

Private Albert Lee, MM, (Regimental Numbers 1134 and 3216\*), having no known grave, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



*\*Albert Lee was to enlist on two occasions – see below – both in January of 1915 and then on November 9, 1916, recruited again in St. John's, during the Twelfth Draft.*

His occupation prior to his first term of military service\* recorded as that of a *fireman* – whether he who fights fires or he who tends to them on a steam locomotive or engine we do not know - and working for a monthly remuneration of sixty dollars, Albert Lee presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on January 16, 1915. It was a procedure which would pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

*\*He also declared that he had been in the Royal Naval Reserve prior to enlistment.*

It was now to be thirty-two days following his medical assessment that, on February 17, he returned to the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road to enlist – engaged at the private soldier's rate of a single dollar per diem plus a daily ten-cent *Field Allowance.*

Then, whereas attestation for others had followed several weeks after enlistment, he was now to swear his *Oath of Allegiance*, the *final* formality, only ten days later again, on February 27. Albert Lee thereupon became...*a soldier of the King.*

There was to be a further three weeks before he would be summoned for *overseas service*. Where Private Lee, Number 1134, was to spend that time, or how he was to be occupied, has however not been recorded. Nor is it documented as to *where* he spent those several weeks: he may of course have returned temporarily to work – or simply to home at Riverhead, St. Mary's - but in either case that is only speculation.



(Right above: *The image of the Bowring Brothers' vessel 'Stephano', sister-ship of 'Florizel', passing through 'the Narrows' of St. John's Harbour is from Provincial Archives.*)

Unlike the two previous contingents to have departed Newfoundland (see below) for...*overseas service*, Private Lee's 'D' Company was not to sail directly to the United Kingdom. On March 20, it, he a soldier of the Number 7 Platoon, embarked onto the Bowring-Brothers' vessel *Stephano* for the short voyage to Halifax, capital city of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, where it was thereupon to board a second vessel, the newly-launched *Orduña* for the trans-Atlantic crossing\*.

(Right below: *The image of Orduña is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel was not to be requisitioned during the Great War but would be used by the Cunard Company to operate on its commercial service between Liverpool and New York.*)

Having then sailed from Nova Scotia on March 22 for Liverpool, Private Lee and his draft landed there eight days later, on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Once disembarked in Liverpool, the two-hundred fifty men and officers of 'D' Company were thereupon transported on the same date by train directly to Edinburgh, the Scottish capital, to join the Newfoundland Regiment's 'A', 'B' and 'C' Companies.



These units were by this time stationed at the historic Castle, 'A' and 'B' having recently been posted from Fort George and 'C' having arrived directly from home (see further below). After 'D' Company's arrival at the end of that month of March, the Newfoundlanders were now to remain at Edinburgh for the following six weeks.

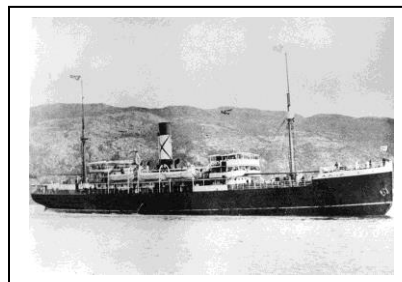


(Right above: *From its vantage point on Castle Hill, the venerable fortress overlooks the city of Edinburgh where in 1915 the Newfoundlanders were to provide the first garrison to be drawn from outside the British Isles. – photograph from 2011*)

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Five to six months before that time, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of some five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's for the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits – these to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after a recruit's enlistment and/ or attestation. To become known to history as the *First Five Hundred* and also as the *Blue Puttees*, on that day they had boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.



The ship had sailed for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

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

(Right: *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, as recorded beforehand, it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent\* - would arrive directly from Newfoundland.

*\*This contingent, while a part of the Newfoundland Regiment, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

\* \* \* \* \*

As seen in a previous paragraph, for the month of April and the first days of May of 1915, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies, now united, were to furnish the garrison – the first troops from outside the British Isles to do so - of the guardian of Scotland's capital city. Then, during the first week of May, 'E' Company was to report there...*to duty*...from home. Seven days later again, on May 11, the Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

On that day, some seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit was dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent would eventually receive 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered available to be sent on 'active service'.

