

Private William Hall (Regimental Number 1949) lies in Brookwood Military Cemetery: Grave reference X. A. 1.

His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of both *farmer* and *miner* – he worked for the *Nova Scotia Steel Company*, earning fifteen dollars a week – William Hall was a volunteer of the Seventh Recruitment Draft. He presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on October 26 of 1915 for a medical examination. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being...*fit for Foreign Service*.

On the day of that medical assessment, October 26, and at the same venue, the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, he was now to enlist. William Hall 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.

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Then it was to be just some twenty-four hours thereafter that there then came the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On October 27 he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, at which moment William Hall became...*a soldier of the King*.

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

**In fact, 'H' Company was to depart from Newfoundland in two detachments: the first one-hundred recruits, Private Hall among that number, would be the first to leave in that December of 1915. The second part of 'H' Company would not follow until the fourth week of the upcoming month of March. It was to make the journey on board the SS Sicilian and report to Ayr on April 9.*

Until as late as that spring of 1916 it had been the intention to form a 2nd Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment to fight on the Continent. In fact it would seem that the one-hundred sixty-three recruits of the second contingent, 'H' Company, were to form a part of the nucleus of that unit, while the personnel already at the Depot by this time would form a reserve battalion to serve as a re-enforcement pool for both the Regiment's fighting units.

It could not have been long before a change of plan came about as, very soon, men of the second half of 'H' Company were being sent to strengthen the 1st Battalion already on the Continent – maybe Beaumont-Hamel had something to do with it.

Private Hall, Regimental Number 1949, would be one of the one-hundred men who comprised the first detachment of 'H' Company to travel for...overseas service. He was now to wait seven weeks and three days after attestation before being called, but where he was to spend this interim is not certain: he may have temporarily returned to work and almost undoubtedly would have spent time at the family home on the Old Broad Cove Road in St. John's East – all of the above of course is only speculation*.

**It is also likely that some of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the city, or those who had no friends or family to offer board and lodging, were quartered in the curling rink at Fort William in St. John's, a building which was to serve as a barracks.*

This first detachment of 'H' Company left St. John's by train to cross the island to Port aux Basques on December 18, 1915. After the short sea-voyage to traverse the Gulf of St. Lawrence the detachment entrained once again, in North Sydney, for Saint John, New Brunswick.

The Atlantic crossing was to be effected from there on board the Royal Mail Ship *Corinthian* and the draft reported to the Regimental Depot at Ayr on January 4 of the New Year, 1916.

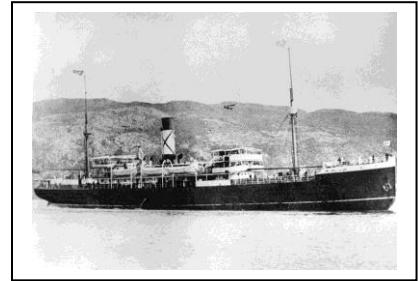


(Right above: The Allan Line Ship 'Corinthian' was built in 1899 and was to serve mainly on trans-Atlantic routes between Great Britain and Canada. At the beginning of the Great War she formed a part of the convoy carrying the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the United Kingdom although after that it appears that she resumed her commercial work,

transporting troops only if and when it suited her schedule. In December of 1918 she was driven ashore in the Bay of Fundy and although there was no loss of life, the ship was wrecked.)

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Some sixteen months prior to that January 4 of 1916, 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 the 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 1st 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.

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*.

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

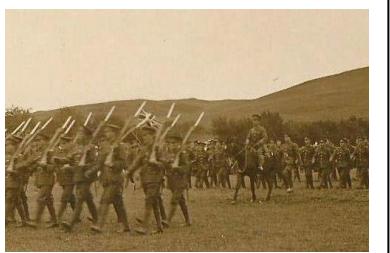
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(Right: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011*)



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

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

From *Stobs Camp*, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the four senior Companies, having now become the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, had been transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before the Battalion's departure to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



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 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

(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.)

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(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 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 – that the new-comers were sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion*.

*The first such re-enforcement draft was, in fact, to depart from Ayr for service on the Gallipoli Peninsula on November 15, some seven weeks before the arrival in Scotland of Private Hall's 'H' Company.

