



Private Walter Garfield McDonald (Regimental Number 1678) is interred in Poelcapelle British Cemetery: Grave reference LXVIII. F. 3.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *longshoreman* working in the Canadian province of British Columbia, Walter McDonald apparently returned back to St. John's to become a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on the fifth day of July of 1915. It was to be a procedure which would pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

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On the day following his medical assessment, July 6, and at the same venue, the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, Walter McDonald was also to enlist. He was thus engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar to which was to be added a ten-cent per diem field allowance.

Six days later again, on July 12, he swore an oath of allegiance, habitually the final formality of enlistment, to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon at that precise moment Walter Garfield McDonald became...*a soldier of the King.*

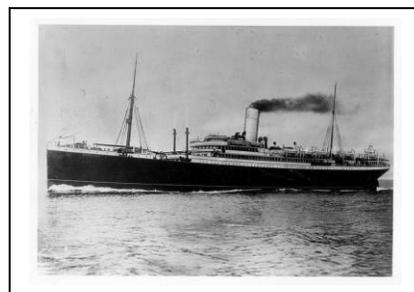
**A second source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.*

A further, and lengthier, waiting-period was now in store for the recruits of this draft, designated as 'G' Company, before they were to depart from Newfoundland for...*overseas service.*

Private McDonald, Regimental Number 1678, was not to be again called upon until October 27, after a period of fifteen weeks and two days, by which time he had received a promotion, on only the day prior to that, to the rank of lance corporal. Where he was to spend this intervening time appears not to have been recorded, although he possibly that he sought temporary work and likely was to spend time at the home of his parents – recorded at the time as also being his address - on Brazil's Field in St. John's – but, of course, this is only speculation.

On the above-mentioned date of October 27, 'G' Company left St. John's by train to traverse the island to Port aux Basques, the other passengers on board reportedly having included several naval reservists and also some German prisoners-of-war. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry – documented as having been the *Kyle* - and afterwards proceeded again by train from North Sydney as far as Québec City.

There the Newfoundlanders joined His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* for the trans-Atlantic voyage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9. The vessel had departed Montreal on October 30 with Canadian troops on board before stopping at Québec: the 55th Canadian Infantry Battalion and the Second Draft of the (1st?) Divisional Signals Company.



(Right adjacent: *The image of Corsican is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Launched in 1907 for the Allan Line, one of the largest private shipping companies of the time, she spent much of her early career chartered to the Canadian Pacific Line which in 1917 was to purchase the entire Allan Line business. She was employed as a troop-ship during much of the Great War which she survived – only to be wrecked near Cape Race on May 21, 1923.*)



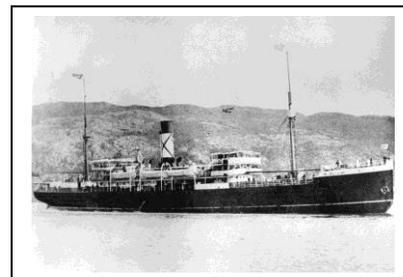
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(Preceding page: *The once-busy Royal Navy facility and harbour of Devonport almost a century after the Great War – photograph from 2012(?)*)

By the morning of November 10, Lance Corporal McDonald's 'G' Company had again travelled by train, to Scotland where it had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gales, not far removed from the evolving Newfoundland Regimental Depot at Ayr where accommodation for the new arrivals was as yet not available.

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More than a year prior to that November 10 of 1915, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914, the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and were formed into 'A' and 'B' Companies.



During that same period the various authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

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

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 1st Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

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

Once having disembarked* 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 it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.



**It was to do so at Devonport through which 'G' Company would pass eleven months later.*

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland.

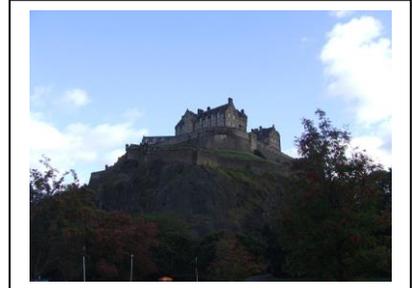
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On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of 'D' Company to arrive – they via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty*...at Edinburgh, and then 'E' Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4*.

