



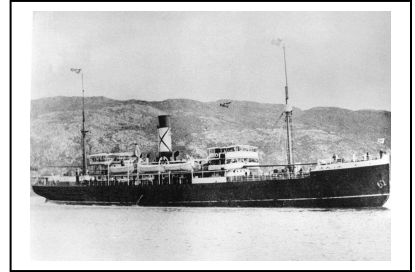
Private Silas Jeffers (Regimental Number 292) lies buried in Y Ravine Cemetery – Grave reference D. 3.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a of a *clerk* working for seven dollars per week, Silas Jeffers presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on September 1, 1914, four weeks less a day after the *Declaration of War*. The procedure would pronounce him as...*fit for foreign service*.

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It was to be a week before he then enlisted, also at the *CLB Armoury*, on September 8 – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 (this including a ten-cent Field Allowance). Private Jeffers was a recruit of the First Draft.

There was now to be a more than three-week wait – although training was to be ongoing - before Private Jeffers was to attest on October 2 and then a further two days until he 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 1st 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 Jeffers 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.

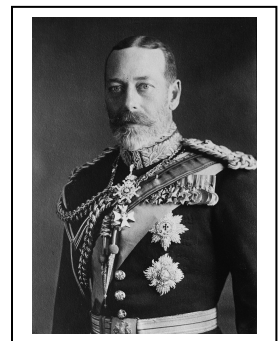


(Right above: *Fort George, constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, still serves the British Army to this day. – photograph from 2011*)



(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.

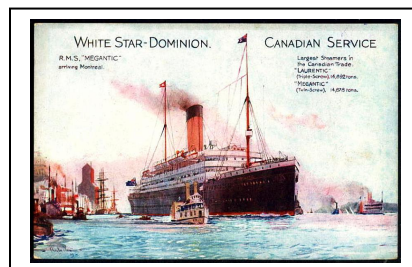
It had then been during the period spent at Aldershot that Private Jeffers of 'A' Company – he was not alone in doing so - had been prevailed upon, he on August 14, to re-enlist for the duration of the war*.

****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, in peace-time a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)



On August 20, 1915, Private Jeffers 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: *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 below: 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.

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



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 1st Battalion was to be 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 were also to serve at Gallipoli – were now only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the Peninsula was undertaken. The operation would take place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion providing part of the rear-guard on this second occasion also.



(Right above: 'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was 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 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)



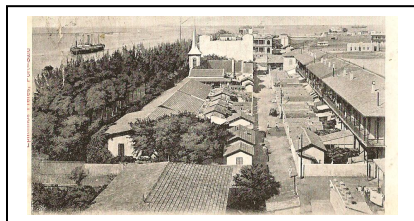
(Right below: The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1st Battalion were among the last to leave on two occasions, at Suvla Bay and at Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)

When 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, having arrived there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to Suez, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders as, 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.*

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, where the 1st Battalion would land on March 22, en route to the *Western Front*.



(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*)

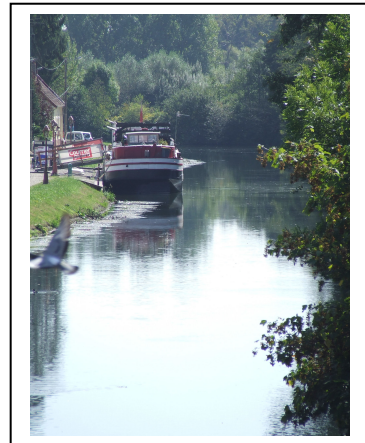
(Right below: *A languid River Somme as seen from the bridge at Pont-Rémy – photograph from 2010*)



Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Battalion's train would arrive at the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy.

It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for them having travelled 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 were to reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

It is doubtful that any of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they had passed on their way from the station. But in three months' time *the Somme* would be a part of their history.



On April 13, the Newfoundland Battalion had entered into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy – where it was billeted, received reinforcements and, after two days' time, would be introduced into the British lines of the *Western Front*, there to be immediately put to work to improve the condition of the nearby communication trenches.

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

Only days later again, two of the four Companies – ‘A’, that of Private Jeffers, and ‘B’, – were to take over several support positions from a British unit* before the entire Newfoundland unit was to then be ordered to move further up 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 the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles. This was also true on the day of the attack on July 1.*

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 the innocuous, meandering river flowing through the region, and over which the parent unit of the 1st Battalion had marched only weeks previously at Pont-Rémy: *the Somme*.

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 sustained while advancing 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: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village (see below). – 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.

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*.

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It would prove to be the biggest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps worse, it was to continue for the next four and a half months.

The son of Francis Jeffers, fisherman, and of Sarah Jeffers (née *Moore*)* – to whom he had willed his all - of Freshwater in the District of Bay de Verde - his own place of residence recorded as St. John's – he was also oldest brother to Harold; George-William; Hannah; Elizabeth; and to Mary-Amelia.

**The couple was married on March 31, 1892.*

(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 from 2009)

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

Private Jeffers was reported as *missing in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'A' Company during the fighting on the first day of *the Somme*. Some six months later, on December 31, 1916, he was officially *presumed dead*.

However, a letter dated June 15, 1917, submitted by the Officer Commanding 3rd Army Mobile Graves Registration Unit, confirmed his burial on or about that same date. His record was thus amended so as to read...*killed in action or died of wounds shortly after 1/7/16*.

Private Jeffers shares a grave marker with a Private Hepburn of the Gordon Highlanders.

Silas Jeffers had enlisted at the declared age of twenty-two years.

(The photograph of Private Jeffers is from the Provincial Archives.)

Private Silas Jeffers 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).

(continued)



Freshwater
July 31st 1916

J. R. Bennett.
Colonial Secretary. St. John's
Dear Sir;-

We are very anxious to know about Pte. Silas Jeffers No 292. as we have not heard from him for some time. and was in the big drive in France. Would you please find out something about him as his mother is very anxious to know. If it costs anything let us know.

An oblige.
W.J.J Moore.
Freshwater
Bay. De. Verde

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.
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