That November 15 of 1915 (see immediately above) was to see not only the departure of the 1st Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr to the Middle East and to the fighting of the *Gallipoli Campaign* but also, only five days prior, the arrival from Newfoundland of 'G' Company which would be obliged to take up quarters at *Gailes Camp*, some sixteen kilometres up the coast from Ayr itself – but just over sixty if one went by road.

A further seven weeks plus a day were now to pass before Private Hall and the first one-hundred of 'H' Company were to present themselves at the Regimental Depot.

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Transferred upon their arrival in Scotland on January 4 to serve with 'G' Company, the new-comers of 'H' (now 'G') Company were to be quartered in the barracks of the Royal Scots Fusiliers; they, however, had not yet vacated the aforesaid premises, due to an epidemic of measles at the time. It was not long before the disease had also taken its toll on the Newfoundlanders amongst whom there would be fatalities.

However, Private Hall was not to be one of those affected.

Some six months after his arrival in Scotland, on June 30 but after that still some eight weeks before his departure from there to France on active service, he was prevailed upon to re-enlist for the duration of the War*.

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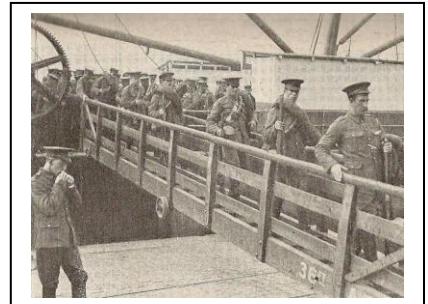
**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits signed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

By the time of his calling, the Regimental Depot had already seen the departure of the first of many re-enforcement drafts to eventually be dispatched from there: the First directly to Gallipoli; the Second which had sailed to Egypt before being turned back to land in France; and the Third which had sailed straight to France at the end of March.

Those which had subsequently sailed from Scotland – up until the winter of 1917-1918 – were also to cross directly to the Continent.

He, Private Hall, had not been selected to serve in any of the first nine of those drafts; it was only after he had been serving in Scotland for some seven months that his turn would come. When it *did* come, his draft would be dispatched directly to the Continent.

The 10th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Hall among its ranks – passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on August 24 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front. It disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, the 25th, and spent time at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, undergoing final training and organization*, before making its way to a rendezvous with the 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen at an earlier date of the Great War 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, Étaples, Le Havre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Once in Rouen it would appear that Private Hall's draft from Ayr was to be parcelled out in small numbers to eventually report to the parent Newfoundland unit in the several re-enforcement drafts sent from the Base Depot during the upcoming few weeks.

It was at Ypres that Private Hall, one of a small detachment of only nine other ranks reported...to duty...on September 14 – although its arrival is not recorded in the *Regimental War Diary*. At the time...all companies working every available man on various work under Royal Engineers...(excerpt from the 1st Battalion War Diary excerpt of the day). And although at the time the Newfoundlanders were being billeted in the city of Ypres itself, this, given the constant bombardment, was no guarantee whatsoever of safety.



(Preceding page: A view of a re-built Ypres (Ieper) today, the quarters of 'A' and 'B' Companies being in the ramparts to the right and left respectively of the Menin Gate, itself just to the right of centre in the image – photograph from 2013)

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Some thirteen months prior to this juncture taking place, back in the early summer of 1915 the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both 'E' and 'F' Companies, as seen further above, had only then been beginning their period of training there at Ayr.

As for William Hall, he had still been at home awaiting enlistment and attestation after which he still would have those fifty-two days 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 1st Battalion had at this same time been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had subsequently been dispatched from Camp Aldershot to...active service.



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



(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.)

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 1st Battalion was to land at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.



(Right above: 'Kangaroo Beach', where the officers and men of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is to be seen in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on 'A' Beach. – photograph taken in 2011)

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(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 1st Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

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:

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.

(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.

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

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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 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

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

The British, Indian and Anzac forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – had by now simply been marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.



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

(Right above: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles under shell-fire 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 above: *'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in that January of 1916 and by the Newfoundlanders who were to be the last soldiers off the beach: Vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen.* – photograph from 2011)

Immediately after the British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria and beyond.

On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived there with the 1st Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16th, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she had docked early on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders had landed and marched to their encampment.

(Right: *The image of the Blue Funnel Line vessel Nestor is from the Shipsspotting.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.*)



There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided

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

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



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and other ranks of the 1st Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.