**These five Companies, while a contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment, did not as yet comprise a battalion and would not do so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

(Right below: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011*)

Seven days after the arrival of 'E' Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent had been ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit had been dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.



(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 of Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



Two months less a day later, on July 10, 'F' Company would march into *Stobs Camp*.

This had been an important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength* of a battalion which could be posted on...*active service*.



**A number sufficient to furnish four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

(Right above: *The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles. – original photograph from the Provincial Archives*)

From *Stobs Camp*, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the four senior Companies, having now become the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, had been transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before the Battalion's departure to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *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.*)

The later arrivals to the United Kingdom, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were eventually to form the nucleus of the soon to be formed 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

(Right: *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 below: *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.



The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer and the early autumn of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 – that the new-comers were to be sent in drafts, at first to *Gallipoli* and then subsequently to the *Western Front*, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1st Battalion*.

**The first such draft was, in fact, to depart from Ayr for service on the Gallipoli Peninsula days after the arrival in Scotland of Lance Corporal McDonald's 'G' Company, on November 15.*

This then had been the situation facing the new-comers: the new Regimental Depot had still been in the throes of its establishment when Lance Corporal McDonald and 'G' Company were to arrive in Scotland on November 10 of 1915; thus, as related in a preceding paragraph, the new-comers were required to be quartered at Gales, some sixteen kilometres further up the coast – but apparently more than sixty kilometres distant by road.

It was after almost five months spent in Scotland, on April 5 of 1916, and only three days before his departure from there to join the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, the unit by that time in France, that the now-Corporal McDonald – having received this second advancement two months before, on February 3 - 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 signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.*

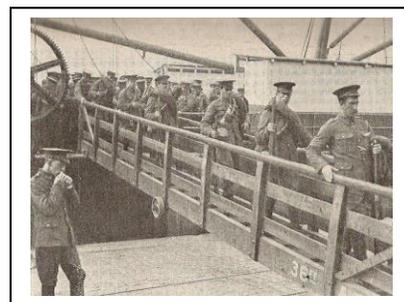
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By the time of his eventual departure, Corporal McDonald had witnessed the despatch of the first three re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: the first in mid-November of 1915 which had joined the 1st Battalion on December 1 at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*; the second which had sailed for Egypt in mid-March only to be ordered back to the French port of Marseille; and the third which had left Scotland at the end of March to go directly to the Continent, to France.

On April 8, as a non-commissioned officer of the 4th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, he passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on his way to report to the 1st Battalion on the Continent. Having arrived on that same day, the 8th, in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, the Draft was posted there for several days of final training and organization* before being split and then dispatched to seek out the parent Newfoundland Battalion.

This rendezvous for Corporal McDonald occurred on May 4 at a time when the parent Newfoundland unit had just completed its first tour in the trenches of the *Western Front*.

(Right: *British troops disembark at an early date 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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the *Bull Rings*.

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While both ‘E’ and ‘F’ Companies had been beginning their time of training at Ayr in the summer of 1915 the aforementioned four senior companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, of the Newfoundland Regiment, having now become the 1st Battalion, had thereupon been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and was soon to be dispatched to...active service.



(Right above: *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.*)



(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.*)

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On August 20 of 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 1st Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *'Kangaroo Beach', where the officers and men of the 1st Battalion of the 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*)



(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 was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011*)



When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* they were to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would now 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: *An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at Suvla Bay – from Provincial Archives*)



(continued)

(Right: *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.***

November 26 would see what perhaps was to be 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.

(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)*



By this time the situation there had daily been 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 thereupon 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 would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



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



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

(Preceding page: ‘W’ Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration)

This final operation would take 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 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 and beyond and had thus once more taken ship.