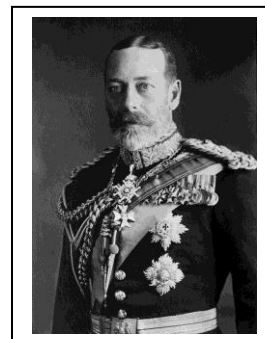
(Right: *The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915.* – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

*\*This was approximately fifteen hundred, sufficient to furnish two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*



At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', 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 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

Meanwhile the two junior Companies, 'E' – the last arrived at Edinburgh - and the aforementioned 'F', were ordered transferred to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion.



(Preceding page: *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.)

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It was for medical reasons that Private Lee was now to depart neither for Aldershot nor for *Gallipoli* with his comrades-in-arms of 'D' Company in August – not in fact immediately to the aforementioned Scottish west coast. While still at *Stobs Camp* he had been hospitalized for a day at Edinburgh where he had been diagnosed as having a venereal problem. He then was to spend a week at Glencorse Hospital before then Having transferred to the Workhouse Hospital at Newcastle-upon-Tyne which specialized in such matters and where he was to spend the following thirty-four days.

Upon his discharge from Newcastle on August 26, Private Lee was posted to the New Regimental Depot at Ayr.

Towards the end of that 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 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.



It was not all to be military matters for Private Lee during this posting to Ayr: he became the husband of a Miss Isabella McKissock. The ceremony took place at the Ayrshire County Buildings on October 20, 1915 – although *he* cites September, the documents say otherwise. She was a shopkeeper and lived at 129, High Street, in the town centre of Ayr. A son, John Lawson Lee, was to be born to the couple on May 28, 1916.

It was on the fourteenth day of that November of 1915 that the 1<sup>st</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, Private Lee among its ranks, passed through the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport to embark onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*, sister ship of *Britannic* and the ill-fated *Titanic*, en route to *Gallipoli*.

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The new-comers landed at *Suvla Bay*, via *Mudros*, on December 1, 1915.

(Right: *HM Transport Olympic* on the right lies at anchor along with *HM Hospital Ship Aquitania*, centre, at *Mudros Bay* in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the *Imperial War Museum, London*)



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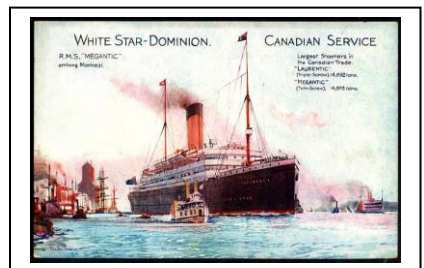
In the mean-time, whereas Private Lee had been undergoing the first weeks of his medical treatment, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion with most of his fellow soldiers from 'D' Company had been preparing for passage to the Middle East.

*\*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. Later recruits signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their enlistment.*



(Right above: Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.)

(Right: 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*.)



On August 20, 1915, the Newfoundland Battalion had 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. 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *Kangaroo Beach*, where the officers and men of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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)



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**(Preceding page: 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)**

**(Right: A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla Bay, and where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to serve during the autumn of 1915 – photograph from 2011)**

**When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* on that September night of 1915 they were to 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 been proving 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 their allies, the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.**



**(Right above: *No-Man's-Land* at *Suvla Bay* as seen from the Newfoundland positions – 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.***



**(Right: An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at *Suvla Bay* – from Provincial Archives)**

**(Right: This is *Anzac Bay* in the fore-ground with the *Salt Lake* in the centre further away. The bottom of *Suvla Bay* is just to be seen on the left and adjacent to the *Salt Lake*, and further away again. The hills in the distance and the ones from which this photograph was taken were held by the Turks and formed a horse-shoe around the plain surrounding the *Salt Lake* - which was where the British and Newfoundlanders were stationed. – photograph from 2011)**



**(continued)**

November 26 of 1915 had seen perhaps the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; there was to be a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm 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 was to be 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.

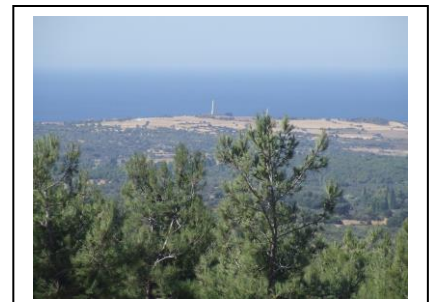
This then, was the situation into which Private Lee with his 1<sup>st</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr was to step when it set foot onto the sand and stone of *Kangaroo Beach* – mostly the latter – on that December 1 of 1915.