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

The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.



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

Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille.

It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexplicably 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.

(Right: A *languid River 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 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 entire 1st Battalion had subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

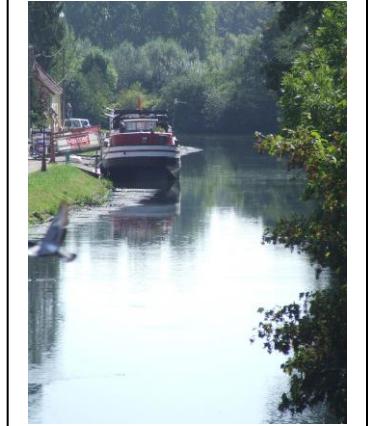
(Right: A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)

Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front*, two of the four Companies – 'A', and 'B' – were to take over several support positions from a British unit* before the entire Newfoundland unit had then been ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.

**It might be added here that the Newfoundland Battalion and two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles who were serving at the time in the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment Battalion, were then the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles - true also on the day of the attack on July 1.*

Having then been withdrawn at the beginning of that May to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders had soon been 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.

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(Preceding page: *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 right in the photograph.* – photograph taken in 2009)

If there is one name and date in Newfoundland history which is etched in the collective once-national memory, it is that of Beaumont-Hamel on July 1 of 1916; and if any numbers are remembered, they are those of the eight-hundred who went over the top in the third wave of the attack on that morning, and of the sixty-eight unwounded present at muster some twenty-four hours later*.

(Right above: A view of Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)

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

**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...First Battle 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)

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.

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(Preceding page: *A further view of the re-constituted battle-field in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – today the barbed wire is there to control the tourists – photograph from 2007(?)*)

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, at Beaumont-Hamel, 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.

There were then 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*)

There on July 11-12, 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, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion was still to number only...11 officers and 260 rifles...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

Of course, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had not been the only unit in the British Army to have incurred horrific losses on July 1, 1916, even though it had indeed been one of the most devastated. But even with its depleted numbers, the Battalion had still been needed and, after that first – above - re-enforcement, it had almost immediately again been ordered to man the trenches of the front line: as of July 14 the Newfoundlanders were to begin another tour in the trenches where...we were shelled heavily by enemy's 5.9 howitzers and a good deal of damage was done to the trenches (excerpt from the 1st Battalion War Diary).

On July 27-28 of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, maybe fewer even after two further re-enforcement drafts – would move northwards and enter into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

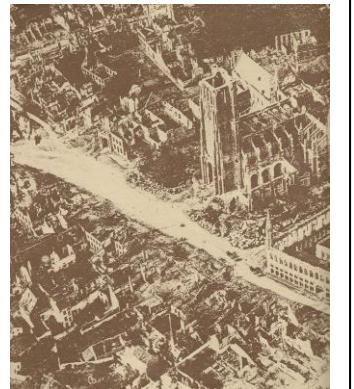


(Right: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

The unit 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.

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



It was into this lethal situation – although at the time perhaps preferable to...*the Somme*... - that Private Hall and his eight comrades-in-arms from Rouen had marched on that September 14, 1916.

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On October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion was ordered to return south and would be transported by train back into France, and back into the area of the...*First Battle of the Somme*.

Just four days after the unit’s return to France from Belgium, on October 12 of 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment would again be ordered to the offensive; it was at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.

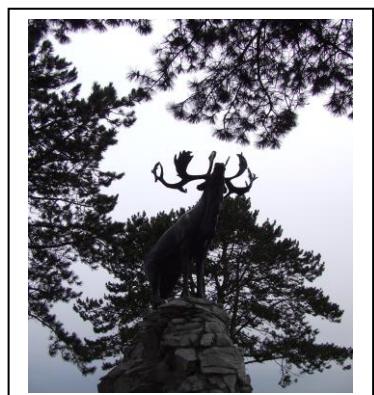
The encounter was to prove to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.



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

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

The Newfoundland Battalion was not then to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it furnished 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 88th Infantry Brigade of which the Newfoundland unit was a battalion.



