

# THE VETERAN

JUNE 1922  
GUEUDECOURT

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# The VETERAN



GUEDECOURT NUMBER

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≡ EDITORIAL ≡

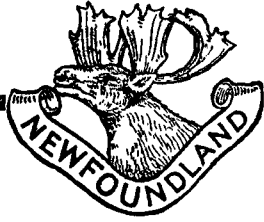


MEMORIAL DAY is near at hand and citizens will again be enabled to pay homage and respect to the memory of the Men Who Went and did not return. It is right that one day should be set aside and that this day should be kept fittingly. Last year's ceremony was an honour to the country. No more impressive sight could be imagined than that of thousands of citizens with perfect order and decorum watching the unveiling of the Sergeants' Memorial on July 3rd, 1921. It is proper not alone that year after year the ceremony should be continued but that there should be no falling off in numbers or respect. The people of Newfoundland have not forgotten their Dead. Practically every District has its War Memorial. Thanks to Colonel Nangle and a few energetic citizens a large National Memorial is now a possibility—to be dedicated not to those who came from St. John's or any one town or village but to all the Dead.

A short while ago the colours of the old Royal Newfoundland Fencibles were impressively unfurled at the Museum in St. John's. It was through the interest and patriotism of a few earnest men and women, who compose the Historical Society and to whom the history of their country is not a closed book, that these colours were obtained from Jersey, where they have lain for over a hundred years. A most glorious episode in our History—the part played by Newfoundlanders in the defence of Quebec in the American War of Independence—was almost unknown until Major Gustave Lanctot of the Public Archives, Ottawa, unearthed the facts and gave to these pages in most inspiring language the wonderful story. And so our history has been forgotten. So it is brought together in piece meal fashion.

Dr. J. A. Robinson in one of his brilliant Editorials remarked "We, of this generation, proudly and justly boast of Newfoundland's part in the World War. But what are we doing to perpetuate its memory? Thanks to THE VETERAN MAGAZINE some of its epics have been told, but to-day, nearly four years after the Armistice, no attempt worthy of the name has been made to record the story of those memorable days between August the 4th and November the 11th, 1918. Even such records as exist, despite repeated warning and entreaty, are unprotected, and what 1846 did to the records of the Fencibles, 19—may do to these of the present day. Possibly a century hence the Historical Society of that day may undertake a function similar to that of last Saturday, and, by delving into such of the early twentieth century newspapers and magazines as may survive the wreck of years, may be able to tell some similarly uncertain tale of the heroism and service of the veterans of to-day."

The main object of this magazine is to record in each issue some stirring engagement in which the Newfoundlanders took part. Written by those who were eye witnesses, Major Tait, M.C., Major Raley, M.C., Capt. Hicks, M.C., Major Butler, D.S.O., and Private Fred Curran, M.M., the stories of Gallipoli, Beaumont Hamel, Monchy, Brombeek, and Cambrai have been well told and this issue commemorates the glorious day of Guedecourt. If through indifference and neglect the full story of our country's share in the war is never finished, then War Memorials and Tablets are but useless pieces of stone and tinkling brass in a land where the deeds they are supposed to perpetuate are forgotten.



## BEAUMONT HAMEL

IS IT the sigh of the night-wind in the grasses,  
The long rank grasses that grow so tall and thin?  
Or only the cry of a night-bird as it passes  
On wings of fear this field incarnadine?

Is it the soft low rustle of the garments  
Of those high souls who nobly laid their all  
On this grim altar of unnumbered torments,  
And won to Life through deaths heroidal?

Is it the sob of earth in deadly sorrow  
At the red flood that chokes her hidden ways,—  
Sick with her longing for the fruitful furrow,  
Faint with the memory of bygone days?

Is it the voice of God within us, calling,—  
Deep unto deep—the God without, within,—  
Bidding us loose our souls from their enthralling,  
Moulding His Peace through this sore discipline?

—JOHN OXENHAM.



CROSS AND CROWN



# GUEUDECOURT

By MAJOR B. BUTLER, D.S.O., M.C.