Their posting there was to be of a short duration.

\* \* \* \* \*

By this time the situation there was daily becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire 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 had the respite been of a long duration; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to 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* – had now only been marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.

This final operation had taken place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion to furnish part of the British rear-guard on this second occasion also.

(Right: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was only 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.*

(continued)



**(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 evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria. On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived there with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on board.**



**The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16<sup>th</sup>, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she arrived on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders landed and marched to their encampment.**

**Once at Suez, the Newfoundlanders were now to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division had yet to be decided\*.**

**(Right above: The image of the Blue Funnel Line vessel *Nestor* is from the Shipspotting.com web-site. The vessel was launched and fitted in 1912-1913 and was to serve much of her commercial life until 1950 plying the routes between Britain and Australia. During the Great War she served mainly in the transport of Australian troops and was requisitioned once again in 1940 for government service in the Second World War. In 1950 she was broken up.)**

**\*Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.**

**(Right: The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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)**



**(Right: Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card)**



**It was while at Suez that, on March 1, Private Lee received treatment at the 18<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital at Suez for a seemingly innocuous lacerated wound to the scalp.**

**After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and...other ranks...of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the Suez Canal en route to France.**



The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.

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

Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on that 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 Marseille. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.



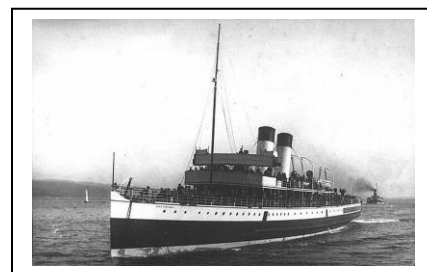
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But Private Lee had not travelled north with the Newfoundland unit. Immediately upon arrival in France, he had been admitted – on the same day - into the 9<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital in Marseille for further medical treatment to that scalp wound, apparently by this time more serious than had been supposed\*. He was to remain there for seven weeks less a day.

*\*It should be remembered that these were the days before the advent of anti-biotics and that infection was oft-times more of a problem than the initial wound. The same was true for infectious diseases where problems which today may be cured within a matter of days at times might take weeks – or not be cured at all.*

He was discharged from hospital in Marseille on May 9, also during his time there having received further treatment for his venereal complaint. He was thereupon forwarded...to duty...to the Divisional Base Depot at Rouen. There being no further documentation, it may well be that it was to be at the Base Depot that Private Lee remained for the succeeding seven weeks.

On June 30, the day prior to the affair at Beaumont-Hamel, Private Lee reported for discharge at the same British Expeditionary Force Base Depot in Rouen: his time was about expire\*. On July 6 he boarded HM Transport *Queen Alexandra* en route to the United Kingdom, and arrived at the Regimental Depot at Ayr, on July 19, when and where he officially became a civilian once more.



His record of the time shows nothing other than a rather glacial report that...*This man is discharged in consequence of...Refusing to re-engage for duration of War\**.

(Right above: *The image of the Queen Alexandra is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. She was a new, fast vessel built in 1912 to replace a previous ship of the same name and was requisitioned in 1915 to be a troop-carrier. She operated between England and France and on May 9, 1918, rammed and sank a German U-boat off the French coast near Cherbourg. She survived the Great War, served as an accommodation ship in the Second, and was finally taken out of service in 1958.*)

***\*At the beginning of hostilities, many men signed up for a one-year period, it being felt that the War would not last that long. After that time they had either to be demobilised or re-enlisted. In the case of the Newfoundland Regiment – as elsewhere - a majority seems to have opted for re-enlistment.***

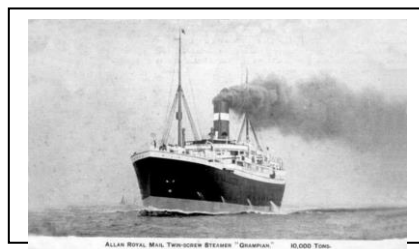
***It was not an easy decision for those in Private Lee's position to make. Many of these young soldiers from Newfoundland were irreplaceable fishermen whose families were absolutely dependent on them and whose service in the Army increased hardship on those at home. The position in which the death of one of these men left those dependent on them, is literally beyond description and to judge them as cowards or shirkers, as has been done, shows only an ignorance, by these critics, of Newfoundland's history.***

