



**Sergeant William James Hall (Regimental Number 352) is interred in Dadizeele New British Cemetery – Grave reference I. D. 33.**

**His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a draper working for a wage of \$30.00 per month, William Hall, unlike the majority of the new recruits, has no documentation in his files to show that he presented himself for a medical examination – although it is almost certain that he did. There is only a record that he underwent some sort of procedure during the month of October of that 1914 – and which, if in St. John’s, could only have taken place in the first three days of the month.**

**(continued)**

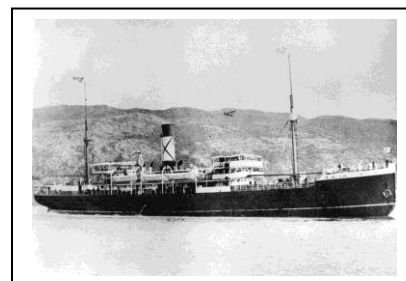
On September 5, William Hall reported to the *C.L.B. Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on this occasion to enlist, whereupon he was engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*. A recruit of the First Draft, he was likely now ordered to the tented area by that time established on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the East End of St. John's where a four-five week course of training was already under way.

The regimental authorities were *also* busy by now, preparing for the transport of this, the first body of volunteers, to *overseas* - and later to *active* - *service*.

At the beginning of the month of October a large number of the new recruits underwent attestation; Private Hall was one of that number, taking his oath of allegiance on the first day of October.

Two days later, after the Newfoundland contingent - it was not as yet a battalion - of 'A' and 'B' Companies had paraded through the city, it embarked onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* which was awaiting in St. John's Harbour.

Private Hall and his comrades-in-arms of the *First Five Hundred* - also to be known to history as the *Blue Puttees* - were now to sit on board ship for the best part of a day as it was not to be until the morrow that *Florizel* would sail to the south coast of the Island and to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the Canadian Division to the United Kingdom.



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

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

In the United Kingdom this first Newfoundland contingent was to train in three venues during the late autumn of 1914 and then the winter of 1914-1915: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland at Fort George - on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; and lastly at Edinburgh Castle where the unit was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.



(Right below: *The venerable Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from its position on the summit of Castle Hill. - photograph from 2011*)

Some three months later, on May 11, and some seven weeks into spring - although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit - by now 'A' and 'B' Companies re-enforced by 'C', 'D', and 'E' - was ordered moved from the Scottish capital to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.



It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent received the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength\*. The now-formed 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered ready to be ordered on ‘active service’.

*\*The number was about fifteen hundred, sufficient to provide four ‘fighting’ companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

(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 Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

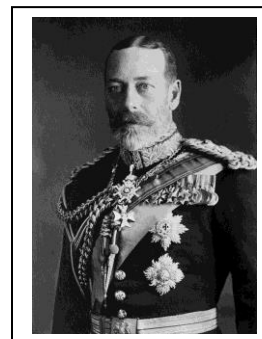


At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ – Private Hall among their ranks - were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot.

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

Meanwhile the two junior companies, the later-arrived ‘E’ and the aforementioned last-arrived ‘F’, were ordered transferred to Scotland’s west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion.

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



It was also during this period while at Aldershot that on August 13 Private Hall was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion for the *duration of the war\**.

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

(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.)*



(continued)

While 'E' and 'F' Companies were beginning their posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr, on August 20 of 1915 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Plymouth-Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks.



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

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*.



(Right above: *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 above: *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 – Dardanelles to the French, Çanakkale to the Turks. – from Provincial Archives*)



(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*)

When the Newfoundlanders landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* on that September night of 1915 they would disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion was to serve but, even ever since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, had proved to be little more than a debacle:

Flies, dust, disease, the frost-bite and the floods – and of course the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command\* had ever anticipated – were eventually to overwhelm the British-led forces and those of the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.

(Right below: *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.*

November 26 would see the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm was to 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, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

On the night of December 19-20, the British abandoned the 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 were to be 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* – were now to be only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.



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

(Right: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles 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.*



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(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 evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, to arrive there on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to the vicinity of Suez, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division had yet to be decided\*.



*\*Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.*

(Right above: *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*)



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

After that 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 through the *Suez Canal* en route to France. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseilles, on March 22.