**A**BOUT October 8th, 1916, our Regiment was ordered from Ypres, where we had been enjoying a real Newfoundland "spell" and it was rightly conjectured by all ranks that we were to have another "crack" at the German defences on the Somme. As our "spell" in Belgium had consisted mostly of digging and bailing out and rivetting trenches, putting up barbed wire and providing fatigue parties to all kinds of engineers, everybody was more or less overjoyed to get away from the Salient, although some of us regretted very much leaving the neighbourhood of Poperinghe where the "Broken Doll" formed the scene of many happy re-unions of the different Company Messes.

We entrained early on the night of October 8th and detrained at a Somme village about noon next day. After a march of about ten kilometres we arrived at Corbie, well known to many of our boys, where we "hung up" for that night. On October 9th orders came through that we were for the line right away and were to proceed by charabancs, German aircraft made an appearance and several bombs fell very near us, but we suffered no casualties. About 2 a.m. we left Corbie and started a long and very cold ride, and at 6.30 a.m. we crossed the old German line which had been broken by the British assaults on July 1st, and it certainly thrilled us to know that we were on territory that had once been German. Not a tree could be seen for miles although our maps showed big forests. Here we saw the great devastation wrought by war, the whole place was a shell torn, battle scarred plain, with thousands of horses and men going about their various duties of bringing up ammunition, rations, etc., whilst a constant stream of ambulances were returning from the front line, which, since July 1st, had advanced about four miles. It was very hard going for the charabancs and I doubt if they moved at more than five miles per hour. The roads were in a terrible condition, owing to the

immense amount of transport which daily went over them. After getting about three miles into Germany, (as we called it) our charabancs could go no further and we had to detrain. We marched about a half mile to a bivouac, right out in the open, without cover of any kind, although we were but two miles from the front line and the air was alive with German aircraft. There were all kinds of German munitions of war lying about this area, which proved of interest to most of our chaps, although the "old hands" were very chary of playing with any of them.

Here a rather amusing incident occurred which luckily did not bring the consequences, usually attendant in such cases. A private, who had lately come out from the Depot, picked up a German bomb and not knowing the mechanism, was unfortunate enough to set it off, with the result that four of our men were wounded, luckily not severely. As is usual in occurrences of this kind a Court of Inquiry was ordered by the C.O. when a thorough investigation was made regarding the accident. After several witnesses had been examined it came to the turn of the man who was responsible for the happening. His evidence was something like this: "Well, Sar, I seed a lot of can-like things lyin' about and I picked one of 'em up. I 'yeared' 'im fizzing and I laid 'im down fur safety and he mus' a bus'." Needless to say the Court could hardly keep its dignity but the straightforward way in which the offender gave his evidence saved the day for him and he was let off with a reprimand. He was however the cause of our being four men short in the action of October 12th, but perhaps he thereby saved the lives of one, if not more, of them.

Before we really had time to look around, orders came through that the C. O. and Adjutant together with Company Commanders were to proceed to the front line in pairs (100 yards apart) to make themselves conversant with the 'lie of the land' and to make arrangements for taking over the

front line from another Battalion. We accordingly started off about 11 a.m. very, very tired, I remember, as we had been up all night and had no decent meal for nearly 24 hours. We had to pass through the famous Bourlon Wood, and it was a gruesome sight indeed. There were corpses all around, both German and British. This Wood had changed hands about ten times during the week previous to our going there, and up to then it had been impossible to provide the necessary burial parties.

Whilst on our way up to Brigade Headquarters, situated about a mile from the front line, we met two staff Officers—one a General, the other a Captain who showed us the best way to go. After we left them it suddenly dawned upon us that we had just been speaking to the Prince of Wales. Up to that time we were of the opinion that our Prince was kept at G. H. Q. wrapped in cotton wool, but such was not the case, and what concerned us most was that why was he not kept further back from the danger zone.

