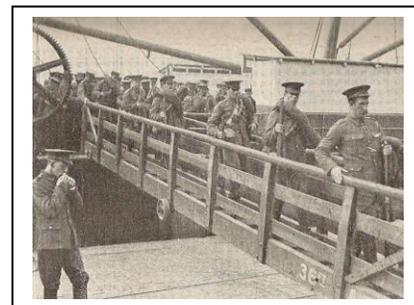
**This then had been the situation facing the new-comers: the new Regimental Depot had still been in the throes of its establishment when Private Grouchy and his comrades-in-arms of 'G' Company were to arrive in Scotland on November 10 of 1915; thus, as related in a preceding paragraph, the new-comers were required to be quartered at Gales, some sixteen kilometres further up the coast – but apparently more than sixty kilometres distant by road.**

**Then, some twenty-eight weeks after having reported to Gales those several months before in November of 1915, on May 24 of the spring of 1916 - and three weeks before his eventual departure on active service – Private Grouchy 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 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.***

**By the time that he, Private Grouchy, was eventually to sail from the United Kingdom to...active service...he had witnessed the departure of five re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: In mid-November the first – already cited in an earlier paragraph - had sailed for the Middle East to serve at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula; the second had been a convoluted adventure – the draft had taken ship in mid-March for Egypt but upon arrival there had been obliged to turn around for a return voyage as far as the French Mediterranean port-city of Marseille. From that time on, however, the drafts were all to proceed directly across the English Channel to France.**

On June 14, 1916, the 6<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Private Grouchy among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent. On the following day, the 15<sup>th</sup>, it disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and the site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot where the contingent spent time in final training and organization\* before moving on to a rendezvous with the parent 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

*\*Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed – in areas near Rouen, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

A detachment of sixty-six men from Rouen – mostly from that 6<sup>th</sup> Draft – would arrive to join the parent unit at Louvencourt on June 30\*. At a quarter past nine on that same evening, most of the Newfoundlanders – minus the ten per cent Reserve Company\*\* but including many of the new-comers – marched from there to where they would do battle on the morrow: Beaumont-Hamel.

\* \* \* \* \*

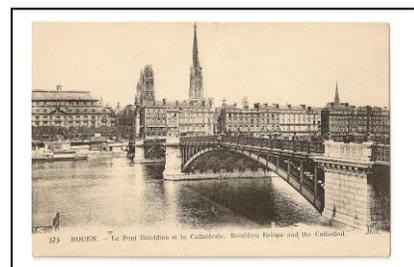
Private Grouchy was not, however, to be involved with the draft's doings in the days after its disembarkation on June 15 in France: on the following day, June 16, he was admitted into the 12<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in Rouen and there diagnosed as suffering from NYD – *Not Yet Determined*. On the following day yet again he was forwarded to the 9<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital in the industrial port-city of le Havre.



There he apparently remained until August 29, for almost seven weeks, before then being transferred back to Rouen and admitted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Stationary Hospital there.

(Right above: *The esplanade in the French port-city of le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The next stop for Private Grouchy was to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> Convalescent Depot where he was admitted on September 8 (or 18 – the paper is almost illegible). Some two weeks (or perhaps only days) later again he was discharged from there to the Divisional Base Depot at Rouen which he had managed to avoid three months previously.

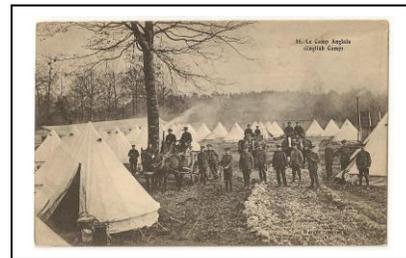


Perhaps he then suffered a relapse – or had by then developed another complaint – because he was back in hospital only six days following, on the 29<sup>th</sup>. On this occasion it

was again at the 1<sup>st</sup> Stationary Hospital, and where the diagnosis was once more NYD – soon to be identified as a venereal problem.