(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*)

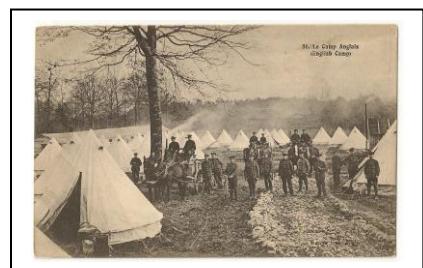


On October 30, the Newfoundland unit eventually retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving continuously in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks retired to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the Battalion began to wend its way back to the front lines.

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.

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



Those Christmas festivities having been completed – turkey dinner washed down with...*real ale*...apparently – it was not to be until a further sixteen days had passed, 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 town 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. Days later again the unit continued its progress back up to the forward area and to...*active service*. That recent six-week Christmas respite spent far to the rear, by now a thing of the past, 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.

By then it was the beginning of the winter period. As had been and as was to be the case of all the winter periods of the *Great War* – that of 1916-1917 would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable – there was a shortage of fuel and many other things, particularly in 1917 - for most of the combatants of both sides. It was also to be a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were kept busy, particularly, so it seems - at least according to Canadian medical documents and records - with thousands of cases of dental work.

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

On February 18 the 1st Battalion started a five-day trek back from Coisy to the forward area where it went back into the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers.

This relief had been at a place called Sailly-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans would be warm and 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 ordered withdrawn on February 25...to return three days later.



They were to be carrying 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)

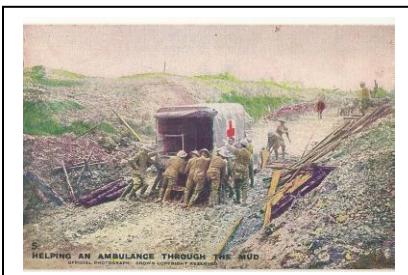
(Preceding page: *The fighting during the period of the Battalion's posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time.* - photograph from 2009(?)

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.

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March was to be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; 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 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.



(Right above: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from The War Illustrated*)



On March 18, only the day after the Prime Minister's day spent at Meaulté, Private Hall was admitted into the 88th Field Ambulance from where he was transferred on that same day to the 38th Casualty Clearing Station at Heilly. He was suffering from a PUO (*Pain of Unknown Origin*).

(continued)

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(Right below: *Transferring wounded from the forward area to the rear by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)

On the 20th of the month he was then admitted into the 3rd Stationary Hospital in Rouen before being sent back to the United Kingdom the following day, March 21, on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Gloucester Castle*. The diagnosis by this time had evolved into the all-encompassing term: debility or a general weakness.



Upon his arrival in England, Private Hall was conveyed to the 3rd London General Hospital in the borough of Wandsworth where he was admitted on March 22.

(Right above: *The image of 'Gloucester Castle' in peace-time is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Built in 1911 as a vessel for the Union-Castle Line she was requisitioned at the outset of the Great War and served as a hospital ship from September of 1914 to that of 1919. Torpedoed on the night of March 30-31 – but with a loss of only three or four out of a total of well over three-hundred patients, staff and crew, she stayed afloat and, her decks awash, was towed into harbour two weeks later for repair. The Germans finally sank her, but not until 1942 when she was caught by the German raider 'Michel'. On this occasion ninety-two of those on board lost their life, plus two in a camp in Japan where the German captain was to disembark the British ship's survivors.*)

(Right: *The main building of what was to become the 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War had originally been opened, on July 1st of 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010*)



(Right below: *A party of Newfoundland patients dressed in hospital uniform but otherwise unfortunately unidentified, is seen here convalescing in the grounds of the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



After treatment and convalescence Private Hall was granted the customary furlough allowed military personnel upon discharge from hospital. In the case of Private Hall it commenced on April 12, to be followed immediately by a posting to the Regimental Depot in Scotland where he reported...to duty...on April 21.

(Right: *The new race-course at Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photo from 2012*)



Some six weeks later Private Hall, was passing through the ports of Folkestone and Boulogne, the 24th Re-Enforcement Draft from Ayr embarking on June 3 and landing on the same day, before making the inevitable visit to the Base Depot in Rouen where, in fact, he did not spend the usual amount of time.

(Right: *The English Channel port and town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)



(Right: *An image of the French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



Four days after his arrival on the Continent, Private Hall was once more receiving medical treatment, on this occasion for a venereal complaint, in the 1st Stationary Hospital in Rouen. *Discharged to duty...at the Base Depot on August 3, he was not to return to his unit until the end of the month.*

Two detachments of newcomers from Rouen are documented in the Regimental War Diary as having arrived at Penton Camp – in the proximity of Poperinghe, Belgium – on August 28, Private Hall being one of the total of one-hundred sixty-five other ranks to report to duty on that day.