***And of course, he was newly-wed with a child.***

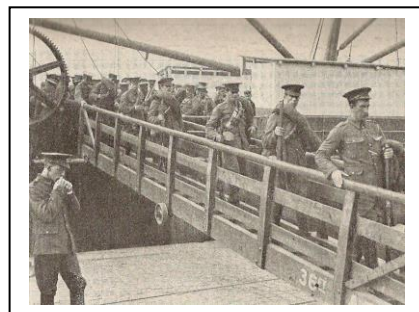
**Albert Lee began his repatriation journey to Newfoundland before that above-noted July 19. On the 17<sup>th</sup> day of July, he boarded the SS *Corinthian* in the Port of London, three days before the ship sailed carrying soldiers returning to Canada. The vessel was to dock at Québec on August 1, there then appearing to be no further details of his travels to Newfoundland among his papers – perhaps not too surprising given that he was now a civilian, no longer a charge of the military authorities and with few if any records kept.**

**Citizen Lee became Private Lee for the second occasion on November 9 of 1916, when he once more underwent a medical examination and re-enlisted in St. John's as Regimental Number 3216. On January 31 of the New Year, 1917, he set sail on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* as one of an overseas draft of three-hundred nineteen...*all ranks*...to leave for the short sea-journey to Halifax and then for further passage to the United Kingdom.**

**He was part of the ill-fated and so-called *Winsor Draft* which, due to a mumps epidemic, was to spend some ten weeks quarantined in the town of Winsor, Nova Scotia, before being cleared for onward travel overseas. HM Transport *Grampian* was the ship upon which Private Lee finally embarked on April 15 for passage to the United Kingdom – a passage shared with the Newfoundlanders by two Canadian Infantry Battalions as far as Liverpool which was reached on April 29 - before a short journey back to the Regimental Depot at Ayr.**



**Private Lee was then to be a soldier of the 25<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft which passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on June 11, 1917, en route to the...*Western Front*. It disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, on the 12<sup>th</sup>, proceeding to that perhaps familiar Base Depot for several days of final training and organization\*.**



**(Right above: *British troops disembark earlier in the War at Rouen en route to the Western Front.* – from Illustration)**

***\*Apparently the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.***

Private Lee is next recorded as having returned to the Newfoundland Battalion on July 2 – the War Diarist has recorded July 1. When he reported *to duty*, one of two-hundred fifty *other ranks* to do so on that day, the Newfoundlanders were near Woesten, having arrived in Belgium only days before in preparation for the British summer offensive of 1917.

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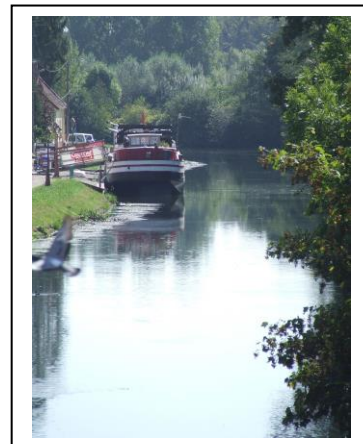
By that July 2 of 1917 the Newfoundland Battalion had fought in three major engagements in two campaigns as well as in a number of minor incidents. Its losses had been great during the more than fifteen months of Private Lee's absence, and he would surely have been struck by the number of new faces that he would have encountered. The first of these actions, one hundred days after his departure to hospital in Marseille had been fought on the first day of the...*First Battle of the Somme*.

He had left his unit to make its way northwards by train after which it had then proceeded onwards on foot some fifty kilometres on to the *Western Front*. Having de-trained at the local station at Pont-Rémy 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.

(Right below: *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 had then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to become a part of their history.

On April 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive reinforcements 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 to then be 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 below: *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.

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, perhaps just as depressing, the butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for four and a half months.

(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village. – photographs from 2010 and 2015*)



(continued)

***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...?)***

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that a German counter-assault might well annihilate what had managed to survive of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*.

The few remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion – and of the other depleted British units - had thus remained in the trenches perhaps fearing the worst, and at night searching for the wounded and burying the dead. It was to be July 6 before the Newfoundlanders were to be relieved from the forward area and to be ordered withdrawn to Englebelmer.

