

Corporal James Patrick Houlahan (as he signs himself, but elsewhere *Houlihan*) (Regimental Number 500) lies buried in Earlsfield (Wandsworth) Cemetery – Grave reference Nfld. Plot.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a clerk in the *Passenger and Freight and Express* (money order) *Office of the Reid Nfld. Co.* in St. John's, James Houlahan 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 – three weeks and a day after the *Declaration of War* on August 4 – for a medical examination. It was an exercise which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

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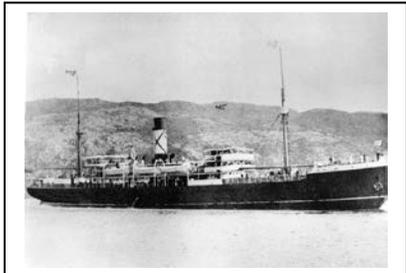
Nineteen days later, on September 14, James Patrick Houlahan returned to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, on this second occasion for enlistment, whereupon he was engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*. A recruit of the First Draft, he was likely 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; it may have been that Private Houlahan was one of that number, taking his oath of allegiance one of the first three days of October - although a single source suggests that he had already done so by the, on September 14, when he had enlisted..

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 Houlahan 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.



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.



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(Preceding page: *The venerable Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from its position on the summit of Castle Hill.* – photograph from 2011)

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 1st 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 Heaney 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th 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 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* – the photograph is from *Bain News Services* via the *Wikipedia* web-site.)



It was while at Aldershot that, on August 14, Private Houlahan was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion for the *duration of the war**. It was apparently also during this period, although the exact date appears not to have been documented, that Private Houlahan was promoted to the rank of lance corporal.

**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.*



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(Preceding page: *Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915, prior to its departure to active service on the Gallipoli Peninsula – from *The Fighting 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 1st 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 1st Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right: *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: *Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros: 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 1st 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: *No-Man's-Land at Suvla Bay as seen from the Newfoundland positions – from Provincial Archives*)

(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 had been the priority.

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

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 1st Battalion would 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* – were now only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.

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

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.

**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 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 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then 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 29th 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration*)

It was during this period spent at Suez that Lance Corporal Houlahan received a second promotion, on February 27 being appointed to the rank of Corporal.



(Right above: *Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal 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 1st 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.



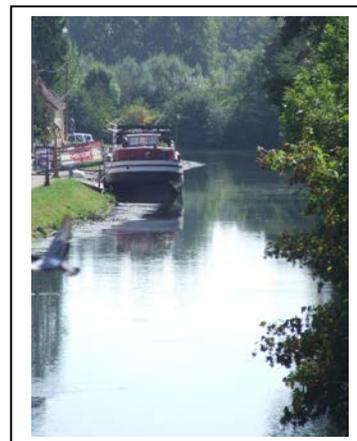
(Preceding page: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles.* – from a vintage post-card)

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

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 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment Battalion, were then the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles - true also on the day of the attack on July 1.*

(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.

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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, just as depressing, the carnage of *the Somme* would 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...?)*



On July 1, 1916, the first day of *the Somme*, Corporal Houlahan was wounded during the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having incurred gun-shot wounds to the right leg and left thigh, he was evacuated from the field eventually to the 39th Casualty Clearing Station at St. Ouen on July 2, then forwarded on to the 10th General Hospital at Rouen the following day.



(Right: *Evacuating Canadian casualties to the rear in hand-carts after an infantry operation – somewhere on the Somme – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)

(Right above: *A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War. Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card*)



From hospital in Rouen Corporal Houlahan was transferred to England by hospital ship on July 7 to be admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth on the following day. He was to remain there and subsequently in a convalescent home for a period of five months altogether.



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

Excerpt from a later Medical Report dated August 24 and issued by the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth: *Was advancing when an H.E. (high explosive) shell piece struck him in the legs.*

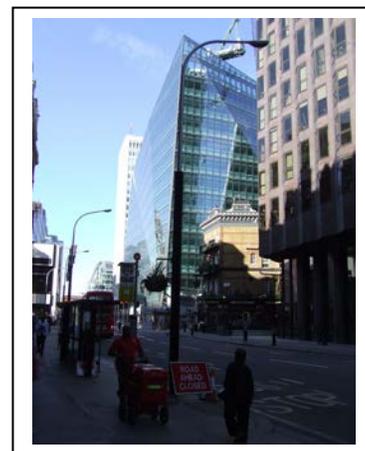
The Rt. (right) Fibula was broken.

There was a good deal of internal hæmorrhage from the artery in the Rt. Leg but no operation was performed...

...His general health is feeble & he is run down with poor appetite.

Days later, the conclusion of a Medical Board meeting convened on August 29, 1916, was that Corporal Houlahan was...*Permanently Unfit.*

After treatment and convalescence – the convalescence at the Lammas Auxiliary Hospital at Esher - Corporal Houlahan was granted, on December 12, the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel upon release from hospital. In most cases this would have been followed by a posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr, but Corporal Houlahan had been doing some lobbying from his hospital bed, and his pre-War office experience was to stand him in good stead.



He was posted immediately to the *Newfoundland Pay & Record Office* at 58 Victoria Street, London, SW1, for the next six months, beginning duties there on December 21, 1916. He was, according to the records ‘...a good and capable clerk’.

(Preceding page: *The remnants of Number 58, Victoria Street, are to be found beneath the glass monstrosity in the picture. The only survivor of that period is Number 52, the small brick building, which today is – and perhaps also was in those days – a public-house – a pub! - photograph from 2012*)

During this period, for the period of April 16 to 24 (inclusive), Corporal Houlahan was to undergo medical treatment in London for for a *slight* venereal problem. The hospital on this occasion was not to be the 3rd London General but at the Military Hospital, Rochester Row, London.

