



Private Lucas Holden (also known as *Luke*) (Regimental Number 329) is interred in Serre Road Cemetery No. 2 – Grave reference XXXIX. F. 1.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a worker for the *Reid Railway Company* earning two dollars and forty cents per day - but unemployed at the time of his enlistment – Lucas Holden presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 29 of 1914, four weeks less three days after the *Declaration of War*.

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The medical procedure having pronounced him as being...*fit for foreign service*...Lucas Holden enlisted at the same venue six days later – at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 (ten cents of which was a *field allowance*) - on September 5. He was a recruit of the First Draft.

Some four weeks later again – having trained during that interim period - Private Holden attested on October 1 before then proceeding to embark on October 3 with the other personnel of the *First Five Hundred* onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting the contingent in St. John's Harbour.

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

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 1st Canadian Division across the Atlantic.

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

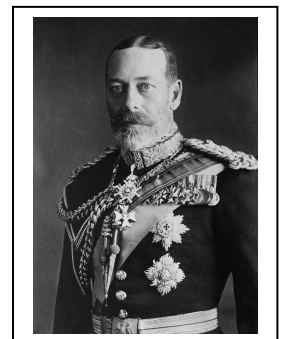
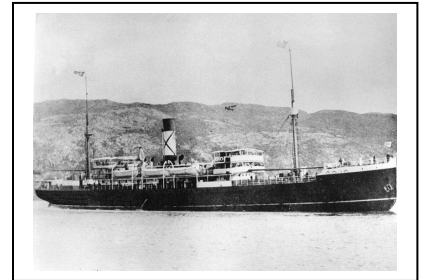
In the United Kingdom Private Holden trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; at Edinburgh Castle – where it provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles; and later again at the tented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

(Right above: *The Newfoundland Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp and about to be 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', 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 2nd (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*)

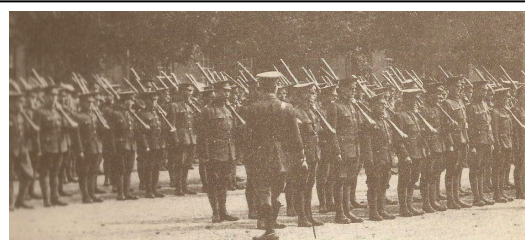
**On July 10, 1915, 'F' Company had arrived at Stobs Camp from Newfoundland, its personnel raising the numbers of the unit to battalion establishment strength, and thus permitting it to be ordered to active service.*



The 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, comprising those four Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

It had then been during the period spent at Aldershot that Private Holden 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 1st 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, here in the peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)



On August 20, 1915, Private Holden 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 1st Battalion at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *Kangaroo Beach, where the officers and men of the 1st 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. – from Provincial Archives*)*



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(Preceding page: A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where the 1st Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion was to serve but, even since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, would prove 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.

Thus it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.

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

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



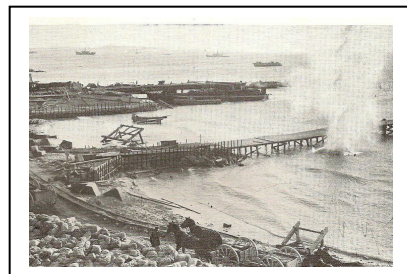
On the night of December 19-20, the British abandoned the area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, formed a part of the rear-guard – and the 1st Battalion was transferred two days later to Cape Helles on the western tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula.

(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)



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

When the British evacuated the entire Gallipoli Peninsula in January of 1916, 1st Battalion had been sent to Alexandria, arriving there on the 15th of that month. From there the Newfoundlanders were transferred, almost immediately, south to Suez at the end of the Canal of the same name.



(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 just above are still to be seen – photograph from 2011)

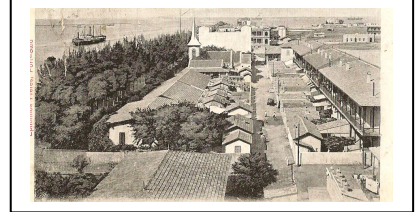


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At that time it would seem that the future posting of the Newfoundland unit's parent (British) 29th Division was still uncertain. Bulgaria had lately entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika (north-eastern Greece) was soon to become a theatre of war.