* * * * *

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

Meanwhile, five months before Private Hall's return to the Newfoundland Battalion – and just after his departure for medical attention, on March 29 the Newfoundlanders had commenced 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.



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.



(continued)

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

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

(Right below: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen in 1917, from the western, 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 1st Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin 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 had proved 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 other thirty-nine other ranks of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen had reported to the 1st Battalion on April 18, they had been just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers. They had been only two hundred twenty in number plus twelve officers now serving with some two hundred of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. Those of the 1st Battalion had spent the 19th salvaging equipment and burying the dead. They had then remained there until the 23rd.



(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 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies.

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

And the Newfoundlanders also had sustained further casualties: 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 adjacent: *Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from The War Illustrated*)

The *Battle of Arras* had by then been proceeding to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-month, but the Newfoundland unit was not to be further involved in any further co-ordinated offensive action – it was too exhausted; this now would be a period when the Battalion was to be moving in a circular fashion on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches.

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

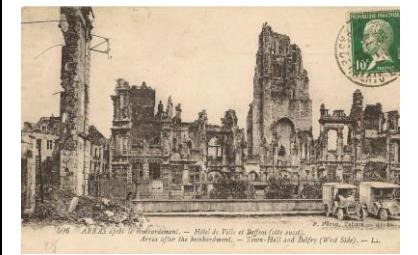
(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – as cited immediately above - in early May, perhaps the 7th, of 1917 – from The War Illustrated*)

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

The Newfoundlanders were then soon once again to be moving north into 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 to the north of the city.

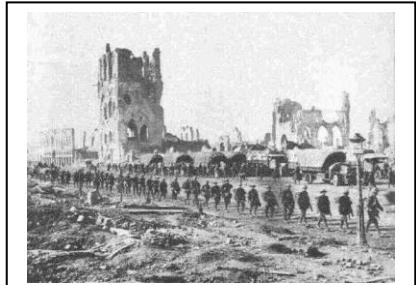
(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right – photograph from 2014*)

(continued)



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

(Right: *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*, the 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.

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



The 1st 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.

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



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 would be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.



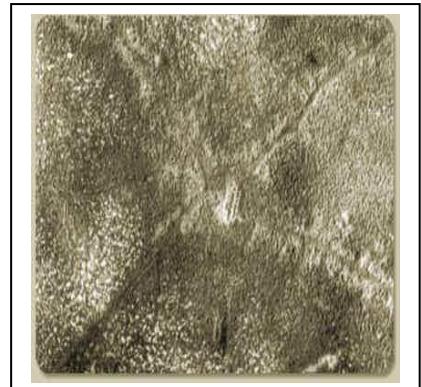
(Right above: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees – and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele.* – photograph from 2010)

(continued)

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As related further above, it had been at the end of the month of August – after the action at the *Steenbeek* but before that at the *Broembeek* – that Private Hall, a soldier of one of the two drafts of the day from Rouen, had reported to the Newfoundland Battalion at *Penton Camp*

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



There were then to be four weeks of relative calm which was for the Newfoundland Battalion to begin on August 24 with a four-day withdrawal from the forward area to the aforementioned *Penton Camp* to the north-west of Poperinghe. This reprieve would continue while the British forces re-enforced and re-organized after a month of fighting that had not gone as well as the British High Command had optimistically anticipated.

Private Hall's unit would go back to war during the last days of what had been a fine month of September, in contrast to what had gone before – but, as the fighting started once more...so did the rain.

The offensive recommenced for the 1st 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. It came some two weeks later and it came at the *Broembeek*.



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

It was to be only two days after this last-mentioned confrontation that the 1st Battalion then marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe from there to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of Proven. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit was once more to board a train.

By ten-thirty that same evening, the Battalion 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 1st Battalion would be ordered once again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it began 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 would be issued as it went with...war stores, rations and equipment. For much of that night it 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 1st Battalion 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 to be directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle was to begin well for the British who had used tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities were again be squandered. There were to be no troops available to exploit what was, admittedly, a hoped-for yet unexpected success, and by the close of the battle, the Germans had counter-attacked and 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 1st 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 1st 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.