It had then been a further two days before the unit had marched further again to the rear area and to billets in the village of Mailly-Maillet.

***(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)***



There on July 11, a draft of one-hundred twenty-seven re-enforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported *to duty*. They had been the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles...*after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.



***(continued)***



(Preceding page: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

*The Salient* – close to the front lines for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict - was to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there; yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

(Right: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916: it is described as the 'Ville morte'. – from Illustration*)



Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was to be at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.

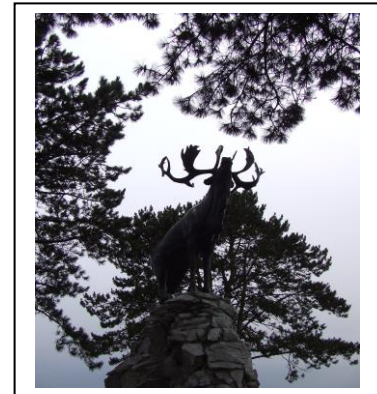
The encounter had proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.



(Right above: *This is the ground over which the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)

(Right: *The Caribou at Gueudecourt stands at the furthest point of the Newfoundland Battalion's advance of October 12, 1916. – photograph from 2012*)

The Newfoundland Battalion was not to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it would supply two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires and the Worcestershires, of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.



(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme. – from Illustration*)



(continued)



On October 30, the Newfoundland unit had eventually been retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would begin to wend its way back up to the front lines.



There it had continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period to be broken only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

(Right above: *A typical British Army Camp during rather inclement winter conditions somewhere on the Continent* – from a vintage post-card)

It had been on January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion was ordered out of *Corps Reserve* - and out of its lodgings at...*Camps en Amienois* - from where it would make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it was to entrain for the small town of Corbie where it had thereupon taken over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

After that recent six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve* far to the rear, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to *active service* on January 23, although they apparently had already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.



Those casualties, however, were only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig was to somewhat cavalierly refer to as...*wastage*...as the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches.

(Right above: *A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, their unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold of the trenches at Sailly-Saillisel during the winter of 1916-1917.* – from *Illustration*)

In fact, the sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during that entire period – from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action which would bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The fighting during the period of the Battalion's posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time.* - photograph from 2009(?))

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March had been a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events. They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band come from Ayr, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



(Right above: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté* – from *The War Illustrated*)

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had begun to make their way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, the march to finish amid the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War, in early 1916* – from *Illustration*)

(Right: *The Canadian National Memorial which has stood atop Vimy Ridge since 1936* – photograph from 2010)



On April 9 the British Army was to launch an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a major French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties – just over four thousand - this attack was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, its only positive episode to be the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday, 1917.

And while the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, the French *Bataille du Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.



(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community: The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera.* – photograph from 2013)

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, the

ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux would prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone\*.

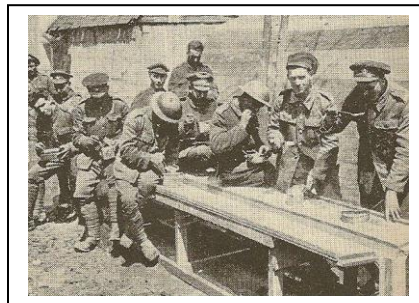
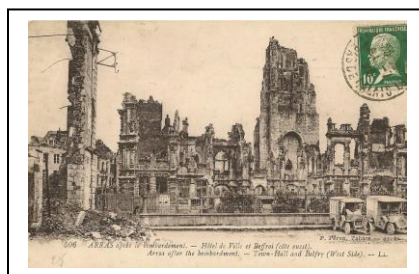
*\*It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, be amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming re-enforcements would allow the two units' strengths to once more resemble those of bona fide battalions.

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This was in fact an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies. It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

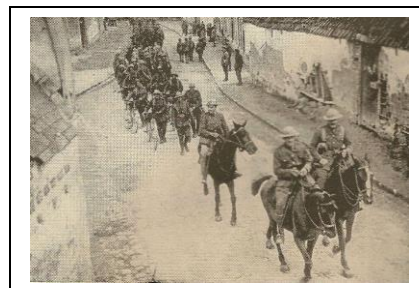
Late on that same evening the Newfoundlanders had retired to the relative calm of Arras.