However, it was soon determined that the services of the 29th Division were to be required on the *Western Front*.

(Right: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The Newfoundlanders, employed as the rear-guard, were among the last to leave on two occasions.* – photograph taken from the battleship *Cornwallis* from *Illustration*)



(Right above: *Port Tewfiq before the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

On March 14, the some six-hundred officers and men of Private Holden's Newfoundland Battalion embarked through Port Tewfiq at the southern end of the *Suez Canal* onto His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* for the voyage to the French port of Marseilles, en route to the *Western Front*.

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



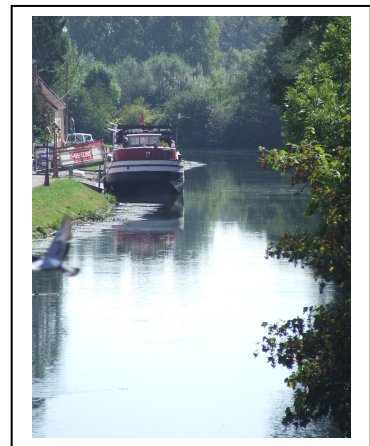
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Battalion's train arrived at the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for them travelling unused in a separate wagon. De-training at the station at two in the morning the Newfoundlanders still had a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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

It is doubtful that any of those tired soldiers paid much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge that they passed on their way from the station. Some three months later the *Somme* would be a part of their history.

On April 13, the 1st Battalion marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy – where it would be billeted, would welcome reinforcements two days later on the 15th, and, on that same day, would be introduced into the British lines of the *Western Front*, there to be put to work to improve the communication trenches.

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Just days later, two of the four Companies – ‘A’, and ‘B’, that of Private Holden – were to take over several support positions from a British unit* before the entire Newfoundland unit was then to move further up into forward positions on the *Western Front* for the first time, 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 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment Battalion, were the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles - true also on the day of the attack on July 1.*

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for that same meandering river, *the Somme*.

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

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

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

(Right above: *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*)

**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.*

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

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 & 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.



The son of William V.* Holden (former merchant, deceased November 6, 1901) and of Alice Josephine(?) Holden (née Grace, deceased August 14, 1895)** of Harbour Main - but having been living with his Aunt Kate Veitch from Holyrood since the year 1901 – she then moved to the United States soon after her nephew's enlistment - he was brother to Mrs. Madeleine (also found as *Magdalene*) Holden Sullivan, she, since the age of nine and by the time of the War, also living in the United States; and brother also to Gerard Philip who died at the early age of three months before the birth of Lucas.

**There appears to be confusion in the records as to whether he was William V. Holden or if William V. was another gentleman of Harbour Main who married a Mary Butler.*

***The couple was married at St. Patrick's Church), Riverhead, St. John's, on November 24 of 1887.*

Private Holden was reported as *missing in action* on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel on the first day of *the Somme*. On July 26, not four weeks afterwards, the record was amended so as to read *killed in action* - surely from an eye-witness account.

At home, it was the Reverend W.P. Finn who was requested to bear this latter news to his family.



Lucas Holden had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-one years: date of birth at Harbour Main, Newfoundland, December 8, 1893 (from Roman Catholic Records).

(Right above: *The Holyrood War Memorial honours the sacrifice of Private Holden.* - photograph from 2010)

As the remains of Private Holden were identified and buried well after the cessation of hostilities, his name is also recorded on the Beaumont-Hamel Bronze as being one of those *missing in action* - *presumed dead*. Subsequent to the report of his burial, his file was once more amended so as to read *killed in action* or *died of wounds on or shortly after 1/7/16*.



(Right above: *In the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont Hamel, and under its Caribou, are to be found the names of those in the Newfoundland forces who died during the Great War and who have no known last resting-place. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

Private Lucas Holden 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. Last updated – February 12, 2023.