Then on June 19, two months afterwards, Corporal Houlahan was admitted once more into the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth. But his problems were now no longer gunshot wounds or VD: he was exhibiting erratic behaviour due to *war trauma* and it was also in that month of June, 1917, that he began to exhibit the first symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis.



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

Admitted to Grosvenor Sanatorium at Kennington, Ashford, County of Kent, on August 22, it was to be almost four months later again before he was released from there on November 30. On December 6 he arrived – late, not having reported to the *Pay & Records Office* in London immediately after his discharge from hospital as ordered – at his posting in Scotland, at the Regimental Depot at Ayr, and there was attached to ‘H’ Company.

This posting to the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was to last for only five months and, in fact, Corporal Houlahan was to spend only six weeks of that time in Scotland.

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 2nd (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 1st 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.*



But by the end of 1917, however, and by the time of Corporal Houlahan's deployment at Ayr, it had been decided by the War Office in London that the Newfoundlanders should be stationed elsewhere.

Thus the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to transfer its headquarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to the south of England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, and close to the venerable cathedral city of Winchester in the county of Hampshire.



(Right above: *Troops on the march through a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp, Hampshire, during the early winter of 1918 – from *The War Illustrated**)

The transfer of the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was finalized in the latter part of January, 1918, but well before that time Corporal Houlahan had been admitted into *Heathfield Hospital, Ayr...pending his admission into a sanatorium*. He had been ordered there on December 12, only days following his arrival at Ayr, and also after a remonstrance by the officer commanding 'H' Company to which he had been attached*.

**It appears that Corporal Houlahan has insisted upon his release from the Grovesnor Sanatorium, even though he had been diagnosed as having tuberculosis. At Ayr, of course, this posed a problem to the personnel with whom he was in contact.*

Correspondence present among his papers show that Corporal Houlahan was still in hospital at Ayr of April 4 of 1918, but a month later a telegraph dated 16/5/18, sent from the *Pay & Record Office* in London, was received by the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Hazely Down: *500 Houlahan reported yesterday in uniform without pass stating he had been sent here for discharge...telegraph instructions...urgent.*



An addendum a day later – with apologies – was forwarded by the *P&R Office* to Hazely Down, a missive which partially reads thus: ...If he proceeds elsewhere than Newfoundland, which it is understood is his intention, it will be necessary for him to indicate his whereabouts...

Thus it may well be that also as a result of that telegraph, Corporal Houlahan was transferred to the 4th London General Hospital at Denmark Hill* on May 18, 1918, to be discharged more than three months later again, on August 28. Subsequently to that he was released from service - as *physically unfit due to wounds and sickness* - on September 17, 1918, being granted a furlough on that same day.

According to his wishes, Corporal Houlahan was discharged in the United Kingdom.

(*The above photograph of Private Houlahan is from the Provincial Archives.*)

**A second source has his being admitted at more or less the same time into the St. James Infirmary, Balham, on May 18, not only with pulmonary tuberculosis but with unspecified throat problems.*

By December of 1919 he had been classified as *Pensioner ex No. 500 Cpl. J. P. Houlahan* and had been back in hospital yet again for several months.

Apparently he had been offered passage back to Newfoundland – as suggested in an above paragraph, on May 6 of 1918 the authorities apparently thought that he was on his way and reported *Corporal...Houlahan is proceeding to Newfoundland with next draft... - but he had refused, claiming that he...no longer had relatives there – even though the documentation seems to suggest otherwise. He did apparently speak about possibly going to South Africa. Whether he ever realised this desire is not known, but for certain he was in the United Kingdom in February of 1925.*

He was the son of Patrick Michael Houlahan, a fisherman of Cape St. Mary's, and of Anna Houlahan* – of 9 Patrick Street in St. John's as of October 23, 1915 – but deceased before August, 1918 - as he made out his will to her benefit at this address**. He also had a brother, Francis, and a sister, Mrs. Rose Connors, of Brazil Square in the city.



**She perhaps née Hunt of Harbour Grace, married there August 11, 1879, Elizabeth and Eliza-Joseph being the first two children. Confirmation is required.*

***His own address is cited as 14, George Street before Leslie Street, both in St. John's.*

Corporal James Patrick Houlahan was reported as having *died of sickness* on February 26, 1925, and as having been buried in the Newfoundland Plot at Wandsworth.

James Patrick Houlahan had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-three years.

(Right above: *The Newfoundland Plot in Magdelene Road (Earlfield) Cemetery in the London Borough of Wandsworth – from 2009(?)*)

Corporal James Patrick Houlahan 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).

He was also awarded a Silver War Badge (Number 14) to recognize...*For King and Empire: Services Rendered.*



(continued on the following page)

The "Lammas"
Esher
Nov. 14th 1916

Capt. H. A. Timewell
Pay & Record Office,
Newfoundland Contingent

Dear Sir:-

Mr. Morris had kindly passed your letter to him of recent date over to me, and according to your request I have much pleasure in communicating to you in reference to my experience in office work. As you are aware I wrote Mr. Morris some time ago asking him if it was possible to get a position on your staff now that I am unfit for active service and if he would speak to you on my behalf.

I must thank you Sir, very much indeed for the interest you have taken in my request, since Mr. Morris has so kindly interviewed you. I was employed in the Passenger and Freight and Express (money order) Office of the Reid Nfld. Co., St. John's Nfld for eight years, as clerk. I feel sure I could take a similar position in your office with satisfaction to you should you decide to take me on your staff.

With many thanks for your kindness,

I am

Yours Truly
JP Houlahan