(Preceding page: *The River Seine flows through the centre of the French city of Rouen – and under the steeples and towers of the venerable gothic cathedral - at or about the time of the Great War. – from a vintage post-card*)

He was seemingly not to be released...*to duty*...to the Base Depot again until December 16. Private Grouchy then returned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion on Christmas Day as one of a draft of fifty *other ranks* from Rouen – whether in time or not to enjoy the turkey dinner of the day served at half-past mid-day has not been recorded.



The Newfoundlanders had at the time been posted to *Corps Reserve* and were spending some six weeks behind the lines in the area of *the Somme*, and close to the city of Amiens – in a camp to the south-west of the city.

(Right above: *a typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card*)

\* \* \* \* \*

Some eighteen months prior to this juncture, in the early summer of 1915, the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both ‘E’ and ‘F’ Companies had only then been beginning their time of training at Ayr; as for Thomas Joseph Grouchy, he was as yet only at the point of enlistment and attestation at home, and he still had some three months to wait before the call was to come to sail overseas to the United Kingdom.

The aforementioned four senior companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, of the Newfoundland Regiment, having now become the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had at this same time been attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been dispatched to...*active service*.

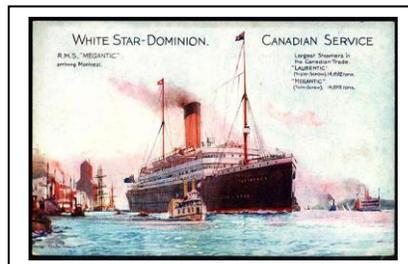
(Right: *Some of the personnel of ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915, prior to its departure to active service on the Gallipoli Peninsula – from The Fighting Newfoundlander by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.*)



On August 20 of 1915, the Newfoundland Battalion had 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 was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(continued)

**(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.)**



**(Right below: 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 below: 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)**



**When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at 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:**



**(Right: 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 was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)**

**(Right below: 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.**

**(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*)



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

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.



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, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire 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 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 *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.

(continued)

**(Preceding page: 'W' Beach under shell-fire at Cape Helles as it was 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16<sup>th</sup>, 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.

There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division had yet to be decided\*.

**(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 once 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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)**



**\*Bulgaria had by that time entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.**

**(Right: Port Tewfiq, adjacent to Port Suez at the south end of the Suez Canal, at a time just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card)**



(continued)

After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.

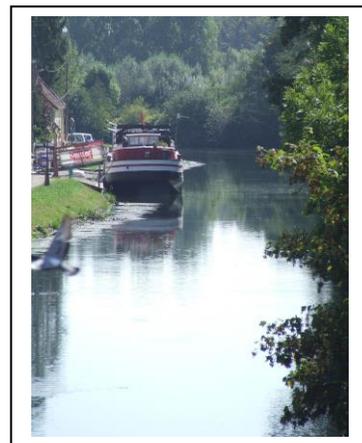
(Right: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseille. – from a vintage post-card*)



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. But some three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.



On April 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 reinforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

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

Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front* in mid-April, 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.*

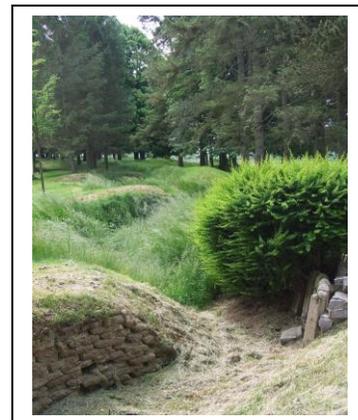


(Right: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)*)

Having then been withdrawn at the beginning of that month of May 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 for the upcoming British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, that flowed – and still does so today – through the region.

And it was, as related in an earlier paragraph, on the very eve of the onset of that campaign that the draft of sixty-six men dispatched from the Base Depot at Rouen - a detachment which would likely have included Private Grouchy had he not been in hospital - arrived to report to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at Louvencourt.