On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport Nestor had arrived at Alexandria with the 1st Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16th, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she had docked early on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders had landed and marched to their encampment.

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 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 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)



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1st 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.



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

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

(Right below: *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 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.



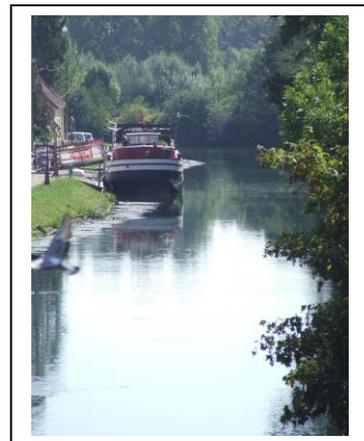
It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.

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 which they had then traversed on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* would become a part of their history.

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

On April 13, the entire 1st Battalion – including the 2nd Reinforcement Draft having arrived from Egypt - subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive re-enforcements 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.

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****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.***

And as related in an earlier paragraph, it was after the completion of the Newfoundland Battalion's first tour in the trenches of the *Western Front*, that Corporal McDonald's draft arrived from Rouen on May 4 to report...*to duty*.



(Right: A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?))

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Corporal McDonald was one of the contingent of a single officer and thirty-two *other ranks* to report to the parent unit, probably late in the day, of May 4.

By then the 1st Battalion had been withdrawn from the forward area to the vicinities of the communities of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months. The Newfoundlanders were now 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.



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

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(?))

(continued)

****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 greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage 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)



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 of Newfoundland - dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?*)



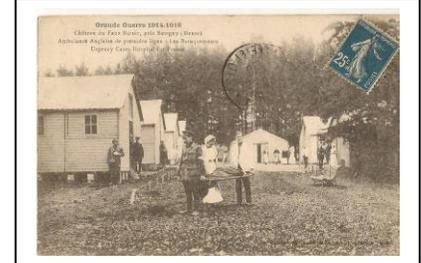
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On July 1, 1916, Corporal McDonald was wounded on the field at Beaumont-Hamel during the fighting of the first day of the...*First Battle of the Somme*. He was evacuated on July 2 to the 87th Field Ambulance suffering from injuries to the left shoulder, thence to the 12th General Hospital in Rouen on the following day. On the 6th, three days later again, he was en route from there on board an un-identified hospital ship back to the United Kingdom.

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



(Right: *A British Field Ambulance, more permanent than some nearer to the front, in north-eastern France at a later date in the War – from a vintage post-card*)



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Having arrived in England, Corporal McDonald was admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth on July 8 for further treatment and subsequent convalescence – this commencing as of July 21 – which he received at the Brooklands Convalescent Home in Weybridge.

(Right: *The main building of what was to become the 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War had originally been opened, on July 1st of 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010*)



(Right: *A party of Newfoundland patients dressed in hospital uniform but otherwise unfortunately unidentified, is seen here convalescing in the grounds of the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



On August 2, Corporal McDonald was discharged from medical care and granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded military personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom, a period of leave after which, on August 12, he reported back...to duty...to the Regimental Depot in Scotland.

Exactly one month later, on September 12, he was once more further promoted, on this third occasion to the rank of sergeant.

(Right: *The Newfoundland Plot in Ayr Cemetery wherein lie fourteen Newfoundlanders whom the Commonwealth War Graves Commission refer to as Canadians – here and elsewhere – photograph from 2014*)



That December 25, Christmas Day of 1916, was not to be a festive moment for Sergeant McDonald. On that date he was reduced to the rank of private and awarded one-hundred twelve days detention, having most unfortunately been tried by court martial for – and found guilty of - theft from Sergeant Carew, a fellow non-commissioned officer.

The 17th Re-enforcement Draft embarked from Southampton on February 1 of the New Year, 1917, Private McDonald now amongst its among rank and file. Landing once more at Rouen, on the following day, February 2 – for that inevitable period of last-minute training - he was then to be one of the fifty-nine *other ranks* comprising the re-enforcement contingent from Rouen which reported...to duty...with the 1st Battalion on February 17.

