



Lance Corporal Herbert Harding (Regimental Number 353), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *teamster* working for eight dollars and fifty cents per week, Herbert Harding presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 26 of 1914 – just three weeks and a day after the *Declaration of War* – for a medical examination. It was an exercise which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

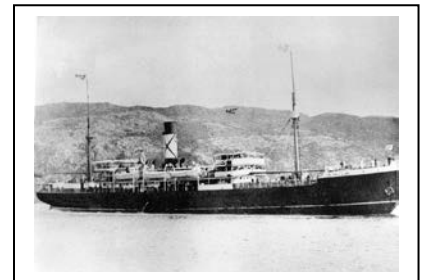
Twelve days later, on September 7, Herbert Harding returned to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, on this second occasion for enlistment, whereupon he was engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar a day plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*. A recruit of the First Draft, he was likely now 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 Harding 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 Harding 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 Harding 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 Harding 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.)



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



(Right: *Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros: either Megantic on August 29, Ausonia on September 18, or Prince Abbas on September 19* – *Whichever the case, they were yet to land on Gallipoli – 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)



However, if Private Harding had anticipated travelling to the *Gallipoli Peninsula* with the majority of his comrades-in-arms, he was to be disappointed. When *Ausonia* sailed for there from Alexandria on September 13, he was to remain in Egypt.

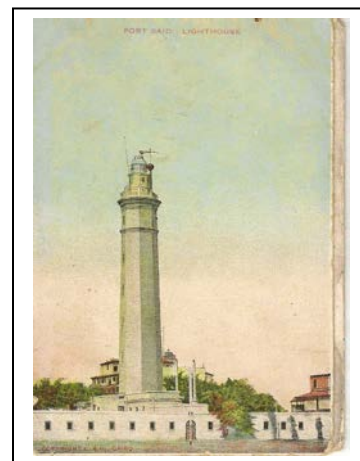
\* \* \* \* \*

Private Harding and other personnel from the Newfoundland Battalion's Transport Section had been seconded to serve in that same capacity for the recently-formed 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Composite Battalions. These forces had been constituted to serve on the Western Egyptian Frontier to forestall the uprising instigated in the area by a religious leader, the Senussi.

Thus he was to be stationed in the desert region of the frontier zone – between Egypt and neighbouring Libya - from December of 1915 until February, 1916 – although not to be directly involved in much of the fighting.

The uprising quashed, on March 2, 1916, Private Harding sailed, with others of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion who had been likewise seconded, from Port Saïd, at the northern end of the *Suez Canal*, to the French Mediterranean port-city of *Marseilles* where he disembarked on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the same month.

(Right above: *The old light-house at Port Saïd, a last glimpse of Egypt before entering the Mediterranean Sea* – from a vintage post-card)



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



It does not seem to be documented when exactly Private Harding re-joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. If, however, he was to be treated in the same manner as other Newfoundland personnel who had served in the *Western Desert Frontier Force* and travelled on the same ship to France – and whose personal papers have documented the events - then he was to be at first sent to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot at Rouen on the Atlantic coast – there to undergo supplementary training.

From Rouen he would have subsequently been attached to one of the re-enforcement drafts arriving from the Regimental Depot at Ayr.

(continued)

It was not un-likely to have been on April 15 that Private Harding re-joined the parent 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion *in the field*. A detachment of two officers and two-hundred eleven *other ranks* reported *to duty* from Rouen on that day in the small *Somme* village of Englebelmer just behind the lines. While most of that contingent comprised personnel having arrived from the Regimental Depot at Ayr, there were also some from Egypt who had been unable to depart from Suez on March 14 with the Newfoundland unit.

That night, according to the Newfoundland Battalion's War Diarist, the newcomers had already been put to work in the nearby communication trenches.

\* \* \* \* \*

During the time of Private Harding's stay in Egypt the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been operating on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*. It had not really been a happy episode: When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* on that night of September 19-20 of 1915, they were to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

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

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

(Right 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.