Shells were falling just around him but he certainly did not mind them a bit and I was told later on that it was with extreme difficulty that he was kept out of the Firing Line itself. You can bet it did not do us any harm to see our beloved Prince taking his life in his hand as well as the rest of us, and in the near future we were destined to see a good bit of him.

We eventually arrived at B.H.Q. and secured a guide to the Battalion H.Q. of the Unit in which we were interested—a Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers. We moved up

the well known communication trench—Cocoa Alley. Looking over the top we could see numerous dead, mostly German, who had fallen three days before, and there were also a good many of our Tanks which had been most useful in our attack, but were now derelict.

We duly arrived at Battalion Headquarters but found that it was impossible to move along to the front line in daylight.

Accordingly, arrangements were made regarding the relief of the Battalion in the front line and also re guides for the various Companies. Company Officers then went back to their commands and prepared to move them up towards the line as soon as it became dark.

Through some misunderstanding on the part of the guides, C Company took over a part of the line which had been allotted to B Company, and when the latter Company arrived it took up a position at right angles to C Company, immediately in front. When the relief was complete many of our tired men who were not wanted for duty, tried to



The Bombing Newfoundlander, modelled after a member of the Regiment This fine piece of statuary will be erected in Bowring Park.

sleep, the sleep of the just. We were however on the qui vive and ready for anything. The night of October 10/11 was fine but cold and nothing unusual happened. An occasional shell sailed over our heads and enemy-machine guns, every minute or so, beat a rat-tat on our parapets just to show that they knew where our trench was and had the range. When daylight came we took stock as far as possible of the enemy trenches and the ordinary routine of trench life was observed. We were practically cut off from Headquarters which was half a mile away

from us—it being on the southern and we on the northern outskirts of Guedecourt — and there being no communication trenches. We were thankful in a way to be left alone by our H. Q. but nevertheless a little curious as to what plans were being prepared for us. We knew that our Battalion and also the Essex Battalion had been lent to our Brigadier to the 12th Division, but we knew not whether for offence or defence. At dusk on October 11th an orderly arrived with orders for all Company Commanders to report to Battalion Headquarters. We eventually arrived there about 10 p.m. and the Colonel explained to us the plans for the attack to be made the next day. One of the chief features of these plans was a new form of attack in which infantry

and artillery acted in close conjunction. This had been worked with great success by the French some time previously but I think it was the first time that the British Army had employed "curtain fire" with infantry.

The programme was as follows:—The Battalion was to advance in attack formation on a two company front. A and B Companies in the firing line and D and C Companies supporting at a distance of 150 yards. B Company being directing company with right flank on a road which led north out of Guedecourt. On our right a Battalion of the 12th Division, on our left the Essex Battalion. Zero hour was 2 p.m. on October 12th. At zero our artillery would open fire, their shortest range being 100 yards in front of the assembly trench. Immediately the Battalion was to leave its trenches and take up position in "No Man's Land" moving so as to keep not more than 50 yards behind our barrage. Every minute our barrage would lift 50 yards until the first German line was captured. The barrage would then be kept for ten minutes, 100 yards from our front of this trench and at the expiration of this time 2 platoons, each from A and B



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Company would move on to the second German line and capture it, the barrage lifting each minute as before until it came to a part 100 yards from our front of the objective.

On receiving these instructions, O. C's Companies returned to their units in the front line to impart as much knowledge of the plans to the Officers, N.C.O's and men as possible.

It was now after 1 a.m. on the morning of October 12th and much had to be done before daylight, about 5.30 a.m. Our jumping off point was some distance to the left and B and C Companies had to go over half a mile from their original trench. This took us nearly an hour and parties of the Company had to make the trip several times for rations, extra ammunitions, etc. Eventually we got settled away in the front line opposite our objectives just before daylight. We were packed closely together in this trench and as far as possible we tried to rest.