A goodly number of this draft was thus to be marching eastwards on that evening with the Newfoundland Battalion to the assigned ...*forming-up place trenches i.e. rear line of trenches in our usual sector* (from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary). They were not alone: as the guns continued to thunder and hurl their destruction towards the enemy positions, many tens of thousands of others in khaki uniform were doing likewise.



(Right above: *Just inside the entrance to the Newfoundland Memorial Park is to be found the re-constituted forming-up trench from where the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion attacked on the morning of July 1. – photograph from 2010*)

*\*Had the attack gone ahead on June 30 as initially had been planned, those men might not have been flung into the imminent maelstrom. Bad weather – fog which had restricted aerial surveillance – had decided the High Command to postpone the attack for one day.*

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 front lines down the hill towards the Y Ravine Cemetery visible in the distance and which today stands atop a part of the German front-line defences of the time: 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(?)*)

(continued)

*\*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 greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage of *the Somme* was to continue for four and a half months.



(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village.* – photographs from 2010 and 2015)

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

*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 separating Beaumont from Hamel.*



After the events of the first day of the...*First Battle of the Somme*, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that any 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 - had thus remained 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 had then been a further two days before the unit had marched further again to the rear area and to billets in the village of Mailly-Maillet.



(Right above: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John's East.* – photograph from 2009)

(continued)

There on July 11, a draft of one-hundred twenty-seven re-enforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported *to duty*. They had been the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was still to number only... *11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

Ten days later a second draft from the Regimental Depot at Ayr had joined via the Divisional Base Depot at Rouen and had presented itself in the community of Acheux to which the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had withdrawn four days before.

Days later again, having marched from Acheux to the provincial town of Beauval, on July 27-28 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, maybe fewer even after a third re-enforcement draft of sixty *other ranks* on July 24 – moved northwards and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.



(Right above: *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*)

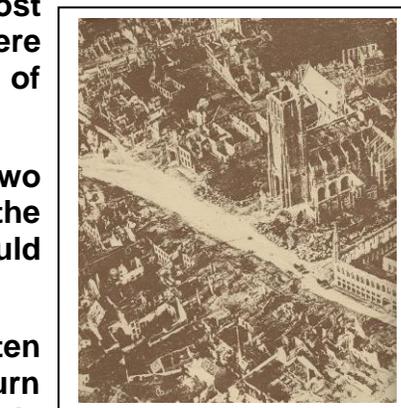
It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.

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

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

(Right above: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916: it is described as the 'Ville morte'. – from Illustration*)

Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 encounter was to prove to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Preceding page: *This is the ground over which the 1<sup>st</sup> 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)

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



After October 12, the Newfoundland Battalion was not to be immediately directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it had supplied two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires and the Worcestershires, of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme.* – from *Illustration*)



On October 30, the Newfoundland unit had eventually been retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing and it was not to be until November 15 that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to wend its way back up to the front lines.



(Right above: *A typical British Army Camp during rather inclement winter conditions somewhere on the Continent* – from a vintage post-card)

There it continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period broken only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

And it was there on Christmas Day that Private Grouchy had reported to the unit.

\* \* \* \* \*

(continued)

After those Christmas festivities – turkey dinner, as mentioned much further above, washed down with...*real ale*...apparently – it was not now to be until January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of Corps Reserve and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* to make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it entrained for the small town of Corbie where it thereupon took over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

After that recent six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve* far to the rear, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to *active service* on January 23, although they apparently had already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

Those casualties, however, were to be only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig somewhat cavalierly referred to as *wastage* since the Newfoundland unit did not venture from its trenches during those several days.

However, that winter period – as had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the Great War – would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable for most of the combatants of both sides. It was a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were kept busy, particularly, so it seems - from at least Canadian medical documentation - with thousands of cases of dental work.

This period also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion this was at least partially undertaken in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.