(Right above: *British troops march through the port area of the* from a vintage post-card)

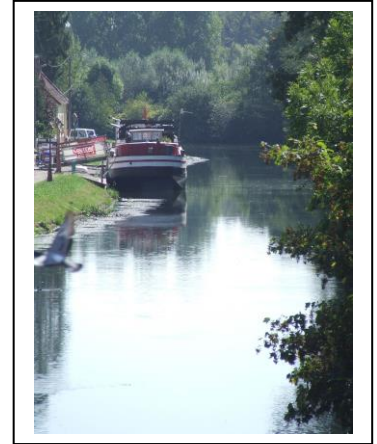
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train found its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled 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.

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It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to become a part of their history.

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



On April 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 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*.

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 was then 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 end of that April 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.



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 lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences: The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009*)

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



*\*Perhaps ironically, the majority of the Battalion's casualties was to be incurred during the advance from the third line of British trenches to the first line from where the attack proper was to be made, and while struggling through British wire laid to protect the British positions from any German attack.*

There are other numbers of course: the fifty-seven thousand British casualties incurred in four hours on that same morning of which nineteen-thousand were recorded as having been *killed in action or died of wounds*.

It was to be the largest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.

(Right: *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.*



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



(Right below: A further view of the re-constructed trench system in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?))



While his name is to be found on the nominal roll of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment on July 1, 1916, the first day of *the Somme*, Private Hall was not to figure in the fighting on the field at Beaumont-Hamel. It may be that he was a soldier of the ten per cent reserve held in the rear area at Louvencourt, and which was not to be recalled to the field until late in the afternoon when the fighting had for the most part subsided\*.

(continued)



***\*These men answered a roll call of the following day as did those who had fought the battle and survived it unscathed. Where the documentation shows with Battalion on July 4, this is the date on which the roll call of July 2 was eventually reported.***

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that a 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)***

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 still numbered only... *11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

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.

***(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)***



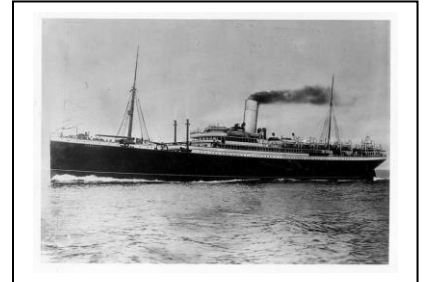
On October 8 the Newfoundland Battalion would return to France and to the area from which it had withdrawn some three months earlier. The First Battle of the Somme was still being fought and the Newfoundlanders were still to have a role to play. But Private Hall was not to be among its ranks.

\* \* \* \* \*

Private Hall had been granted a special furlough\* which was to begin on October 6. Having left the Continent he reported to the *Pay & Record Office* in *Victoria Street* in London on the 9<sup>th</sup> and, on the following day, was to board the *SS Corsican* in Liverpool for the trans-Atlantic voyage to Québec. The ship sailed on the same October 10 to arrive in the port at Quebec City ten days later.

Private Hall had been granted leave back to Newfoundland for undisclosed personal reasons\* and apparently paid his own passage. He arrived back home from Québec towards the end of October having likely completed his travels by train, by ferry and by train again.

*\*Nevertheless almost undoubtedly because of or connected to the passing of his mother who was to die of tuberculosis on September 3 of that year.*



(Right above: *The image of the Allan Line vessel Corsican is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries. During the Great War the ship, although sold to the Canadian Pacific Line in 1917, was used almost exclusively as a troop-transport. In 1923 she was wrecked off Cape Race, Newfoundland.*)

Private Hall's month-long furlough having expired on November 11, 1916, several trans-ocean messages were passed to and fro among the different authorities, attempting to ascertain his whereabouts and his status. It was also at this time, on or about November 23, that Private Hall submitted a request to the *Sub-Committee on the Selection of Officers* to consider him for an Imperial Commission – a request that ultimately appears to have come to nought.

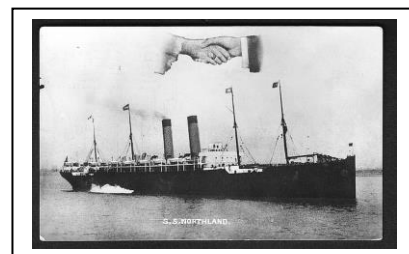
He was apparently attached at this time to the 3rd Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in St. John's – one may presume from the date of the termination of his furlough until his return to the United Kingdom – because during that time he would be promoted to the rank of lance corporal, the appointment coming on January 15 and just prior to his embarkation for the return journey to the United Kingdom.