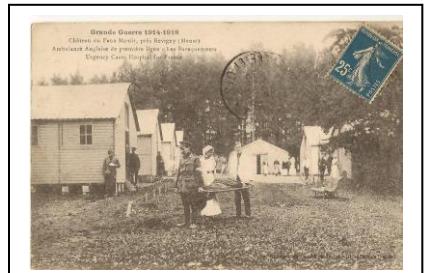


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(Preceding page: A number of graves of soldiers from the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery. Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, has identified them as being Canadian.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

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On one of the last days, December 3, of the retreat fought by the British – it was also the time of the retirement of the Newfoundland Battalion from the field – a date which would later mark the official conclusion of the *Battle of Cambrai*, Private Hall was evacuated to the 89th Field Ambulance and from there transferred to a casualty clearing station – the 41st? – for further treatment to a wounded right hand.



(Right above: A British Field Ambulance, more permanent than some at the Front, at a later date in the War – from a vintage post-card)

From the CCS, possibly on December 5, he was forwarded onwards to the 7th Canadian General Hospital at Étaples. A month later, on January 5 Private Hall was ordered discharged from hospital to the 6th Convalescent Depot and, two days afterwards, from there on to the by-now familiar Divisional Base Depot at Rouen.



(Right above: An extensive medical centre during the Great War, Étaples also had the task of hosting the largest British Military Cemetery in France, some twelve thousand graves which include some of military personnel and civilians of the Second World War, a task which continues over a century later. – photograph from 2009)

Private Hall, according to his files, re-joined the 1st Battalion on February 4 of 1918: the unit's War Diarist has noted a draft of sixteen other ranks arriving from Rouen on the 5th. The Newfoundlanders had just been relieved in the front line and had travelled by train to Brake Camp, just to the west of Ypres at Vlamertinghe. The Diarist has also noted that the Battalion...Remained in BRAKE Camp for 8 days during which Coys were employed on working parties in the vicinity of the Camp.

Private Hall undoubtedly did his share of that work.

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After the exertions of *Cambrai*, the Newfoundlanders had been withdrawn from the line, the 1st 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 1st 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 above: *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)

Their time was to be divided into the usual postings: the front-line trenches, behind them the support positions and, yet further to the rear again the various reserve sectors. The troops would move in a circular pattern which would see them spend approximately a week in each posting – although the arrangement was very flexible – and at times there had been further and longer withdrawals to the rear for training, re-organization and what was often to be called rest...although it hardly ever was.

The eight-day respite at *Brake Camp*, Vlamertinghe, where Private Hall reported on February 4, was to be an example of the last-mentioned: work-parties, inspections by...*the Brass...*, the awarding of decorations and the announcement that the Newfoundland Regiment was now, since January 25 of the 1918, the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment*, were some of the highlights of that particular period.

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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 did – in fact they were to unleash several of them*.



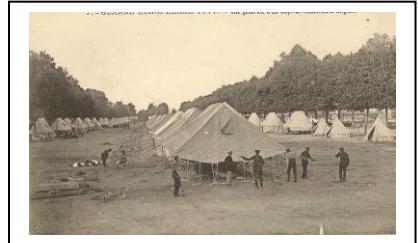
**There were also to be several assaults by the Germans on French forces during that spring. They all met with varying degrees of success at the outset, but eventually they would be thwarted by Petain's divisions, aided at times by the newly-arriving Americans.*

(Right above: *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*)

March 14 was the last day of the latest eight-day tour of duty in the line for the Battalion, two companies being in the front line and the other two companies in support, supplying working and carrying parties. During that period the Newfoundlanders had lost twelve killed, one missing and fifty-four wounded.

* * * * *

Private Hall was one of those wounded and he was taken on the next day, March 15, to the 87th Field Ambulance with injuries to the face and thigh. On that same day he was transferred to the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearing Station at the Rémy Sidings at Poperinghe and from there was sent to the 53rd General Hospital at Wimereux on the 19th for further medical attention.



(Right above: *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)

(Right below: *The coastal resort community of Wimereux which became an important medical centre during the period of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

Having completed his treatment, Private Hall was subsequently released from hospital to be sent to the 1st Convalescent Depot in nearby Boulogne on April 9, before then having been transferred to either the 5th Rest Camp on April 13 or to the 10th Convalescent Depot on the 16th.



