

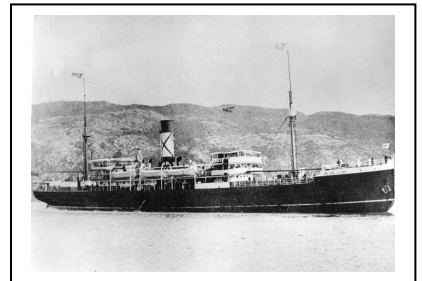


Sergeant William Blackler Knight (Regimental Number 290), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



His occupation prior to enlistment recorded as that of a *motor engineer* working for five-hundred twenty dollars per annum – and before that, employed by his father's insurance agency - William Blackler Knight 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*.

Four days later he enlisted at the same CLB Armoury on September 5, 1914 – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 (this including a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance). Private Knight was a recruit of the First Draft.



Some two weeks later again, on September 21, 1914, he was appointed to the rank of lance corporal and then attested on October 1 before embarking on October 3 with the others of the *First Five Hundred* onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.

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

The ship sailed on the morrow to its rendezvous off the south coast of the Island where she was to join the convoy transporting the 1st Canadian Division across the Atlantic.



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

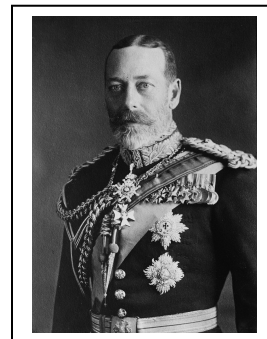
In the United Kingdom Lance Corporal Knight trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; at Edinburgh Castle – where it provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles; and later again at the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



(Preceding page: *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)

It was while in training at *Stobs Camp*, that Lance Corporal Knight received his second stripe and acceded to the rank of corporal.

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.*

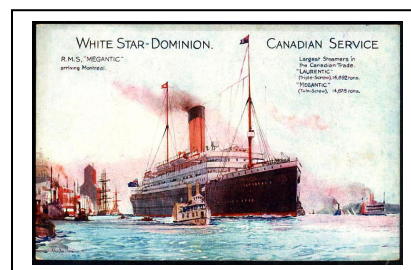
It had then been during the period spent at Aldershot that Corporal Knight of 'B' Company – he was not alone in doing so - had been prevailed upon, he on August 13, to re-enlist *for the duration of the war*.*.

**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*



(Right above: *Some of the men of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915* – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)

(Right: *The image of Megantic, in peace-time a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)



On August 20, 1915, Corporal Knight and his charges 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*.

He disembarked as a senior non-commissioned officer, having been once more promoted: Corporal Knight had become a sergeant on September 13, the day on which the Newfoundland Battalion was to sail from Alexandria – although a second source records the date of promotion as having been November 14, two months later.

(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 Sergeant Knight 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*.

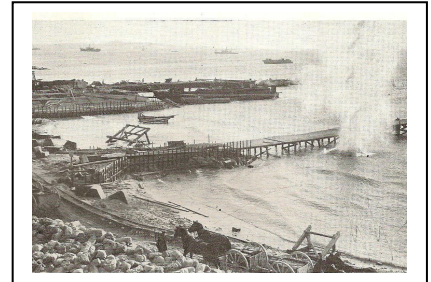


(Right above: Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed Achi Baba, positions which were never breached. The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011)

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: ‘*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 adjacent: ‘*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)



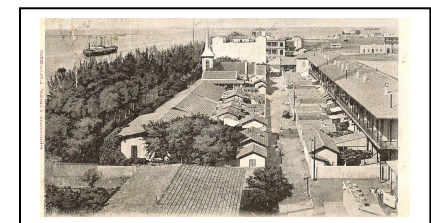
(Right below: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1st Battalion were among the last to leave on two occasions, at Suvla Bay and at Cape Helles.* – photograph taken from the battleship *Cornwallis* from *Illustration*)

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)



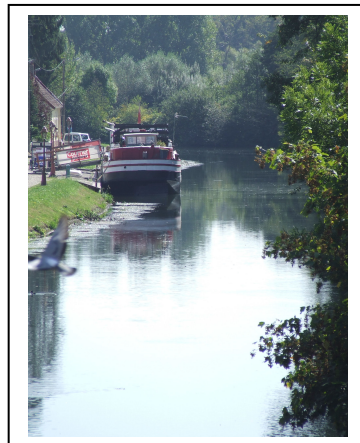
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Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Battalion's train would arrive at the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy.

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

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.

(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', and 'B', that of Sergeant Knight – 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*.

(Right: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John's East. – photograph from 2009*)



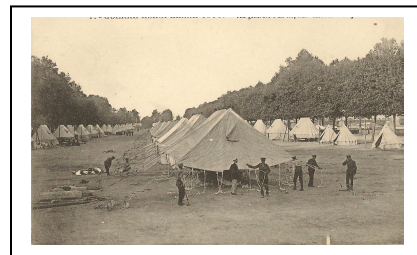
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In May of 1916 Sergeant Knight was withdrawn from the Regimental positions of the time for medical treatment on two occasions: he was first sent to the 87th Field Ambulance and then on to the 88th Field Ambulance on the 3rd day of that month for attention to a case of bronchitis while his comrades-in-arms of the 1st Battalion were moving out of the trenches and into billets at Mailly-Maillet (see above) just behind the line. He was discharged back to his unit *to duty* on May 12.



(Right above: *A British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)

Having re-joined his unit, by then at Louvencourt, on that May 12, he was sent to the 29th Casualty Clearing Station at Gezaincourt a week later, on the 19th, perhaps for dental work. From there Sergeant Knight re-joined the 1st Battalion on May 25, a day when the Newfoundland unit was back in the trenches and was – according to the Regimental War Diary – enduring some enemy shelling.



(Right above: *A British casualty clearing station being established somewhere in France, this one, like many, under canvas – from a vintage post-card*)

The son of Frederick William Knight, insurance agent, and of Emilie Florence Knight (née *Warren*)* – to whom he had allotted the daily sum of thirty-five cents from his pay - of 355, the South Side, St. John's, he was also brother to Frederick, to Raymond, to Jean and to Ethel.



**The couple married on March 18, 1893.*

(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*)



Sergeant Knight was reported as having been *killed in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*.

(The above photograph of Private(?) Knight is by courtesy of the Provincial Archives.)

William Blackler Knight had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-two years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, May 6, 1893 (from Newfoundland Birth Register).

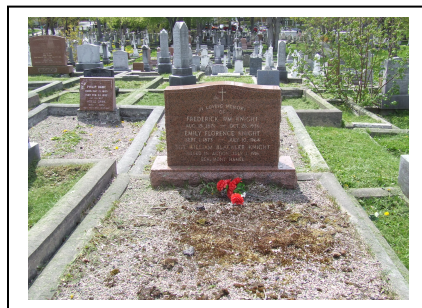


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(Preceding page: A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after the action at Beaumont-Hamel – from...)

(Right: A family monument to be found in the Old Anglican Cemetery on Forest Road in St. John's commemorates the sacrifice of Sergeant Knight. – photograph from 2015)

Sergeant William Blackler Knight was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – February 12, 2023.