Lance Corporal Hall's draft was to leave St. John's on board the *Florizel* although on this occasion the detachment was to leave the ship in Halifax. From there it had been planned that the unit take trans-Atlantic passage on *Saxonia* a month later, on March 3, but a measles and mumps epidemic\* intervened and the draft was to be quarantined in the Nova Scotia town of Windsor.

*\*It is to be remembered that these were the days before the advent of anti-biotics, and that these diseases and other infections were often life-threatening.*

Weeks later again – less some twenty-five personnel still considered as unfit to travel, and two who had died – the unit finally departed from Halifax on April 18, 1917, to traverse the Atlantic on board three ships, His Majesty's Transport *Northland* being the one on which Lance Corporal Hall was to travel.

He sailed in the company of Canadian troops: also taking trans-Atlantic passage on the vessel were a detachment of the 210<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion, the 229<sup>th</sup> Battalion, a detachment of the 232<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and the Nova Scotia Company of the 256<sup>th</sup> Battalion. *Northland* sailed on that April 18 to reach the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on April 29, eleven days later.



On April 30 of that same April and by then back in the United Kingdom, Lance Corporal Hall reported *to duty* at the Regimental Depot at Ayr.

(Right above: *Originally launched as 'Zeeland', it was felt that the name, although Dutch, was German-sounding enough to warrant her being re-christened as 'Northland'. After the Great War, which she survived, the vessel reverted to 'Zeeland'. - The image of Northland is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

At the end of this summer of 1915, the once-Royal Borough of Ayr on Scotland's west coast was to begin to serve as the overseas base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment from where – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 - re-enforcement drafts from home were to be despatched to bolster the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.



(Right above: *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: *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.*



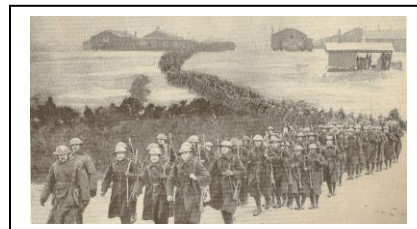
There is a letter dated June 2, 1917, in Lance Corporal Hall's file – still referring to him as *Private Hall* – and addressed to the *Pay & Record Office* in London. It is a letter in which an officer on behalf of the Officer Commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr signals his intention that Private/ Lance Corporal Hall is to be among the draft leaving for the Continent five days later, on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

There appears to be no evidence in his record that this transfer ever came to pass at that time and Lance Corporal Hall seems to have remained with the reserves until the following summer. In the meantime he was promoted to the rank of *acting corporal* on July 18 of 1917, just prior to the move to Barry\*.

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***\*During the summer months of 1917, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.***

In 1918, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion was to move its quarters – and headquarters - from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was undertaken during the latter part of January. A document then records Acting Corporal Hall being confirmed to the rank of corporal on April 7, while a second, dated April 24, shows that he had an upper denture fitted on that day.



***(Right above: Troops on the march on a bleak-looking Hazely Down at some time during the winter of 1918 – from The War Illustrated)***

***(Right: The Newfoundland Plot in Magdalen Hill Cemetery in which a number of soldiers of the Regiment who died while at Hazely Down are buried – photograph from 2012(?))***



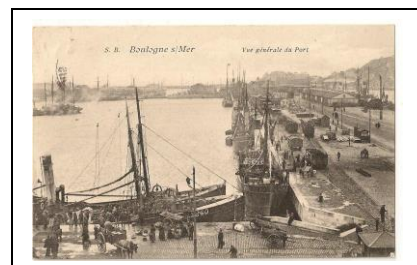
On July 1 a further promotion saw Corporal Hall put up his third stripe\*. On only the following day, July 2, the newly-promoted Sergeant Hall embarked for the *Western Front* through the English Channel port of Folkestone to be reported...with the *BEF...*(*British Expeditionary Force*) on the 5<sup>th</sup>. He was back with the Newfoundland Battalion, one of the draft of one-hundred twenty-eight *other ranks* to report to duty three days later again, on July 8 at three in the afternoon – elsewhere noted as the 7<sup>th</sup> - while the unit was encamped on the French coast.