(Right above: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card*)



That month of May was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders would move hither and thither on the *Arras Front*, marching into and out of the trenches. While there was to be the ever-present artillery-fire, concerted infantry activity, particularly after May 15 – *officially* the last day of the *Battle of Arras* – had been limited, apart from the marching.

(Right above: *Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from The War Illustrated*)



At the outset of June, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and in training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – not Bonneville - in early May, perhaps the 7<sup>th</sup>, of 1917 – from The War Illustrated*)

(continued)



The Newfoundlanders had then soon once again been moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their second posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.

(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right* – photograph from 2014)

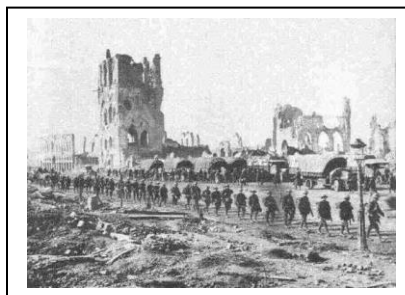


Their first posting when the unit had arrived in Belgium on June 28 had been into the area of Proven, some ten kilometres to the north-west of the town of Poperinghe, there to train, to mend roads, and to receive the re-enforcement draft of two-hundred fifty...*other ranks*...among which had been Private Lee.

\* \* \* \* \*

The low-lying area of Belgian *Flanders*, the only part of that country to have remained unoccupied by German forces, had been selected by the British High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917.

(Right: *Troops arriving from the railway station in single file, march past the vestiges of the historic Cloth Hall and through the rubble of the medieval city centre of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer or early autumn of 1917.* – from *Illustration*)



Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

(Right: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917* – from *Illustration*)



(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war* – from *Illustration*)

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army. This had been or was also to be the case with the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians, all of whose troops had floundered or would soon flounder their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Belgian Flanders.



Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9.

At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost had been higher: forty-eight *killed* or *died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

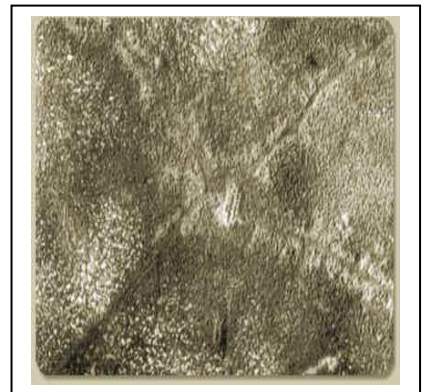
(Right: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010*)



(Right below: *The once-village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

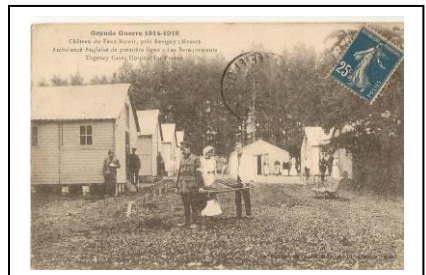
It was to be only two days after this last-mentioned confrontation that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on October 11 had marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe from there to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of Proven.

On October 14, *five* days after the engagement at the *Broembeek*, Private Lee was admitted into the 102<sup>nd</sup> Field Ambulance for treatment for impetigo, a bacterial infection of the skin. Transferred from there to the 14<sup>th</sup> Corps Rest Station, he was released back *to duty* – presumably with his unit as no other posting has been entered into his file – with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on the 19<sup>th</sup> of the same month.



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

In the mean-time, while Private Lee was receiving medical attention, the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in *Swindon Camp* for six days to be both re-enforced and bombed before, on the morning of October 17, the unit was once more to board a train.



By ten-thirty that same evening, the Battalion had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and would now march the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois where, two days later, the unit would be re-joined by Lance Corporal Lee.

The Newfoundlanders had still been there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and two days later when, on November 17, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would be ordered once again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it had begun to move further eastward, now on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while still on the move, the unit had been issued as it went with...*war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of that night it had marched up to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the Newfoundland unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, was to move forward into its forming-up area. From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten, bugles blowing, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had advanced to the fray.



(Right above: *The Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai* – photograph from 2009)

This new offensive – apparently initially conceived to be no more than a large-scale raid - the so-called *Battle of Cambrai*, was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders to be directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle was to begin well for the British who had used tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities had been squandered. There were to be no troops available to exploit what was, admittedly, a hoped-for yet unexpected success, and by the close of the battle, the Germans had counter-attacked and the British had relinquished as much – more in places - territory as they had originally gained.