On February 18 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began a five-day trek back from the above-mentioned Coisy to the forward area where it went back into the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers. It was at a place called Sailly-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans was lively: after only two days the Battalion had incurred four dead, nine wounded and three gassed without there having been any infantry action. The Newfoundlanders were withdrawn on February 25 to return three days later.



They carried with them orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Sailly-Saillisel...to be carried out on March 1.

(Right above: A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, his unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold of the trenches at Sailly-Saillisel during the winter of 1916-1917. – from *Illustration*)

(Right: The fighting during the period of the Battalion's posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time. - photograph from 2009(?))



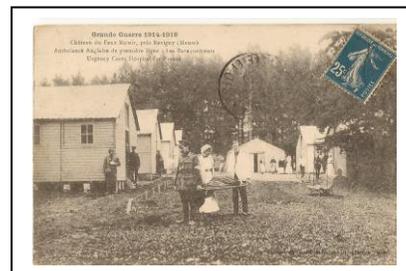
(continued)

In fact, the sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during that entire period – from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917 – was to be that sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action which would bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders’ War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.

\* \* \* \* \*

But Private Grouchy was not to serve during the encounter at Sailly-Saillisel, nor at Monchy-le-Preux, nor even at *Les Fosses Farm* (see further below).

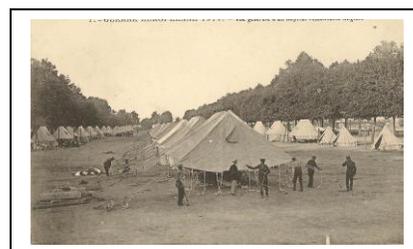
Once again he was having medical problems and by the time of those encounters he had been admitted into the 88<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance for preliminary treatment, perhaps as early as on February 10. He was thereupon almost immediately transferred to an unidentified casualty clearing station where he received attention for a week, until the 17<sup>th</sup>, before being transferred to the 7<sup>th</sup> Convalescent Depot near Boulogne.



The problem was, once more, a venereal complaint.

(Right above: *A British Field Ambulance, more permanent than some nearer to the front, in north-eastern France at a later date in the War – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right: *A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War. Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card*)



He was released *to duty* at the Base Depot near Rouen on April 26 and there he was to remain for another six weeks.

Private Grouchy was to re-join his parent unit on June 7. He was one of the draft of four officers and ninety-two *other ranks* from Rouen to report...*to duty*...on that day at the rural community of Bonneville. The 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion had arrived on just the previous day and would now spend the subsequent three weeks there training and preparing for the British summer offensive of 1917.

\* \* \* \* \*

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March had been a quiet time for the Newfoundland unit; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events. They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band come from Ayr, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick’s Day.



(Preceding page: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from The War Illustrated*)

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had begun to make their way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, the march to finish amid the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right: *The remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War, in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

(Right below: *The Canadian National Memorial which has stood atop Vimy Ridge since 1936 – photograph from 2010*)

On April 9 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a major French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties – just over four thousand - this attack was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, its only positive episode to be the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday, 1917.



And while the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, the French *Bataille du Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

(Right: *The re-built village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community: The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)



The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that had begun at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After *Beaumont-Hamel*, the ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux would prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone\*.

*\*It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux for but a few days. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, be

amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming re-enforcements would allow the two units' strengths to once more resemble those of bona fide battalions.

When the thirty-nine *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen had reported to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 18, they were just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers. There had even *then* been only two hundred twenty – plus twelve officers in number - serving with some two hundred of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. Those of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had spent the 19<sup>th</sup> salvaging equipment and burying the dead, and had then remained there until the 23<sup>rd</sup>.



(Right above: *Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras.– photograph from 2007*)

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* had been the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This had in fact been an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies.

It apparently had not been a particularly successful venture, at least not in the sector of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.



And the Newfoundlanders had sustained further losses: ten...*killed in action*, three ...*missing in action*, and forty-eight...*wounded*.

Late, on that same evening of April 23, the Newfoundlanders had retired the dozen or so kilometres to the relative calm of Arras.

