



Private William Edward LeShana (Regimental Number 799), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



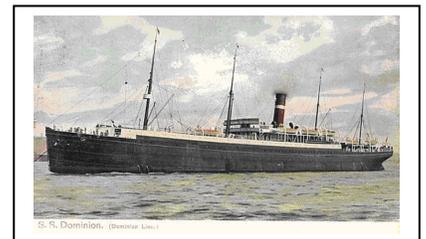
His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a *clerk* with *George Knowling, Importers, General Merchants & Fire Insurance Agents*, and earning six dollars and fifty cents a week, William Edward LeShana was a recruit of the Second Draft. He presented himself for medical examination on December 4 of 1914, at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

Three weeks less two days after having undergone this medical assessment, on December 23 William Edward LeShana was to return to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, there to enlist...*for a year's service* – engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar a day to which would be appended a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*.

Only some few hours were now to follow before there subsequently came to pass, while still at the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On the same twenty-third day of that month of December he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, William Edward LeShana became...*a soldier of the King*.

Now for Private LeShana, Number 799, there was to be a six-week waiting period. How he occupied himself during that period is not recorded among his papers; he may, of course, have returned to work, but this is only speculation.

On the fourth day of February of 1915, the first reinforcements – this was 'C' Company - for the Newfoundland contingent – it was not yet at battalion strength - which by this time was serving in Scotland (see further below), were to embark via the sealing tender *Neptune* onto the *SS Dominion* – the vessel having anchored to the south of St. John's, off Bay Bulls, because of ice conditions.



(continued)

The vessel was then to sail - a day later again, on February 5, and Private LeShana thus departed Newfoundland for overseas service and for trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom.

(Preceding page: *The image of the steamer 'Dominion' - launched in 1894 as the 'Prussia' - is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. An older vessel, she was to be requisitioned during the latter part of the Great War as a store and supply ship. She survived the conflict to be scrapped in 1922.*)

**There appears to be some confusion in some sources as to whether these troops were 'C' or 'D' Company. However, 'D' Company was to go overseas some time later on 'Stephano' to Halifax and then on 'Orduña' to Liverpool.*

(Right: *The photograph of personnel of 'C' Company on board the 'Neptune' on the way to the harbour at Bay Bulls is from the Provincial Archives.*)



Having disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool, the Newfoundlanders entrained for Edinburgh, the first Newfoundland Regiment contingent having by this time been posted to the historic Castle in Scotland's capital city. There they were to provide the garrison, thus being the first unit from overseas ever to do so.



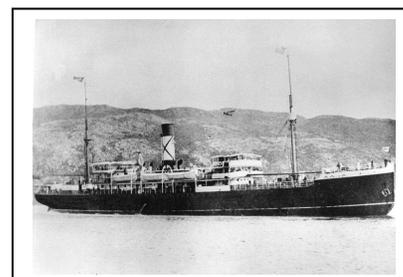
Private LeShana and the other new-comers reported...to duty...at Edinburgh Castle on February 16.

(Right above: *Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from its position on the summit of Castle Hill. – photograph from 2011*)

* * * * *

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 – they soon to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities on both sides of the ocean 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 enlistment and/ or attestation. To become known to history as the *First Five Hundred* and also as the *Blue Puttees*, on that day the recruits had boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.



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

The ship would sail for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous off the south coast of the Island with the convoy carrying the (1st) Canadian Division overseas,



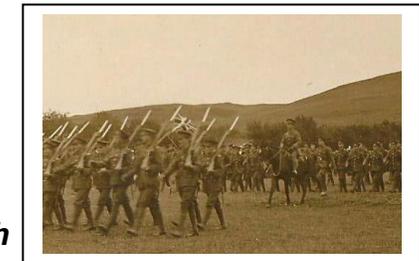
(Right: *Fort George, constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, still serves the British Army to this day. – photograph from 2011*)

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 – and where ‘C’ Company and Private LeShana, as also cited beforehand, would arrive from Newfoundland on February 16 of 1915.