The Newfoundland Battalion had once again been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing, Masnières - where a Caribou stands today - and in the area of the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who had advanced into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day\*.



(Right above: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on November 20; however, whether its capture was ever achieved is at best controversial.* – photograph from 2012)

*\*At five-hundred fifty-three all ranks – not counting the aforementioned ten per cent reserve - the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment even at the outset of the operation was operating at just over fifty per cent of establishment strength: not that it would have been any consolation had it been known, but a goodly number of battalions in all the British and Dominion forces – with perhaps the exception of the Canadians - were encountering the same problem.*



(continued)



(Preceding page: *A number of graves of soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery. Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, has identified them as being Canadian.* – photograph from 2010)

After the exertions of *Cambrai*, the Newfoundlanders were to be withdrawn from the line, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment by then numbering the strength of only a single company - whereas a full battalion comprises four. The unit had then remained in the vicinity of Humbercourt, to the west of Arras, until December 18 when it was to march to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There the unit would spend both Christmas and New Year. The weather had obliged and had even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow - a bit too much at times apparently.

On December 26, Boxing Day of 1917, while the Newfoundlanders, after the efforts of *Cambrai*, were billeted as related above, in and about the community of Fressin, well behind the front, Private Lee – of 'B' Company - was awarded a first promotion and appointed to the rank of lance corporal.

At the beginning of January of 1918, after that snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had returned to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time. There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.



(Right above: *By 1918 Ypres was looking like this; some of these broken buildings had been a school which had served as a shelter for troops in the earlier days of the conflict.* – from a vintage post-card)

In the meantime, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them. It was expected that they would launch a spring offensive - which they did – in fact they were to unleash several of them\*.



*\*There were to be several assaults by the Germans on French forces during that spring. They all met with varying degrees of success at the outset, but eventually they would be thwarted by Petain's divisions, aided at times by the newly-arriving Americans.*

In the sector where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was stationed, the blow was not to fall until April. Thus, while they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders were to continue to dig.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *Some of the countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

As suggested above, the Germans would do as was expected of them: Ludendorff's armies had launched a powerful thrust against the British on March 21, the first day of that spring of 1918, having struck at first in the area of and just south of, *the Somme*, there to overrun the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while their advance had seemed unstoppable.

For a number of reasons, after two weeks the offensive had begun to falter and would eventually halt; but then, just days afterwards, a second offensive, *Georgette*, was to be launched in the northern sector of the front, in Belgian Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders had been stationed: the date April 9. Within only two days the situation of the British had become desperate.



(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

On the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, and as the Germans had approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were to be deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, having been due to come out of the line and to move back to the area of *the Somme*, were instead to board buses at three o'clock in the afternoon, thereupon to be directed southward, towards the border town of Nieppe.



They were to be in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, just three hours later.

(Right above: *The area of La Crèche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station – photograph from 2010.*)

The British had been pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of April the Newfoundland Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was to make a series of desperate stands.



(Right above: *Ground just to the east of Bailleul where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to be in action during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

On April 12-13 – the dates in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's War Diary are not clear - during the defensive stand near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance.

(continued)

The remainder of 'C' Company had taken up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, had stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' – Lance Corporal Lee's Company – and also 'D' Company – in a failed counter-attack on that evening – had been equally heavily involved.

(Right: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there stand several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)



The period from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never had materialised and the front had finally been stabilised\*.

*\*The 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade – and therefore the Newfoundland Battalion – was to be seconded to the 34<sup>th</sup> Division from the 29<sup>th</sup> Division during this critical period.*

On April 24, the Newfoundland Battalion had said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 29<sup>th</sup> Division and on the following day there had been a recessional parade.

The unit was to later be deployed to another unit, a Scottish infantry division, but for the summer of 1918 it would be ordered moved a world away from Flanders where, as seen in the preceding pages, it had just fought during the crisis of the German spring offensive, to now be stationed on the west coast of France.

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – the Newfoundland Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four *other ranks* – had taken a train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étaples, where they had arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening.

Their day, however, had not yet been at an end: there was still a two-hour march ahead of them before the Newfoundlanders would reach their new quarters.