(Right above: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right below: *Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from *The War Illustrated**)

After the Newfoundland Battalion's confrontation at Les Fosses Farm, the *Battle of Arras* was to proceed to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-May, but the Newfoundland unit was not to be further involved in any further co-ordinated offensive action – it had been too exhausted; this now would be a period when the Battalion was simply to move in a circular fashion on the *Arras Front*, in and out of the trenches.



(continued)

On May 7 the unit had been on the move once again and marching to different billets in Berneville where it would be the subject of a war journalist and photographer.

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – not Bonneville - in early May, perhaps the 7<sup>th</sup>, of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)



At the outset of June, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it was to transpire, the autumn as well.

On June 7 a detachment of four officers and ninety-two other ranks had reported from the Base Depot at Rouen to strengthen the Newfoundland Battalion. Private Grouchy was to be one of that number.

\* \* \* \* \*

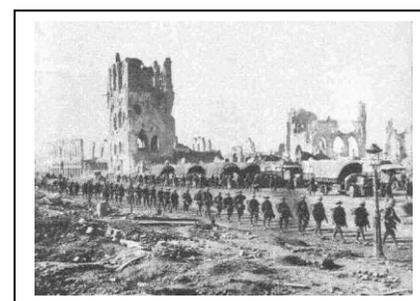
The Newfoundlanders were then soon again ordered north into the *Kingdom of Belgium* – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just north of the city.

(Right below: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right* – photograph from 2014)



This small, low-lying area, Belgian *Flanders*, which had been since 1914 the only part of the country unoccupied by the invading German forces, had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the upcoming British summer offensive of 1917.

(Right below: *Troops arriving from the railway station in single file, march past the vestiges of the historic Cloth Hall and through the rubble of the medieval city centre of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer or early autumn of 1917. – from *Illustration**)



Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, this campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

Since that time it has become one of the symbols of the wretchedness of war.

(continued)

(Right: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)



(Right below: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration*)



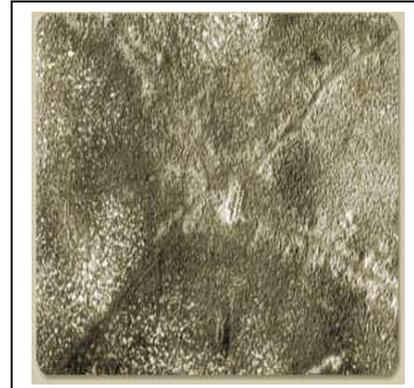
The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army. This had been or was also to be the case with the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians, all of whose troops had floundered or would soon flounder their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Belgian Flanders.

Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9.



At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost was to be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

(Right: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010*)



(Right: *The once-village, now shattered rubble, of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

There had been four weeks of relative calm which had begun at *Penton Camp* on August 28, twelve days after the fighting at the *Steenbeek*, a period which had continued for some four weeks while the British forces re-enforced and re-organized. The Newfoundland Battalion was then to go back to war during the last days of what had been a fine September; but as the fighting started once more...so did the rain.

The offensive recommenced for the Newfoundland Battalion on September 25, although the unit had incurred four wounded two days prior to that date due to long-range artillery fire. Back in their trenches they prepared for their next concerted attack on German positions.

(continued)

It came some two weeks later and, as seen some few lines above, it came at the *Broembeek*.

(Right: *Normally an innocuous, placid stream as shown here, in 1917 the Broembeek was a torrent which would flood the surrounding terrain, transforming it into a quagmire. – photograph from 2009*)



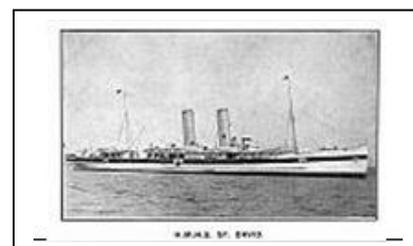
Only two days after that aforesaid confrontation of October 9, the Newfoundland Battalion marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe, whence it was to be transported to *Swindon Camp*. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit once more boarded a train.

