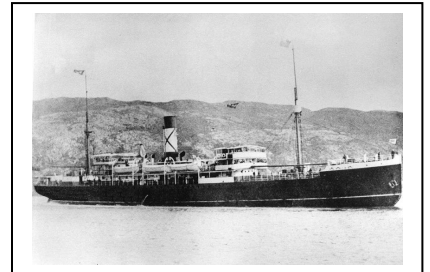


Sergeant Michael Francis Kelly (Regimental Number 148), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



His occupations prior to enlistment recorded as those of *labourer* and *stevedore* working for a weekly wage of \$8.00, Michael Francis Kelly enlisted at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in the Dominion's capital city of St. John's - at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 (including a daily ten-cent field allowance) - on September 3, 1914. He was a recruit of the First Draft.

Having attested a month later on October 3, Private Kelly embarked on the same day onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* for the voyage to the United Kingdom. The ship sailed on the morrow, October 4, to its rendezvous off the south coast of the Island to join the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas.



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

In the United Kingdom Private Kelly 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 the unit provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles - and later again at *Stobs Camp* near to the town of Hawick where he was promoted to the rank of lance corporal on June 19.



(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 on parade at Stobs Camp, Scotland, to be presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915 – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

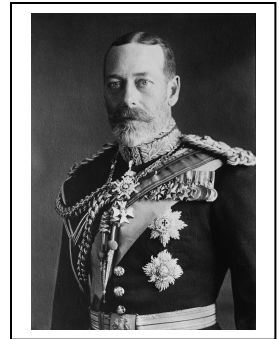


(continued)

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies*, 'A' – Lance Corporal Kelly among its numbers - '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, 'E' and 'F', were sent to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, where they were to form the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

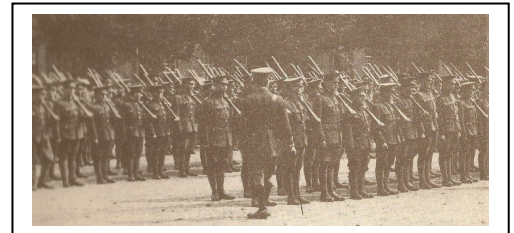
(Right below: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India* – photograph from *Bain News Services* via *Wikipedia*)

**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 the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.*



It was apparently to be during that final period of training spent at Aldershot that Private Kelly – and not only he - had been prevailed upon, he on August 14, to re-enlist in the Newfoundland unit...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 on parade at Aldershot in August of 1915* – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)

Lance Corporal Kelly was not to immediately travel to the Middle East, however. Venereal disease in August and his subsequent hospitalization while at Aldershot – at the Connaught Military Hospital from August 4 to 12 - prevented his embarkation in August with the 1st Battalion for service at *Gallipoli*, and he eventually reported *to duty* at the new Regimental Depot. It was there that he received a second promotion, to the rank of corporal, on October 29.

The Regimental Depot by that time had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland. It was to serve as a base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion and it was from there – as of November of 1915 until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were to be despatched in drafts, at first to *Gallipoli* and later to the *Western Front*, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.



(Preceding page: An aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)

The 1st Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr sailed from the English south-coast naval port of Devonport – where the now-Corporal Kelly had landed as Private Kelly some thirteen months before - on November 14, 1915, on board His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*.

(Right: Sister-ship to Britannic – that vessel to be sunk by a mine in the eastern Mediterranean a year later, in November of 1916 – and also to the ill-fated Titanic, HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor in the company of HM Hospital Ship Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay, Island of Lemnos, in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London)



On December 1 Corporal Kelly's 1st Draft changed vessels at *Mudros Bay* – the large British base on the Greek island of Lemnos* - from there to undertake the final leg of the voyage to *Suvla Bay*. The new arrivals were to remain at *Suvla* for less than three weeks.



**At this stage of the Great War the Greeks were still neutral and neither the British nor the French had permission to establish a base of Greek territory.*

(Right above: Suvla Bay and, at the far end, a rocky Kangaroo Beach where the 1st Battalion came ashore on the night on September 19-20, 1915. It was also here that the re-enforcements of December 1 were to land. – photograph from 2011)



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

* * * * *

In the meantime, during Corporal Kelly's absence, the Newfoundland Battalion had begun to serve at *Suvla Bay*. It was to be a miserable existence in the trenches and would be no more successful from a military point of view – and the situation was not to get any better once Corporal Kelly arrived to serve with his unit.