Officers went through the men explaining the plans especially the working of the barrage. It was a very long day. We were too exposed to start fires to make tea, and we ate meagerly of our bully beef and biscuit with

slender draughts of water, as we did not know really when our next supply would get to us. Everybody was jolly in the extreme, O'Brien and Cecil Clift being in excellent form and the former related several of his masterpieces in his inimitable way, stories concerning local celebrities and worthies whose eccentricities and peculiarities were well known. Several of the men regaled us with songs, sung sort of under the breath (we had orders not to make much noise as we were only 300 yards from the Boche and he might get wise to the little surprise we

passed "fix bayonets" and don't show them over the top of the trench.

Precisely at 2 p.m. a lone shell whizzed over and landed about a hundred yards to our front. Within five seconds the air was alive with bursting shrapnel, and we were off. We got out of the trench and formed up in No Man's Land, platoon commanders keeping a look at their watches and noting as far as possible the movements of the barrage. At the appointed time the whole battalion moved forward, and right here we experienced quite a few casualties, as in their



The Cross of Sacrifice erected in Forceville Cemetery, France. This was one of the first Cemeteries completed.

had for him). Johnny Burke's creations were easily favourites until one chap started off with a ditty concerning a sailor from Cappyhaden who married a Princess of Fiji. It was rather a lengthy song and as the tune was somewhat of a long and drawly metre by the time the 47th verse had been sung many were the demands to "hook 'im." The ditty however helped us to pass the best part of an hour.

As two o'clock approached we began to get our things together and about five minutes to the hour the order was quietly

eagerness to get at grips with the enemy, many of the men walked into, and through, our barrage, whilst the supporting companies got mixed with the firing line.

I estimate that thirty per cent of our force was put out of action before the first objective was reached—fully half this number being killed or wounded by our own shells. Whilst this was to be regretted, it probably was a good thing that we kept close behind the barrage, as it did not give the enemy much chance to bring his deadly machine-guns into action to any great ex-



tent—in fact only one of these did any damage and that was quickly 'knocked out' by a party of A Company under C.S.M. Peter Samson.

(The French, who, as I stated before, inaugurated the mode of attack, were of opinion, that a loss up to ten per cent of an attacking force, by one's own barrage, was not unsatisfactory, especially as the losses by enemy machine-guns would be appreciably less. Had these tactics been in operation on the first of July, 1916, I am sure our casualties on that date would be very much less than what they were).

Our way across No Man's Land lay through a large field of cabbage, and most excellent cabbage it was too. Many of us stopped for a second to pluck a beautifully white cabbage-heart and munched it as we jogged along, our only regret being that the pork was not forthcoming to provide a good old Newfoundland meal that night. I heard quite a few chaps voicing their regrets.

Although our attack was only on a front of about three hundred yards it was impossible for one who took part in it to see what went on, except in his immediate vicinity. One platoon of B Company was practically wiped out, but the one on its right hardly had a casualty until we reached the German line. A Company had extremely hard luck, losing all its officers before they were nearly across; the N.C.O's took up the commands, however, and pushed the attack home. All ranks were eager to avenge as far as possible our comrades who fell on July first.

On our arrival at the German trenches, the fun really began, and for about fifteen minutes hand to hand fighting was in order. Many of our men used a bayonet to kill for the first time, and when once they got the 'knack' of it, it was hard to make them give it up. A few bombs were used to get the 'Huns' hands above their heads, and prisoners were sent to the rear under guard of wounded men.

In the meantime, four platoons had pushed on to the second objective. These platoons got about one hundred yards further on, could find no enemy trench, but dug themselves in. The casualties of this little force was very high—over fifty per cent of them being either killed or wounded. Where they dug in it was later formed into outposts.