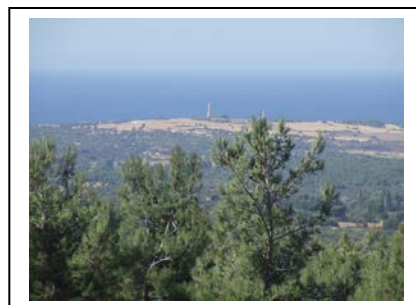


There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

On the night of December 19-20, the British had 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 had been evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some

to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

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



The British, Indian and *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – had now only 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: ‘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.*

*(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 had 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. Men of the Newfoundland Battalion were among the last to leave at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)*

(continued)



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



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage 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: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles. – 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 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.

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 had 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 had subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive reinforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

This was both where and when it is likely that Private Harding re-joined the Newfoundland Battalion on the *Western Front*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Having 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.

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



The documentation in his file show that May 9 was the day on which Private Harding admitted into the 29<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Gezaincourt for an unspecified complaint, then being discharged *to duty* on June 19, some six weeks later. Nothing further *a propos* is to be found in his dossier.

On the day of his return, the Battalion was preparing for a further tour in the trenches.

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

(continued)



***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 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 Harding did not figure in the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel. It may be that he was a soldier of the ten per cent reserve – fourteen officers and eighty-three *other ranks* held back at Louvencourt - and which was not recalled to the field until late in the day when the fighting had for the most part subsided\*.



***\*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 Maily-Maillet.

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

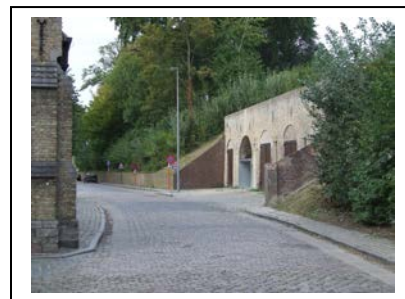
There on July 11, a draft of one-hundred twenty-seven re-enforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported *to duty*. They had been the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power having arrived, the

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*)



\* \* \* \* \*

Early during this posting in Belgium, on August 8, Private Harding is recorded as being admitted into - and immediately transferred from - the 88<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance to the 29<sup>th</sup> Divisional Rest Station. The diagnosis was the all-encompassing PUO (*Pain – or Pyrexia - of Unknown Origin*). He was discharged *to duty* with his unit on August 28.

During the subsequent period from August 29 until September 7 (*inclusive*) the Newfoundland Battalion was serving a tour in the trenches at a sector known to the British troops as *Hell-Fire Corner*. On September 4, the area would suffer a heavier-than-usual enemy bombardment and Private Harding is recorded as having been wounded and as having incurred shell-shock on September 5; he was admitted once more to the 88<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, and later again transferred, on September 29, to the 10<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station established at the *Rémy Sidings*, to the south of the Belgian town of Poperinghe.



(Right above: *Canadian trenches from 1916 in the area of Sanctuary Wood, not far removed from Hell-Fire Corner – from 2009*)



(Right above: *A British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)



From there he was forwarded to 8<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital in the town of Wimereux on September 30, thence to the 1<sup>st</sup> Convalescent Depot in the adjacent coastal community of Boulogne on October 8, before being discharged *to duty* at the Base Depot, Rouen, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> of the same month.

(continued)

In the meantime, the medical stall had found him to have a DAH (*Disorderly Action of the Heart*). This was, however, seemingly of little further concern since nothing more appears to have been recorded of it.

(Preceding page: *The French resort of Wimereux on the coast of the North Sea at some time just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Private Harding was dispatched back to duty with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on November 7. By this time the Newfoundlanders were back in France in the area of *the Somme* and on October 12 had once more been embroiled in an infantry confrontation with the enemy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile, during Private Harding’s absence, the Newfoundland unit had remained in Belgium for almost another five weeks.

The *Ypres Salient* – close to the front lines and to be fought over for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict that was the *Great War* - was in fact to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders’ posting there\*; yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

*\*Until mid-August of that 1916 it had been partially garrisoned by the Canadians. They in turn were then ordered southwards to the Somme, their places to be taken by the depleted British battalions – and the Newfoundlanders – in need of rest, re-organization and re-enforcement.*

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

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

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.