\* \* \* \* \*

As has been cited in a prior paragraph the Newfoundland Battalion was to be posted for the months of May, June and until early July, to the vicinity of Écuire, not far from the coast of the English Channel, to serve at the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.

The late spring and summer of 1918 were to pass peaceably enough for the personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in the new surroundings although things were perhaps not peaceable enough on one occasion in the domain of the great man – who was a teetotaler\*: Lance Corporal Lee was deprived of his single stripe *for drunkenness* and reduced to the rank of private on June 28.





*\*Haig's family were, nonetheless, the whisky distillers of the same name.*

The cosmetic honour of the Newfoundland unit's new role that summer of 1918 was, however, masking the reality that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the recently-proclaimed *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* was, at that time, no longer been capable of serving in the field\*.

(Preceding pa: *Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ – from Illustration*)

*\*Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

The posting to Écuire having been completed, for most of July and for all of August the Newfoundlanders were to be encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihe – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there was by this time plenty elsewhere.

(Right: *A view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihe at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The Newfoundlanders – while still not at establishment battalion strength - were to return to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was now once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today *Ingoogem*).

(Right: *British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days – from Illustration*)

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the British Second Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive*\*. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge. After almost four years of stalemate, it was once again a conflict of movement.

*\*This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as Third Somme. Then, on August 26, the main Arras to Cambrai road had become the axis of the offensive in the region of Picardie.*



By October 1 the Newfoundland Battalion had already advanced to positions in the area of the community of Ledeghem where it was to relieve the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Scots. Any further movement was now precluded as the situation on the 9<sup>th</sup> Division's right was proving to be unstable.

The German resolve now appeared to be stiffening as several heavy artillery barrages showed, and although preparatory orders were received to continue the advance, final orders were not to be forthcoming and the Newfoundland force remained where it was. On October 4 the Battalion began to retire, relieved by a Scottish unit.

It was not to be until October 14 that the Newfoundlanders, having been rested for a week, returned to the front to move forward on that same day to the attack once more. Little progress had been made on the 9<sup>th</sup> Division front during the ten days preceding and the village of Ledeghem had not yet fallen. The Newfoundland unit was now to attack.

Excerpt from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for October 14, 1918: *Attacked from north of Ledeghem. Captured many prisoners, 8 guns & 94 machine guns. Smoke barrage & fog combined to make it impossible to see two yards until Neerhof was reached where fog lifted and Batt. was found to be in touch and in position...*

The Newfoundlanders were to continue to push along the northern bank of the Lys River - Canal, itself north of the city of Courtrai (today Kortrijk) which they would bypass. The advance of that October 14 was successful in gains - but the cost once more was to be high: only three hundred reported for muster at dawn on the following morning.



(Right above: *the re-constructed village of Ledeghem, Belgium, Drie-Masten* – photograph from 2009)

But by this time Private Lee's role in the Great War had been played to its conclusion.

The son of John Lee, carpenter, and of Mary Lee (maiden name *Welsh*) – to whom he had allotted, at least initially, a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Riverhead Northside, St. Mary's, he was also husband of Isabella Lee – who then received that aforementioned sixty-cent allocation – originally of 129, High Street, Ayr, and father of their son, John, and latterly of 53, Dalblair Road, Ayr.

Private Lee was reported as having been...*killed in action*...on October 14, 1918, while serving with 'B' Company in fighting near the Belgian village of Drie-Masten during the *Hundred Days Offensive*.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Courtrai – today Kortrijk – commemorates the eventual crossing of the Lys Canal on October 19-20, 1918, and the sacrifices of the Hundred Days Offensive.* – photograph from 2012)



(continued)

Albert Lee had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-five years, born in Riverhead, St. Mary's, Newfoundland.

Private Lee was a recipient of the Military Medal for his conduct on September 29, 1918, at the Kieberg Ridge “...*during an attack which had been temporarily held up by enemy machine gun fire, he went forward alone with his Lewis Gun and a carrier of ammunition, and as the long grass prevented fire from behind cover, he advanced straight toward the enemy machine gun firing his Lewis Gun from shoulder and hip, gained superiority of fire, which enabled his platoon to move forward and capture the machine gun.*” - London Gazette, May 14th, 1919



Private Albert Lee, MM, was also entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 6, 2023.