He was finally forwarded to the Base Depot on April 26, five days after which he was to report back...to duty...with the 1st Battalion on May 1.

* * * * *

In the meantime in the area of Zonnebeke, the sector where the unit – and Private Hall until he had been wounded – had been serving, the personnel of the Newfoundland Battalion would continue to dig. *There the blow was not to fall until April.*

As suggested in an above paragraph, the Germans, by this time re-enforced, 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, although not in the North where the Newfoundlanders had been stationed; 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 12th 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 1st 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: *Ground just to the east of Bailleul where the 1st 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 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never had materialised and the front had finally been stabilised*.

**The 88th Brigade – and therefore the Newfoundland Battalion – was to be seconded to the 34th Division from the 29th 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 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there stand several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)



The German advance having been held and the danger passed, on April 24 the Newfoundland Battalion had said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the 88th Brigade and 29th Division and on the morrow there had been a recessional parade.

(continued)

The unit was to later be deployed to another unit, a Scottish infantry division, but for the summer of 1918 it would be ordered moved a world away from Flanders where, as seen in the preceding pages, it had just fought during the crisis of the German spring offensive, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – the Newfoundland Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four *other ranks* – had taken a train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étaples, where they had arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening.

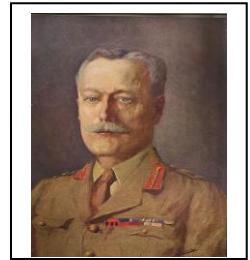
Their day, however, had not yet been at an end: there was still a two-hour march ahead of them before the Newfoundlanders would reach their new quarters. On the following day, April 30, they had been on the march again, a further eight kilometres to the community of St-Josse where they were to remain for the next ten days.

* * * * *

St-Josse is at a distance of some five or six kilometres from the coast and about ten kilometres from the well-known sea-side resort of Le Touquet with its fine beach, Paris-Plage. During the next week, and at times afterwards during its next posting, the Battalion would avail of this luxury.

And it was at St-Josse that Private Hall, as a soldier of a re-enforcement draft of twenty-nine *other ranks* dispatched from Rouen, re-joined the Newfoundland unit on May 1.

The Newfoundland Battalion was to be posted for much of the month of May, for June and until the first days of July, to the vicinity of Écures, a further six kilometres than St-Josse away from the coast of *la Manche* (the English Channel), to serve at the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe, at Montreuil-sur-Mer.



(Right: *Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ – from Illustration*)

The late spring and summer of 1918 were to pass peaceably enough for the personnel of the 1st Battalion in the new surroundings.

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, would mask the reality that the 1st Battalion of the recently-proclaimed *Royal Newfoundland Regiment** had, at that time, no longer been capable of serving in the field**.

*The title had been granted on January 25, 1918, in a War Office Letter (Number 058/4282 (AG 10)) – Document Collection 145.2R21 (D6).

**Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that the 1st Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.

The posting to Écuires having been completed, for most of July and for all of August the Newfoundlanders were to be encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihen* – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.

**On July 1, 2 and 3, the eleven officers and three-hundred twenty-three other ranks – well under establishment strength - of the Newfoundland Battalion had marched into Equihen Camp from Écuires. There the unit was to be visited on July 3 by the Right Honourable D.W.F. Lloyd, the new Prime Minister of Newfoundland.*

Thirteen different re-enforcement drafts are recorded as having arrived to join the Newfoundland Battalion during the months of May, June and July of 1918; as well as personnel returning from hospitalization, these drafts numbered from as few as six other ranks to as many as one-hundred twenty-eight, but an establishment-strength battalion was never again to go into battle.



(Right above: a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihen at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

By the beginning of that September of 1918 the Newfoundland Battalion was still awaiting orders and few among the rank and file would have had much idea as to what the future held for the unit. However, six days later, the orders came through: the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to one of the three battalions* of the 28th Brigade**, 9th (Scottish) Division, 2nd British Army, and was to fight once more in Flanders – and beyond.

The Newfoundlanders returned to...active service...on Friday, September 13. The 1st Battalion was to be once more back serving on the Belgian Front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the Ypres Salient, it was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today Ingooigem).