(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)

The encounter was not a resounding success but rather had proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.





(Preceding page: *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 a subsequent attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires and the Worcestershires, of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of which the Newfoundland unit was, of course, a battalion.



(Right above: *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, by which time Private Harding had returned to take his place in the ranks.

\* \* \* \* \*

There in the forward area – even though *First Somme* had officially come to its end on November 15 with the capture of the village of Beaumont\* - 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 which would be broken only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, the Newfoundlanders to be encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

*\*The village was the 'Beaumont' of the commune of Beaumont-Hamel and had been an objective of the first day of the fighting on July 1, one-hundred thirty-eight days before its eventual capture by the 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) Division.*

Only one month after his return *to duty*, on December 6, Private Harding was once again under medical care, in the 14<sup>th</sup> Corps Rest Station, on this occasion suffering from myalgia (muscular pain). This complaint proved to be of a brief duration as he was discharged *to duty* on December 15 to his unit at *Camps en Amienois*. By then the Newfoundland Battalion had already marched back into *Corps Reserve*, on December 11-12, for that six-week Christmas period.



(Right above: *a British camp, in not particularly clement conditions, somewhere on the Continent during the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

(continued)

It was to be on January 11 of the New Year, 1917, that the Newfoundland Battalion was then ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and from 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 thereupon took over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

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

Those casualties, however, were 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 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, 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from *The War Illustrated*)

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders were to begin 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.

(continued)

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



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



On April 9 the British Army would 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 below: *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*)



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 was to be the most expensive 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 would remain 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 were to retire 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*)

Four days after the assault at Monchy-le-Preux, on April 18, Private Harding was to receive promotion to the rank of lance corporal. What he had played with ‘B’ Company in the events of April 14 seems not to be documented, but seven days after his promotion he was in action at *Les Fosses Farm*.



(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 son of Edward Harding, labourer, and of Belinda Harding (née *Hibbs*), he was also husband of Mrs. Elizabeth Harding, his second wife – to whom he had allotted a daily ninety cents from his pay - and father of three children\*. The family address at the time of enlistment was Brazil’s Field, his wife\*\* later to move to 7, Cabot Street.

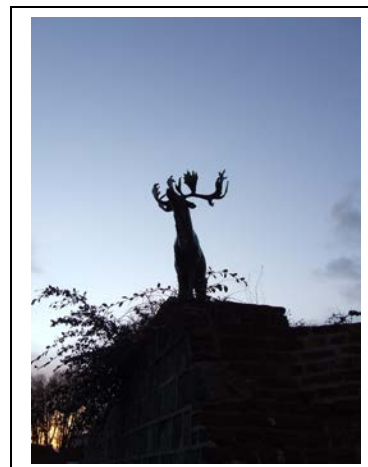
Herbert Harding had two siblings: brother Walter and sister Violet.

Lance Corporal Harding was reported as having been *killed in action* on April 23, 1917, while serving with ‘B’ Company, Platoon 8, at *Les Fosses Farm*, near Monchy-le-Preux.

Herbert Harding had enlisted at a *declared* thirty years of age: date of birth in St. John’s, Newfoundland, August 7, 1888 (from the St. John’s Birth Register).

\**Edward, age 4 as of December of 1914, was Herbert’s child by a previous marriage, possibly to Martha Woodfine (deceased April 22, 1913). The couple had married on February 25 of 1911.*

*The twin, John and Joseph, age two years and five months as of December 1914, were Elizabeth’s by her former husband, William Miller.*



***Herbert Harding and Elizabeth Miller were married on July 19, 1914.***

***\*\* By 1922 she had apparently remarried and the three boys by that time were in the care of Herbert Harding's aunt(?), Mrs. James Harding, of 58, Carter's Hill.***

***(Preceding page: The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the vestiges of a German strong-point in the centre of the village. – photograph from 2012)***

Lance Corporal Herbert Harding was entitled to the 1914-15 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).