His return to the Newfoundland Battalion was to fall on the penultimate day of a two-week period being concluded by the unit in training out of the line in the vicinity of the community of Coisy.

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Meanwhile on *the Somme*, after the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, and Corporal McDonald's departure for medical attention, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that any 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 above: *Burying dead on the Somme, likely at a casualty clearing station or a field ambulance – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)

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 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion was still to number only... *11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

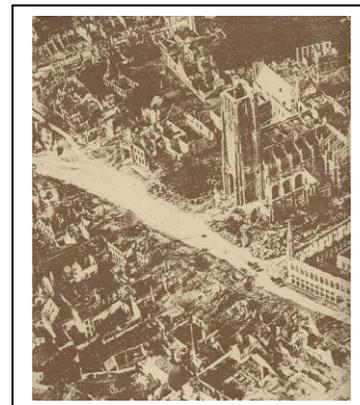
On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1st Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – maybe even fewer - even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

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.



(Right above: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – having been renovated since that time – still stand in the ramparts of the city of Ypres since the time of the Battalion's posting 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 had incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.



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

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*.

Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1st 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.

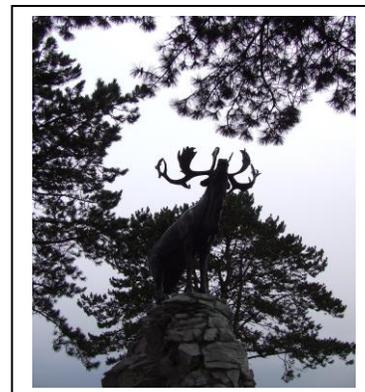


The encounter was to prove to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right above: *This is the ground over which the 1st 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 88th 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*)



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 1st Battalion had begun to wend its way back up to the front lines.



(continued)

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

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 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.

It had been on January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of Corps Reserve and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* to 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 to be only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig somewhat cavalierly referred to as *wastage* since the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches during those several days.

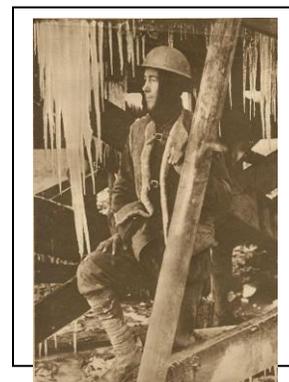
However, that winter period – as had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the Great War – would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable for most of the combatants of both sides. It had been a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were kept busy, particularly, so it seems - from at least Canadian medical documentation - with thousands of cases of dental work.

And as has been related in an earlier paragraph, this period also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion this had at least partially been undertaken in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.

And it was to be, as related in an earlier paragraph, at Coisy on February 17 of 1917 that Private McDonald was to return to report back...*to duty*...with the Newfoundland unit.

* * * * *

On February 18 the 1st Battalion began a five-day trek back from Coisy to the forward area where it went back into the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. It was at a place called Sailly-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans was lively: after only two days the Battalion had incurred four dead, nine wounded and three gassed without there having been any infantry action. The Newfoundlanders were withdrawn on February 25 to return three days later.



They carried with them orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Sailly-Saillisel...to be carried out on March 1.

(Preceding page: *A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, his unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold and ice 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 that 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.

(Right: *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 was to be 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 even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.

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



On March 29, the Newfoundlanders began 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 adjacent: *The remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War, in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

(Right below: *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 below: *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*)

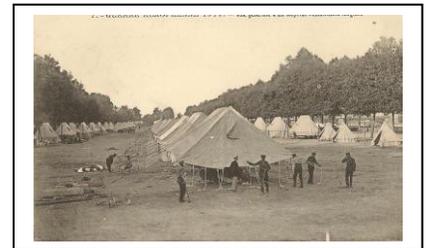
The 1st Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which was to finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, the ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux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

* * * * *

Private McDonald was one of the many wounded at Monchy-le-Preux on that April 14. Admitted immediately into the 87th Field Ambulance with mild injuries inflicted by gun-fire to the left hand, he was forwarded from there to an unidentified casualty clearing station.