\* \* \* \* \*

During those five days, however, Private Grouchy was once more in need of medical attention. On October 14 he was sent to the 102<sup>nd</sup> Field Ambulance suffering that scourge of the soldiery of the *Great War*: scabies. He apparently therefore just missed a visit made by the Prince of Wales, and also the one of the last paragraph made by German bombers, both of which were to take place on the following day, the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Field ambulances normally provide only very temporary sanctuary for their patients: where Private Grouchy was, from the 14<sup>th</sup> until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the next month, the records do not say – but possibly a casualty clearing station or a rest station run by a field ambulance.

On that November 2 he was admitted into the 7<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in the northern French town of St. Omer before being embarked almost three weeks later on November 22 onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. David* for the crossing back to the United Kingdom. On the same day Private Grouchy became a patient of the King George V Hospital in London for treatment of recurring boils and for ICT – *Inflammation of the Connective Tissues* - of the buttock. He remained there under treatment for sixty-two days.



(Right above: *The image of 'St. David' clad in her war-time hospital-ship garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel was a ship built in 1906 to service the crossing from Wales to Ireland for the Great Western Railway but that role was cut short by the Great War which saw 'St. David' and three sister-vessels employed as hospital ships on the cross-Channel routes. She survived the War and returned to her former work until 1933 when she was scrapped.*)

The customary ten-day furlough granted to military personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom – in the case of Private Grouchy from January 23 until February 1 - was thereupon followed by the almost-inevitable posting to the Regimental Depot which by that time had been moved from Scotland to the south of England, close to the historic city of Winchester. His stay there, at *Hazely Down*, was to last just a month.

(Right below: *A bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from The War Illustrated*)

On March 1 the 39<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from *Hazely Down*, Private Grouchy one of its number, embarked through Southampton and arrived in Rouen on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, en route – after those days of final training at the Base Depot - to the front. He re-joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion...*in the field*...in Belgium on March 18, in the area of Poperinghe, a town a dozen kilometres or so to the west of Ypres.



\* \* \* \* \*

Three days after Private Grouchy's departure from *Swindon Camp* on October 14, 1917, on the morning of October 17, while the *Third Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele* had still been raging, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had once more boarded a train. Another campaign beckoned.

By ten-thirty that same evening, the Battalion had crossed the frontier into France and had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and would now march the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.

The Newfoundlanders had still been there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and two days later when, on November 17, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had again been ordered once again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it had begun to move further eastward, now on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while still on the move, the unit had been issued as it went with...*war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of that night it had marched up to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the Newfoundland unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, was to move forward into its forming-up area. From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten, bugles blowing, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had advanced to the fray.



(Right above: *The Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

This new offensive – apparently initially conceived to be no more than a large-scale raid - the so-called *Battle of Cambrai*, was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders having been directly involved at all times during that period.

(continued)

The battle was to begin well for the British who had used tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities had been squandered. There had been no reserve troops available to exploit what had been a hoped-for - yet admittedly unexpected - success, and by the close of the battle, the Germans had been able to counter-attack. During the final days of the *Battle of Cambrai*, the British had relinquished as much – more in places - territory as they had originally gained.

The Newfoundland Battalion had once again been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing, Masnières - where a Caribou stands today - and in the area of the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who had advanced into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day\*.



(Right above: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on November 20; however, whether its capture was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012*)

*\*At five-hundred fifty-three all ranks – not counting the aforementioned ten per cent reserve - the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment even at the outset of the operation was operating at just over fifty per cent of establishment strength: not that it would have been any consolation had it been known, but a goodly number of battalions in all the British and Dominion forces – with perhaps the exception of the Canadians - were encountering the same problem.*



(Right above: *A number of graves of soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery. Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, has identified them as being Canadian. – photograph from 2010*)

After the exertions of *Cambrai*, the Newfoundlanders were to be withdrawn from the line, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment by then numbering the strength of only a single company - whereas a full battalion comprises four. The unit had then remained in the vicinity of Humbercourt, to the west of Arras, until December 18 when it was to march to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There the unit would spend both Christmas and New Year. The weather had obliged and had even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow - a bit too much at times apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, after that snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had returned to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time. There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.

