

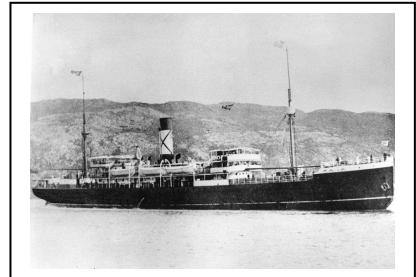


Lance Corporal John Herbert Hockley (Regimental Number 216) lies in Ancre British Cemetery – Grave reference II. A. 9.

His occupation prior to enlistment recorded as that of an *ironmonger* and *hardware clerk* working for *G. Knowling, Importers & General Merchants* of Water Street and Duckworth Street for sixteen dollars a week, John Herbert Hockley presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 31 of 1914, four weeks less a day after the *Declaration of War*. The examination having pronounced him as...*fit for foreign service*...he then enlisted five days afterwards – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 (this included a ten-cent Field Allowance) - on September 5.

John Herbert Hockley was a recruit of the First Draft.

There was now to be a wait of four weeks less a day – although training was to be ongoing - before Private Hockley was attested on October 1. He then embarked on October 3 with the others of the *First Five Hundred* onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.



The ship sailed on the morrow to its rendezvous off the south coast of the Island where she was to join the convoy transporting the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division across the Atlantic.

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

In the United Kingdom Private Hockley trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; at Edinburgh Castle – where it provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles; and later again at the tented *Stobs Camp* near the town of Hawick to the south-east of Edinburgh.



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

(Right: *The Newfoundland Regiment parades at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915. – 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', were then sent south to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot; meanwhile the two junior Companies, the later-arrived 'E' and 'F'\*, were sent to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, where they were 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 – photograph from Bain News Services via Wikipedia*)

\*On July 10, 1915, 'F' Company had arrived at Stobs Camp from Newfoundland, its personnel raising the numbers of the unit to battalion establishment strength, and thus permitting it to be ordered to active service. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, comprising those four Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



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It had then been during that period spent at Aldershot that Private Hockley of 'B' Company – he was not alone in doing so - had been prevailed upon, he on August 13, to re-enlist for the duration of the war\*.

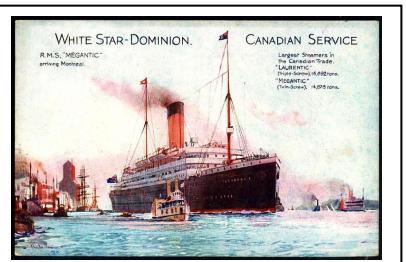
*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*



(Right above: Some of the men of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915 – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)

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

On August 20, 1915, Private Hockley and his comrades-in-arms embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks where, a month later – having spent two weeks billeted in British barracks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, he disembarked with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 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. – from Provincial Archives)



The Gallipoli Campaign was to be a debacle: Flies, dust, disease, frost-bite, floods – and 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 it would be decided to abandon not only Suvla Bay but the entire Gallipoli venture.



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*\*Many of the commanders chosen were second-rate, had been brought out of retirement, and had little idea of how to fight – let alone of how to win. One of the generals at Suvla, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.*

(Right above: A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where Private Hockley was to serve in the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

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 was 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 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 and the Anzac forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps also served at *Gallipoli* – were by then only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* was undertaken. The operation took place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion providing some of the rear-guard for this second occasion as well\*.



*\*Lieutenant Owen Steele of St. John's, Newfoundland, is cited as having been the last soldier of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force to step into the final small boat to sail from the Gallipoli Peninsula.*

(Right above: 'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration)



(Right: 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces and by the Newfoundlanders who were the last soldiers off the beach: vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011)



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

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When the British evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, Private Hockley and his 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were shipped to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, arriving there on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then immediately transferred southward to Suez, one of the ports at the southern end of the Canal and which bears the same name, there to await further orders as, at the time, the subsequent destination of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's 29<sup>th</sup> Division had not yet been decided\*.

*\*Bulgaria had entered the conflict in October of 1915 on the side of the Central Powers and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.*

It was also to be during this period, while stationed at Suez, that Private Hockley received a first promotion, to the rank of lance corporal.



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

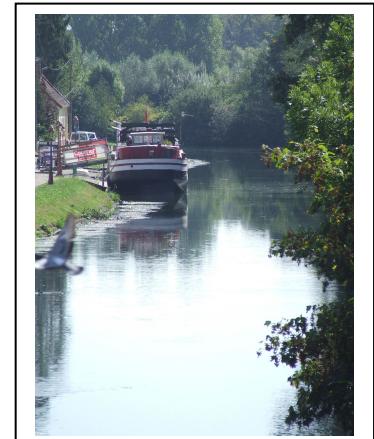
(Right: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles. – from a vintage postcard*)



After a two-month interim, on March 14, the Newfoundlanders embarked through Port Tewfiq, also at the southern end of the Suez Canal, for the French port of Marseilles, and disembarked there on March 22, en route to the Western Front.

Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train arrived at 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 travelled unused in a separate wagon. De-training at the local station at two in the morning, the Newfoundlanders still faced a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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



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

On April 13, Lance Corporal Hockley's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion paraded into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy. There its personnel would be billeted, would receive re-enforcements and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the trenches of the Western Front.

For the remainder of the spring of 1916, the Newfoundlanders were to be preparing for the British campaign of that upcoming summer, the battles to be fought on the ground named for that languid, meandering river flowing through the region, and over which the parent unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had marched only weeks previously at Pont-Rémy: *the Somme*.

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

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\*.



*\*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 killing of the Somme was to continue for the next four and a half months.



(Right above: 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)

\*On July 1, 1916, the Y Ravine had formed a part of the German front-line defences.

(Right: a grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after the action at Beaumont-Hamel – from ...)



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.

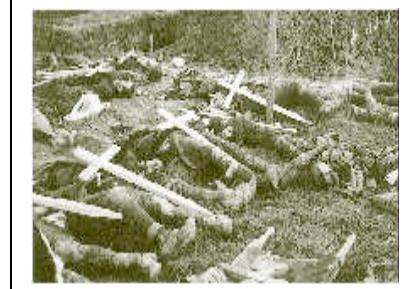


(Preceding page: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village.* – photographs from 2010 & 2015)

The son of William Hockley and Jane Hockley of 13, Richmond Road, Olton, Warwickshire, England, he had at least two sisters: Ethel and a Mrs. Garlick, both also residents of Olton, Birmingham. He himself had been born in nearby Birmingham but, by the time of his enlistment, was working in the city of St. John's and residing at 7, Bell Street.

Lance Corporal Hockley was reported as having been *killed in action* on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*, on the field at Beaumont-Hamel.

John Herbert Hockley had enlisted at the *declared age* of thirty years. However, a Commonwealth War Graves Commission report cites him as having died at the age of thirty-eight.



(Right above: a *grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after the action at Beaumont-Hamel* – from ...)

Lance Corporal John Herbert Hockley was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and 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 12, 2023.