(Right above: *A British casualty clearing station – this one under canvas to allow for rapid deployment – being established 'somewhere on the Continent' during the early years of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

From there his next stop was the 6th Stationary Hospital at Frévent after which, on the following day, April 15, he was placed on board a hospital train and transported to the 3rd Canadian(?) General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers. There he was admitted on the same day.



(Right above: *the railway station at Dannes-Camiers through which thousands of sick, wounded and convalescent military personnel passed during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



On April 20 His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Cambria* was to transport him across the English Channel him back to the United Kingdom. On April 21 - Private McDonald found himself once more receiving treatment at hospital in the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth.

(Preceding page: The image of 'Cambria' in her peace-time livery is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The ship had been built in 1897 for the 'London and North Western Railway' to serve on the crossing of the Irish Sea from Wales to Ireland. In 1914 she was requisitioned at first as an Armed Boarding Steamer, then a year later to be converted for the role of hospital ship. She survived the Great War to be later employed as a troopship by the Irish Free State. The vessel was scrapped in 1925.)

There Private McDonald remained until June 21 when he received a second ten-day post-medical furlough, to be followed by the almost-inevitable posting to the Regimental Depot in Scotland which commenced as of the 30th.

He was apparently stationed at Barry* for a brief three weeks before passing, for a third time, through the port of Southampton to return to the *Western Front*. Private McDonald sailed on July 22 as a soldier of the Twenty-Seventh Re-enforcement Draft, disembarked in Rouen two days later, and after the customary time spent at the Base Depot, on either the 3rd or 9th of September he reported...*to duty* with...the Newfoundland Battalion at *Penton Camp*, close to the town of Poperinghe, in Belgium.

**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

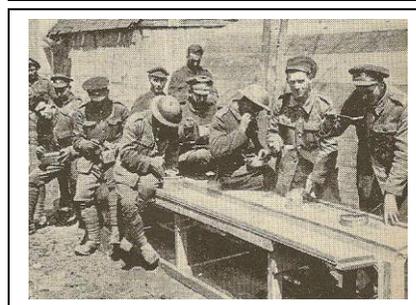
* * * * *

After this further debacle of April 14, 1917, the day on which Private McDonald had been wounded for a second time, the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained for a few brief days 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 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies. It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1st 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 of April 23, the Newfoundlanders had retired the dozen or so kilometres 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)



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

That month of May of 1917 was to be a period when the Newfoundland Battalion would move hither and thither on the *Arras Front*, marching into and out of – mostly away from - 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.



At the outset of June, the 1st 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.

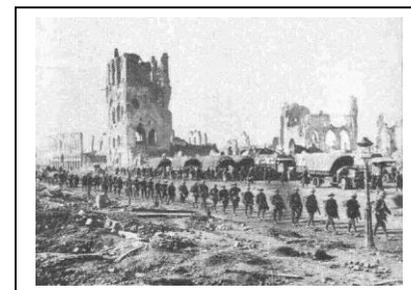
(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – not Bonneville - in early May, perhaps the 7th, of 1917 – from The War Illustrated*)

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 first 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right – photograph from 2014*)

This low-lying area, Belgian *Flanders*, the only part of the country unoccupied by German forces, had been selected by the 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 above: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

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

The 1st 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, at the *Steenbeek*, it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*. But by the time of Private McDonald's arrival in Belgium, this day was already another chapter of Newfoundland history

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

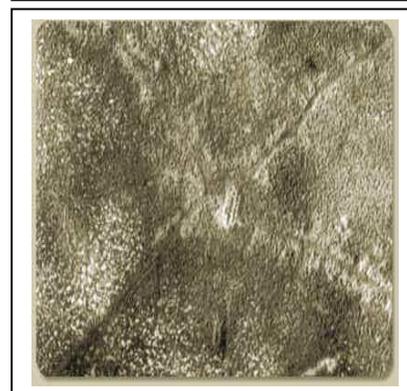
At the *Broembeek* the cost was to be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

Having arrived too late to play any part in the engagement at the *Steenbeek*, Private McDonald was to make his sacrifice at the *Broembeek*.