***(Right: A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009)***

***\*The documentation of the dates of his promotions to corporal and sergeant is confusing. What has been written here seems to be the most logical interpretation, but it may not be totally correct.***

The encampment in question was close to the small coastal community of Equihen just five kilometres to the south of the larger centre of Boulogne through which Corporal Hall's unit may have disembarked after the cross-Channel journey. But it had been a much-depleted Newfoundland Battalion which was to welcome the newcomers: only eleven officers and three-hundred twenty-three other ranks.



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(Preceding page: *The French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

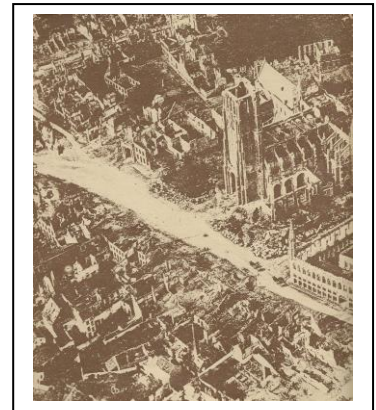
\* \* \* \* \*

By this time Corporal Hall – then with the rank of private soldier – had been absent from his unit for a period of some twenty-one months, since early October of 1916. When he had left, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had still been in Belgium operating in the *Ypres Salient*.

*The Salient* – close to the front lines for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict – had been relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders’ posting there; yet they were to nonetheless 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: *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.

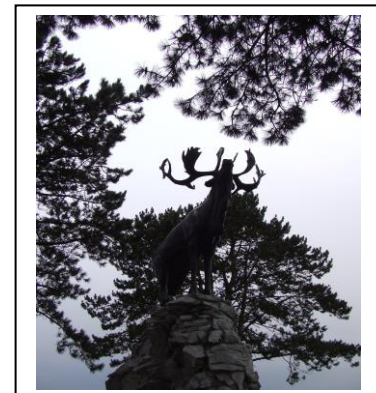


The encounter would prove to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right above: *This is the ground over which the 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)

The Newfoundland Battalion was not to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it would supply 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.



(continued)

(Right below: *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. 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.

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

It was to be on January 11 of the New Year, 1917, that the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* from where it would make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it was to entrain for the small town of Corbie where it had thereupon taken 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 only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig casually referred to as *wastage* as the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches.

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 the 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.



(Right above: *A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, their unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold and ice 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(?)*)



After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March had been 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 had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



(Right: *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 – 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 was to launch 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* had been yet a further disaster.

(Right: *The 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*)

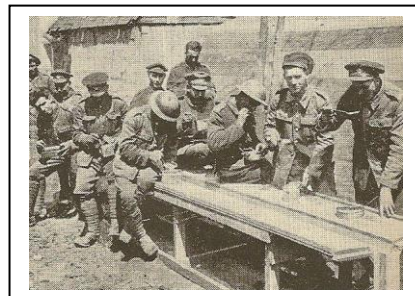


(continued)

The 1<sup>st</sup> 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 would prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone\*.

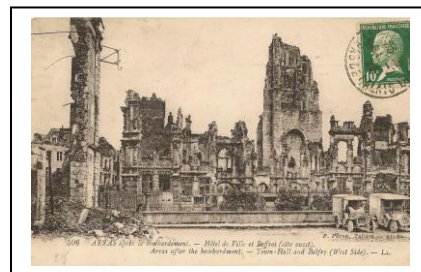
*\*It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux. 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.



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

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This was in fact 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 was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area 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.



Late on that same evening the Newfoundlanders had retired 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*)

That month of May was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders would move hither and thither on the *Arras Front*, marching into and out of the trenches. While there was to be the ever-present artillery-fire, concerted infantry activity, particularly after May 15 – *officially* the last day of the *Battle of Arras* – had been limited, apart from the marching.



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 in training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.



**(Preceding page: 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*)**

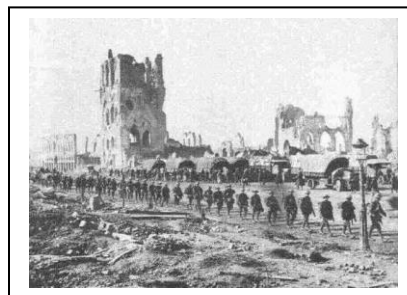
The Newfoundlanders had then soon once again been moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.