The battalion on our left, although successful in the initial attack, was unfortunately unable to hold its advantage, and was compelled to retire. At the time, we were too

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Real Estate, unincumbered - - - - -	672,134.42
Loans on Real Estate - - - - -	124,650.00
Loans on Collateral - - - - -	100,000.00
Accumulated Interest & Rents - - - - -	163,483.48
Reinsurance due on Paid Losses - - - - -	117,591.26
Total Cash Assets - - - - -	\$23,629,510.99

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Cash Capital - - - - -	\$ 3,000,000.00
Reserve for Outstanding Losses - - - - -	1,506,854.07
Reserve for Reinsurance - - - - -	9,648,236.36
Reserve for all other Claims and Liabilities - - - - -	500,000.00
Total Liabilities - - - - -	\$14,655,090.43
Net Surplus - - - - -	\$ 8,974,420.56
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busy to notice this, but on trying to establish communication with them, discovered that the line on our left was held by Germans. The situation was quickly grasped by Major March and his officers, who organized bombing parties and drove the enemy from his trench. When they had captured about four hundred yards, they thought that they were deep enough and built a block in the trench to divide Britain from Germany. We thus found ourselves possessors of seven hundred yards of trench instead of three hundred, and with our weakened force, felt that to defend this successfully against the inevitable counter-attack would tax our resources to the uttermost. We therefore started to make our defences as strong as possible and the trench now became a very hive of industry. Every man who could handle a pick and shovel, except a few that were posted as sentries, was working for dear life to make a British trench out of a German one. This meant a lot of work as we had to build a new fire-step as well as dig out parts of the trench which had been demolished by the accurate fire of our artillery in the attack. As the soil here was composed almost entirely of chalk, our work was pretty heavy, and al-

though the men were tired, we accomplished a lot of work within an hour.

The counter-attack we were expecting, now began to develop. Preceded by a slight bombardment by enemy artillery and machine-guns, a force estimated at about five hundred advanced towards us over a hill some five hundred yards distant. We stopped digging and picked up our rifles. The enemy presented a beautiful target which our riflemen and Lewis gunners took full advantage of and the attack was broken up before it reached within two hundred yards of us, and for the time being we were more or less free to carry on with our consolidation. Several times during the evening small parties of the enemy tried to force an entrance into our lines but were unable to do so.

Several incidents which came to my notice occurred during the evening, might prove of interest. One of our officers noticed a Red Cross flag at the entrance to one of the German dugouts, and, knowing that there were men in the dugout, called to them to come up and surrender. Apparently they were eager to do so, and started to ascend with their hands up. As the leading man arrived at the entrance, one of his com-

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#### The Secretary,

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Water Street, E.,

St. John's, Newfoundland.

panions pushed a revolver over his shoulder and fired at our officer at a range of only six feet. Luckily the bullet passed through his tunic near the right armpit, just grazing the skin of the arm, but this dastardly act was sufficient for our men to make 'good' Germans out of the lot.

After four p.m. our men were feeling the effects of the tension of the past two hours, and C.S.M. Gardner of C Company (who I may say was one of the 'lions' of the day) reported that he had left his Company's day's ration of rum in our jumping off trench, and that if we could issue some of this 'grog,' it would do no harm. Permission being

distance until he came up with the precious jar which was being handed on from man to man, each taking a nip as it passed. Only Gardner's rank saved the little drop left to us, and he bore away the practically empty jar in triumph. As far as possible we 'soiled our lips' and somehow felt better even with that.

Just after dusk a party was seen approaching our trench and was challenged by the sentry. We thought it might be some of our own men, and awaited an answer with fingers on triggers. We soon discovered them to be Germans, but whilst one of them advanced to our trench with his hands up,



A front view of our plot at Wandsworth which shows how carefully the graves of our Dead are looked after.

granted he started back through the German barrage which was now falling behind us. He was gone a considerable time and fears for his safety were entertained, but eventually a figure bearing a gallon jar was seen coming up towards us which was cheered lustily. Our cheers however turned to groans when he informed us that there was little left of the ration. He told us that when he reached the trench he discovered that another unit had taken it over. He went to the place where he had left the jar but could find no trace except that some of the men there did not appear to have just left a Band of Hope meeting. He followed the trail for some