The only son of Henry (*Zekiah-Hezekiah* according to the 1921 Census) McDonald and of Julia (*Sarah* on a separate document, née *Bradbury**) McDonald – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay, and to whom he had willed his all - of Brazil's Field in St. John's, he was also brother to Sadie and Gladys.

**The couple was married in St. John's on November 17, 1893.*

(continued)



(Previous page: *Here a seemingly gentle, meandering stream, in the fall of 1917 the Broembeek was in full spate, flooding and turning its surrounds into little more than a quagmire. – photograph from 2009*)

Private McDonald was at first reported as...*missing in action*...while serving with 'A' Company during the fighting at the *Broembeek*, Belgium, on October 9, 1917.

However a subsequent report by a Lieutenant Masset, Burial Officer for the British 50th Division, documented the identification of his remains and their burial about...*300 yds S. of Broembeek*...on December 18, 1917. The records were thus amended so as to read...*killed in action 9/10/17 or died of wounds on or shortly thereafter*.

Walter Garfield McDonald had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-one years and five months: date of birth on Hunt's Island (off-shore from Burgeo), Newfoundland, February 1, 1894 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

Private Walter Garfield McDonald was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



Captain Timewell
Pay & Record Office

St. John's
Newfoundland
April 8th, 1918

Dear Sir,

I beg leave to wright you these few lines concerning my onely son Walter G MacDonalld 1678 sopouse to be killed in action October 9th 1917 Now Sir this is my belief that my son was not fit for the frount after bening wounded twice before Now Sir I give to the Emperor my onely son and according to his letter to us at home they done him many ronggs In the first place they striped him him of his stripes and they put him in prison and took from him every thing he had and I sopouse even the money that we sent him We sent money twice altogether about 30 dollars and has he never smoked or drank strong drink he must have had some of his hown money on him Preps witch did not have any money to lose Well they stopped his pay for 90 days

and sent him back theard time to face the enemy This his what I call bar bears for eany British solger Our family come from good stock and have always been more or less at war I had 1 uncle killed at Waterloo 1814 and had a sister husband in the American war of 1860 I had sisters sones in the Spanish American War I have 2 brothers sones in the Canadian army and I have about 10 relatives in out home regiment There was 22 of our family brothers and half brothers My fathers people come out from Scotland And I say my son did not get fair play I am ready and willing if needs be to suffer for him my onely son and my onely soport. Think of it Sir drove back the third time like a ox to the slatured I wonder if that doctor had a son with three bullets wound in him think you Sir he would say to him to go back again I say no he would not They are calling for more men I hope they will use him than they did my dear boy Since my son joined the army I have lost the sight of my eyes I tried to get across myself but I am to old and disabled I do not even know if my son was bured I have never receved the word to that effet mely the 6th Army Offers report killed in action I fe they had say that never will I forget nor yet forgive the person who is responsible for sending my son back the third

My hart and soul was raped up in this war Hoping for a few lines from you I remain truely yours

H. MacDonalld

Brazils Field St John's

(Note in files, presumably sent to Captain Timewell)

...A very similar letter was received some months ago from the deceased's sister, and a most careful reply was sent giving all the facts of the case. As to suggestions contained in this letter as to the fitness of Pte MacDonald when he last went to the front, this cannot be too strongly repudiated and the circumstances of his trial and sentence cannot be re-opened. I feel sure that you will send a careful yet firm reply...

Lt Col xxxxxxxx

(no signature as this was a copy of the original)

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 30, 2023.