(Right: British troops with their German prisoners in Flanders during the advance to the rest, the 'Hundred Days' (see below) – from Illustration)

**British Divisions, because of the man-power shortage, in 1918 were obliged to reduce the number of battalions in a brigade from four to three.*

***On September 13, a re-formed 28th Brigade replaced the South African Brigade which left on that same day.*

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2nd British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the...*Hundred Days Offensive**. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge. After almost four years of stalemate, it was now to be once again a conflict of movement.

**This offensive would prove to be the final campaign on the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as Third Somme.*

Excerpt from the 1st Battalion War Diary entry for September 29, 1918: ...advanced from Zonnebeke-Polygon Line in open country and fought their way without artillery support to...where the 26th Brigade passed through and advanced as far as Ledeghem ...went on...and helped to capture Dadizeele...

(Right: *The British Cemetery on the western outskirts of Dadizeele, the village captured that day, and where the 1st Battalion was to rest on the evening of September 29, 1918.* - photograph from 2013)



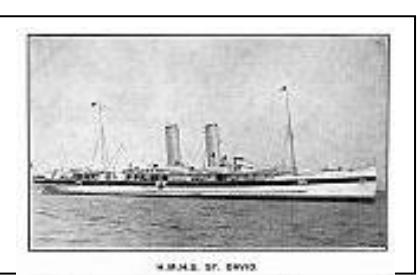
By mid-October the heavily-defended village of Ledeghem had fallen after a fierce and costly week of fighting. The advance eastward then resumed and within a day, on October 16, the next obstacle had been reached: the river-canal system of the Lys where it passes through the northern outskirts of the city of Courtrai (today Kortrijk).

It was on that October 16, while serving with 'A' Company, that Private Hall was wounded once again: injuries by gun-fire to the right buttock, right arm and left leg – a first report described them – somewhat incorrectly - as...*mild*. Later, on that same day he was being treated in the 2nd Australian General Hospital at Wimereux.



(Right: *The Lys – both canal and river – at a point not far from the later crossing-place – right to left - of October 19-20, 1918 - The Harlebeke Caribou stands about one hundred metres behind the camera.* – photograph from 2010)

Three days following, on October 19, Private Hall was being transported by His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. David* to England where he was taken that same day to Bethnal Green Military Hospital in London. His medical record shows that the leg injury was by far the worst, little being left of it: it was decided to amputate the remains.



(Right above: *The image of S. David clad in her war-time hospital-ship garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Built in 1906 for the Great Western Railway for service between Wales and Ireland, the vessel was requisitioned at the onset of the War and converted for use as a hospital ship to accommodate one-hundred ninety-four sick and wounded. She survived the conflict, having served in this capacity from August of 1914 until January of 1919.*)

(continued)

The son of Michael Hall, farmer, and of Mary Hall (née *Caule**; also found as *Colle* and *Cole*) – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of fifty cents from his pay - of the Old Broad Cove Road in St. John's East (also found in St. John's West) and later apparently of Portugal Cove Road perhaps one and the same - he was also brother to James*, to Edward, to two sisters both deceased by 1919 (Mary-Joseph and Elizabeth?), to Michael-Joseph and to Elon (see below).

**The records are sparse but the couple appear to have married on January 7 of 1881, soon after to have a child identified in the records as Elon.*

Private Hall was reported as having...*died of wounds...* - after having undergone the amputation of the lower third of his leg - in Bethnal Green Hospital at 5.50 a.m. on October 27, 1918. He was not buried until November 7 – albeit with full military honours - the funeral having been delayed by the influenza epidemic in the London area which had resulted in no coffin being available.



William Joseph Hall had enlisted at a declared twenty-three years and four months of age: date of baptism in Broad Cove (today St. Philip's), Newfoundland, May 3, 1891 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register wherein is also found the name *Joseph*).

(Right above: *The Caribou at Courtrai – today Kotrijk – commemorates the crossing of the Lys Canal, the eventual cessation of the War and the sacrifice that it entailed.* – photograph from 2012)

**His brother James (Private, Regimental Number 1935) had previously been reported as missing in action and presumed dead in the fighting at Gueudecourt on October 12, 1916 (see elsewhere in these documents). He is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou at Beaumont-Hamel.*



(Right above: *The photograph was taken from the bronze at Beaumont-Hamel in 2010.*)

Private William Hall was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also 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. Last updated – February 4, 2023.