* * * * *

Some three months later, on May 11, and three weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit was ordered moved to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

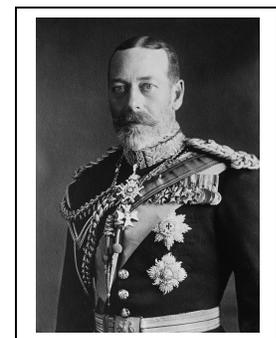
It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent received the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength*. The now-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered eligible 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



Meanwhile the two junior Companies, ‘E’ – 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 first re-enforcement drafts to be sent on...active service.

(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.)

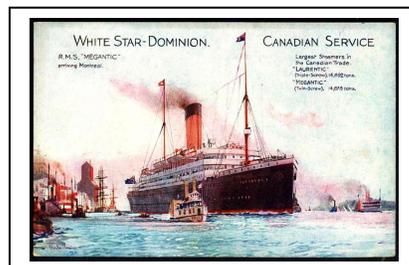
(Right: *Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915, prior to its departure to active service on the Gallipoli Peninsula* – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)



It was during this period at Aldershot, on August 15, that Private LeShana was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion 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. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.*

On August 20, 1915, Private LeShana and the Newfoundland unit embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Plymouth-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 1st Battalion landed at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *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.*)



(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: *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*)

(continued)

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

When the Newfoundlanders 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 proved 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 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 and the Turkish-held locations at Suvla Bay as seen from the Newfoundland positions – 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)

(Right: An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at Suvla Bay – 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.**

During the short period which now followed, things were to worsen at British in general and the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in particular.

***The French know the place as ‘Les Dardanelles’ while the Turks call it ‘Çanakkale’.**

November 26 of 1915 would see 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, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

At *Suvla Bay*, the British positions were daily becoming more and more untenable and thus on the night of December 19-20, the area was totally abandoned – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.



Some of the Battalion personnel were to be evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away; but in neither case would the respite 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*)

(Right above: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration*)

The British, Indian and *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – were by now only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.



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

**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 almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in 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 evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, to arrive there on the 15th of that month.

The Newfoundlanders would then immediately be transferred southward to the vicinity of Suez, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name.

There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.

(Right: *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 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 soon to become a theatre of war.

(Right: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1st 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 below: *Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal as it was just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card)*

After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1st Battalion boarded His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage through the *Suez Canal* en route to France. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseilles, on March 22.



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

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

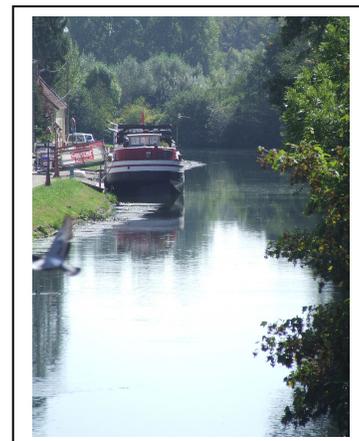


Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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 then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.

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

On April 13, the 1st Battalion 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 then 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 2nd 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: *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.*

(Right: Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from Le Miroir)



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 carnage of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.

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



(Right below: A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland - dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?)

The son of William LeShana, carpenter at *Ayre & Sons*, and of Mabel LeShana* of St. John's, and brother to Eva and Charles – who died in infancy - he was also husband of Janet (also known as *Jeannette, née Garf**) Le Shana – to whom he had allotted a daily seventy cents from his pay - of 27 Power Street, St. John's, a *Garf* family home. After her husband's death – during or about December, 1917 – she moved briefly to Winnipeg then – by September of 1919 - to Vancouver, British Columbia, Dominion of Canada, her address 654, 12th Avenue East).



****The couple was married in St. John's at the Methodist Parsonage on August 7 of 1914.***

****Despite this information being found in his papers, the only marriage in the records in St. John's between a William LeShana and a Mabel LeShana (née Pickett) apparently did not take place until March 27, 1899.***

Private LeShana was at first reported as...*missing in action*...at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'C' Company during the fighting of the first day of the...*First Battle of the Somme*.

However, a subsequent letter dated September 30, 1916, from the Commanding Officer of 2nd Battalion, Hampshire Regiment, recorded his identification and burial on or about that date. His file was thus amended so as to read...*killed in action 1/7/16*.

William Edward LeShana had enlisted at a *declared* twenty-two years of age. Thus far the exact date of his birth has proved to be elusive.

Private William Edward LeShana was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to 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 – January 29, 2023.