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.*

Thus it was that on the night of December 19-20, that the British forces abandoned the area of *Suvla Bay* where the Newfoundland Battalion, the only non-British unit to have served there, was to form a part of the rear-guard. Some of the Battalion personnel was then 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 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* – was then only to be marking time until a complete withdrawal from the *Peninsula* could be undertaken. The operation was eventually to take place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion to provide some of the rear-guard for this second retirement 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 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 finally evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the 1st Battalion was thereupon sent to Alexandria, to arrive there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundland unit was then immediately transferred southward to Suez, one of the ports 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 Battalion's 29th Division had not yet been decided*.



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

(Preceding page: The community of Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal at a time just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

During the latter days of this period spent at Suez, Corporal Kelly was once more in need of medical attention, and once more for his venereal problem and an accompanying case of orchitis. To that end he was admitted into the 18th Stationary Hospital at Suez for a two-week course of treatment from February 26 until March 10 when he was discharged back to his Battalion.

Four days after this episode, on March 14, Corporal Kelly and the Newfoundland unit embarked through Port Tewfiq, also at the southern end of the *Suez Canal*, onto HM Transport *Alaunia* for passage to the French port of Marseilles. The 1st Battalion arrived and disembarked there on March 22, en route to the *Western Front*.

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



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 and 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 had a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

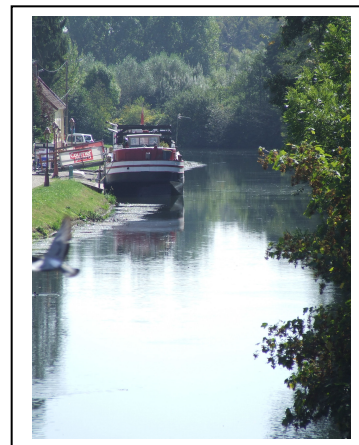
(Right: The Somme as seen from the bridge at Pont-Rémy – photograph from 2010)

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 passed on their way from the station. Some three months later *the Somme* would become a part of their history.

On April 13, the 1st Battalion marched into the forward area and to the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where they would be billeted, would receive reinforcements and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the trenches of the *Western Front*.

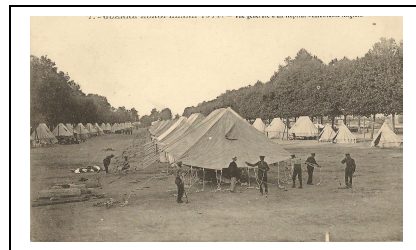
The Newfoundlanders would also soon be preparing for the upcoming British campaign of that summer of 1916, this to be fought on the ground named for the meandering river they had crossed some weeks before: *the Somme*.

(continued)



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

It was during this latter period that Corporal Kelly received his third stripe, being elevated to the rank of sergeant on June 9 (a second source has June 11). It came at a time when he was a patient of the 4th Casualty Clearing Station at Beauval while he was receiving – from June 5 to 10 – some dental surgery.



(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*)

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If there is one name and one 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*)

(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 Henry Kelly and Elizabeth Kelly*, he was also husband to Gertrude Kelly (née Woodford) – to whom he had allotted a daily eighty cents from his pay - and the father of young Henry James. His wife and son apparently resided at 37, Cabot Street** in St. John’s at the time of enlistment and then later, this being the address of his wife’s parents.

****37, LeMarchant Road also appears on a number of Sergeant Kelly’s papers.**

**This may have been the Henry Kelly – he a shoe-maker - and Elizabeth (Lizzie) Kelly (née Hope) of Cookstown Road – the history becomes even more convoluted as Henry appears to have re-married in 1895 – by which time Michael Francis (or was it Edward Henry?) would have had three siblings to be followed by a number of step-siblings and the death of his step-mother in 1913. All this information – alas! – requires confirmation.*

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

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



Michael Francis Kelly had enlisted at a *declared* twenty-four years of age*: birth date possibly June 16, 1891.

It was to his young son, five-year-old Henry James - by that time he being the ward of his grand-mother, Mrs. James Woodford of 37, Cabot Street (see above) - that were addressed Sergeant Kelly’s three medals.



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

**In the Basilica records perhaps it is he who is recorded as Michael Henry, born June, 1891, to the above-mentioned Henry and Elizabeth (Hope) Kelly of Cooks Town (sic).*

Sergeant Michael Francis Kelly 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 13, 2023.