(Right below: *By 1918 Ypres was looking like this; some of these broken buildings had been a school which had served as a shelter for troops in the earlier days of the conflict. – from a vintage post-card*)

In the meantime, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them. It was expected that they would launch a spring offensive - which they were to do – in fact they were to unleash several of them\*.



*\*There were also to be several assaults by the Germans on French forces during that spring. They all met with varying degrees of success at the outset, but eventually they would be thwarted by Petain's divisions, aided at times by the newly-arriving Americans.*

In the sector where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was stationed, the blow was not to fall until April. Thus, while they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders had continued to dig.



(Right: *Some of the countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders had built a tram-line in January and were still stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

As suggested above, the Germans would do as was expected of them: Ludendorff's armies had launched a powerful thrust against the British on March 21, the first day of that spring of 1918; they had struck at first in the area of and just south of *the Somme*, there to overrun the battlefields of 1916 and well beyond - for a while their advance had seemed unstoppable.

For a number of reasons, after two weeks the offensive had begun to falter and would eventually halt; but then, just days afterwards, a second offensive, *Georgette*, was to be launched in the northern sector of the front, in Belgian Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders had been stationed: the date April 9. Within only two days the situation of the British had become desperate.



(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

On the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, and as the Germans had approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were to be deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, having been due to come out of the line and to move back to the area of *the Somme*, were instead to board buses at three o'clock in the afternoon, thereupon to be directed southward, towards the border town of Nieppe.

They were to be in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, just three hours later.

(Right: *The area of La Crêche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station – photograph from 2010.*)



The British had been pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of April the Newfoundland Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, had to make a series of desperate stands.

On April 12-13 – the dates in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's War Diary are not clear - during the defensive stand near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company had been obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company had taken up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, had stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening – had been equally heavily involved.

(Right below: *Ground just to the east of Bailleul where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to be in action during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

The period from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never had materialised and the front had finally been stabilised\*.



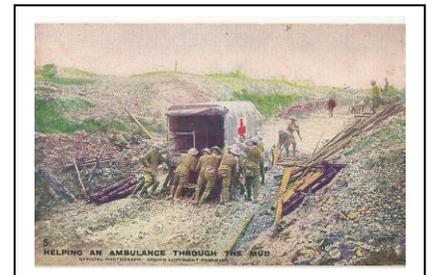
*\*The 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade – and therefore the Newfoundland Battalion – was to be seconded to the 34<sup>th</sup> Division from the 29<sup>th</sup> Division during this critical period.*

(Right: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there stand several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)



Private Grouchy was wounded on April 12 in the fighting that took place in the proximity of the towns of Neuve-Église and Bailleul, on the Franco-Belgian border. He was evacuated that same day to the 10<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at the Rémy Siding, Poperinghe, having incurred multiple gun-shot wounds to the neck and throat.

Two days later, on April 14, he was transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Hospital at Étaples where he was reported as being *seriously ill*.



(continued)

**(Preceding page: *Transferring sick and wounded from the forward to behind the lines through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)**

**The son of Elias Grouchy (found in Baptismal Records as *Grisshey*), carman with the *City of St. John's Sanitary Department*, and of Mary Elizabeth Grouchy (née *Hand\**) – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of 24, William Street (later of 21, Scott Street) in St. John's, he was also brother to Augustine, Mary-Christina, Lucy and Philip-Joseph.**

***\*The couple was married on February 4, 1893.***

**Private Grouchy was reported as having...*died of wounds*...in the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Hospital at Étaples on April 17, 1918.**

**Thomas Joseph Grouchy had enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years and ten months: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, October 19, 1895 (from the Roman Catholic Parish Records).**

**Private Thomas Joseph Grouchy was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

**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 5, 2023.**