the remainder were apparently undecided what to do. Immediately our Lewis guns opened out and helped them to make a decision, as we were taking no chances, but the one who had first advanced, jumped into our trench and was quickly overpowered. Although we could not understand German, one of our chaps who belonged down North, after a certain amount of gibbering, elicited the facts that he was a Pole, who had been conscripted by the German authorities, and that he was glad to be our prisoner. Whilst he was talking he was being searched for concealed weapons, and his jackknife and eating utensils confiscated. He appeared

after a few minutes to be somewhat at his case and ate some bully beef which was given him. After receiving this hospitality he asked for the officer in charge, and on the latter's arrival, he solemnly took from his waistcoat pocket a flannel case containing 6 excellent razors, which had been overlooked when he was searched. These he distributed, took out his pipe and smoked quite contentedly for a few minutes and then went to sleep.

During the night another German drifted into our lines bearing a huge bag filled with provisions. He was a very small chap, barely over five feet, and he was immediately christened 'Hindenburg.' He apparently had planned to desert and thinking that an offering of provisions would be acceptable to the starving British, brought along as much as he could when we left the trenches later in the night. He followed me around like a dog and the Company would certainly have adopted him as a 'mascot' had we been allowed.

In the meantime we were working hard on putting the trench in good condition, and we were greatly heartened at about 10 p.m. when a party of Royal Engineers reinforced us. About midnight we received word from H.Q. that we were to be relieved during the night. This was very cheery news, although it was not until 3 a.m. that the Hampshire Regiment arrived to take our trenches over.

The march back to Bull Trench—about 3 miles away—occupied us about 2 hours, and we were worn out when we arrived there. We found a meal awaiting us, to which we did the greatest justice, and after a couple of hours sleep, started to reorganize our forces against further eventualities.

[The following is an Appendix attached to the Official War Diary and concerns the events related above.]—Editor.

October 10th. At night the Regiment moved into the first line trenches in front of Guèdecourt. Strength: Officers, 27; other ranks, 356. The battalion was heavily shelled while in the trenches before the attack and suffered casualties including Major W. F. Rendell (wounded) and 2/Lt. S. C. Norris (killed).

October 12th. In conjunction with the 18th Brigade, 6th Division, on right and 35th Bde., 12th Division on left, the 88th Bde. attacked the enemy trenches—Newfoundland Regt. on the right and 1st Essex Regt. on the left. For this operation the 88th Bde. was attached to the 12th Division. The attack took place at 14.05 when the Regiment advanced as follows:—

B Co'y (Capt. Butler) on the right. A Co'y (Capt. O'Brien) on the left, both companies in two waves and advancing on a front of two platoons. These were followed in similar formation by C Co'y (Capt. Donnelly) on right and D Co'y (Capt. March) on left. The Regiment followed very close behind our "barrage" and seized the enemy's trench, which on the right was found to be some two hundred yards to our front. Capt. Donnelly was killed on reaching the trench

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and Capt. O'Brien was hit on the way over. The operations then depending on Captains March and Butler.

Our second objective was to establish ourselves on a line in front of the captured trench. Lieut. Clift (B Co.) lead a party forward with this object but they were wiped out. Our first objective was held and consolidated, touch being obtained with (i) Bde. on our right, (ii) between Coy's of the Regt., (iii) with 1st Essex on left. Dugouts in the trench were bombed and cleared out and prisoners taken.

About 1600 it was found that the 1st Essex on our left had retired to their original trenches. Capt. March at once sent a patrol up to the unoccupied trench on our left and thinned out his line and occupied it. At this time the enemy were seen advancing over the open to counter attack. This attack was defeated and driven back and the trench held.

About 2100 a company of the 2nd Hants was sent up to reinforce the Newfoundland Regt., which was now very few in numbers and about about 0300 on 13th another company of the Hants was sent up and the Newfoundland Regiment withdrawn to support trenches known as Bull Trench and Pioneer Trench.

During the Battle 3 machine guns were captured—also taken prisoners, 2 Officers, 1 W.O. and some 56 men.

Our total casualties for the whole time from going into the trenches were: Officers, 10; O.R., 229.

Estimated casualties of enemy, 250 killed.



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