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



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 offensive 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**)**



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

(Right below: *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*)

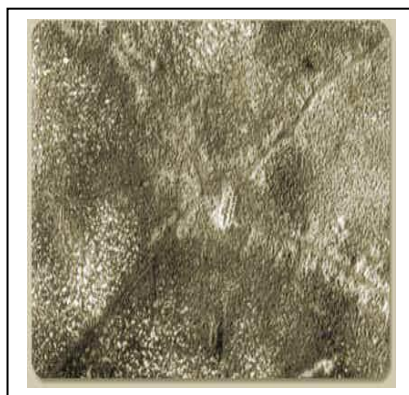
It was to be only two days after this last-mentioned confrontation that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe from there to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of Proven. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning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



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

By ten-thirty that same evening, the Battalion 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 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 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.

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 had been 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 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*)

(Right: *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 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*)**

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 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 were to continue to dig.

**(Right above: *Some of the countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)**

The Germans had then done as was expected of them: Ludendorff's armies had already launched a powerful thrust on March 21, the first day of that spring of 1918, having struck at first in the area of and just south of, *the Somme*, there to overrun the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while their advance had seemed unstoppable.

For a number of reasons, after two weeks it 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*)**

***\*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.***

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, three hours later.



(Right above: *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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was 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 was 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(?)*)

On April 24, the Newfoundland Battalion had said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 29<sup>th</sup> Division and on the following day there had been a recessional parade.



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.

(continued)

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. They were to be posted for the months of May, June and until early July, to the vicinity of Écuire, not far from the coast of the English Channel, to serve at the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.

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

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, would mask the reality that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the recently-proclaimed *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* (on January 22-23, 1918) had, at that time, no longer been capable of serving in the field.



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

*\*Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Écuire 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 Équihe – 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.



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

The Newfoundlanders – while still not at establishment battalion strength - were to return to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 9<sup>th</sup> (*Scottish*) Division. The Newfoundland Battalion was once more to serve 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 and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days – from Illustration*)

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the British Second 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 once again a conflict of movement.



(continued)

***\*This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of 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. Then, on August 26, the main Arras to Cambrai road had become the axis of the offensive in the region of Picardie.***

**By October 1 the Newfoundland Battalion had already advanced to positions in the area of the community of Ledeghem where it was to relieve the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Scots. Any further movement was now precluded as the situation on the 9<sup>th</sup> Division's right was proving to be unstable.**

**The German resolve now appeared to be stiffening as several heavy artillery barrages showed, and although preparatory orders were received to continue the advance, final orders were not to be forthcoming and the Newfoundland force remained where it was. On October 4 the Battalion began to retire, relieved by a Scottish unit.**

**It was not to be until October 14 that the Newfoundlanders, having been rested for a week, returned to the front to move forward on that same day to the attack once more. Little progress had been made on the 9<sup>th</sup> Division front during the ten days preceding and the village of Ledeghem had not yet fallen.**

**Excerpt from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for October 14, 1918: *Attacked from north of Ledeghem. Captured many prisoners, 8 guns & 94 machine guns. Smoke barrage & fog combined to make it impossible to see two yards until Neerhof was reached where fog lifted and Batt. was found to be in touch and in position...***

**The Newfoundlanders were to continue to push along the northern bank of the Lys River - Canal, itself north of the city of Courtrai (today Kortrijk) which they would bypass. The advance of that October 14 was successful in gains - but the cost once more had been high: only three-hundred personnel reported for muster at dawn on the following morning.**



**(Right: *The re-constructed village of Ledeghem, Belgium – photograph from 2009*)**

**The son of Francis Hall, seaman, and of Margaret Hall\* (née Carey, deceased September 3, 1916)\*\* of 6, Murray Street in St. John's, he was also brother to Annie-Maude, Florence, Hilda, Frank, Louisa and Lavinia (the last two a twin).**



***\*As of October 1914 he had allocated a daily sixty cents to his mother from his pay until the time of her death when it was transferred to his father.***

***\*\*The couple married on May 20, 1891 in St. John's.***

**(continued)**

(Right above: *The Caribou at Courtrai – today Kortrijk – commemorates the eventual crossing of the Lys Canal on October 19-20, 1918, and the sacrifice of the Hundred Days Offensive.* – photograph from 2012)

Sergeant Hall was reported as having been *killed in action* at Ledeghem, Belgium, on October 14, 1918, in fighting during the *Hundred Days Offensive*.

At home it was the Reverend J. Brinton of the Cathedral Rectory who was requested to bear the news to his family.

William James Hall had enlisted at the *declared* age of nineteen years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, September 9, 1894 (from the Saint John's Birth Register)

Sergeant William James Hall was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 10, 2023.