



Private Robert Mercer (Regimental Number 1928), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an *oiler* – and also having served with the *Canadian Militia* - Robert Mercer was a recruit of the Seventh Recruiting Draft. He presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on October 22 of 1915 for a medical examination. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being...*fit for Foreign Service*.



Later on the day of that medical assessment, October 22, and at the same venue, the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, he was now to enlist. Robert Mercer was thereupon to be engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar, to which was to be added a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

And it was then to be only hours afterwards again, that there then came the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. Still on the same October 22, he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, at which moment Robert Mercer thereupon became...*a soldier of the King*.

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

*\*In fact, 'H' Company was to depart from Newfoundland in two detachments: the first one-hundred recruits, Private Mercer among that number, would be the first to leave in that December of 1915. The second part of 'H' Company would not follow until the fourth week of the upcoming month of March. It was to make the journey on board the SS Sicilian and report to Ayr on April 9.*

*Until as late as that spring of 1916 it had been the intention to form a 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment to fight on the Continent. In fact it would seem that the one-hundred sixty-three recruits of the second contingent, 'H' Company, were to form a part of the nucleus of that unit, while the personnel already at the Depot by this time would form a reserve battalion to serve as a re-enforcement pool for both the Regiment's fighting units.*

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*It could not have been long before a change of plan came about as, very soon, men of the second half of 'H' Company were being sent to strengthen the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion already on the Continent – maybe Beaumont-Hamel had something to do with it.*

Private Mercer, Regimental Number 1928, would be one of the one-hundred men who comprised the first detachment of 'H' Company to travel for...overseas service. He was now to wait eight weeks and a day after attestation before being called, but where he was to spend this time is not certain: he may have temporarily returned to work or even perhaps to his home in the Conception Bay community of Harbour Grace – all of the above of course is only speculation\*.

*\*It is also likely that some of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the city, or those who had no friends or family to offer board and lodging, were quartered in the curling rink at Fort William in St. John's, a building which was to serve as a barracks.*

This first detachment of 'H' Company left St. John's by train to cross the island to Port aux Basques on December 18, 1915. After the short sea-voyage to traverse the Gulf of St. Lawrence the detachment entrained once again, in North Sydney, for Saint John, New Brunswick.

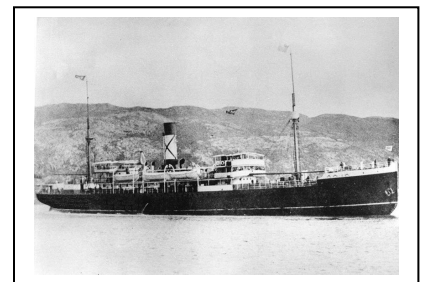


The Atlantic crossing was to be effected from there on board the Royal Mail Ship *Corinthian* and the draft reported to the Regimental Depot at Ayr on January 4 of the New Year, 1916.

*(Right above: The Allan Line Ship 'Corinthian' was built in 1899 and was to serve mainly on trans-Atlantic routes between Great Britain and Canada. At the beginning of the Great War she formed a part of the convoy carrying the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the United Kingdom although after that it appears that she resumed her commercial work, transporting troops only if and when it suited her schedule. In December of 1918 she was driven ashore in the Bay of Fundy and although there was no loss of life, the ship was wrecked.)*

\* \* \* \* \*

Some sixteen months prior to that January 4 of 1916, 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.)*

(continued)



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 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.

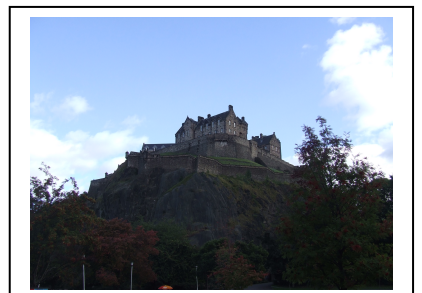


Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of '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, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

(Right: *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*.

(continued)

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 for 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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*.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

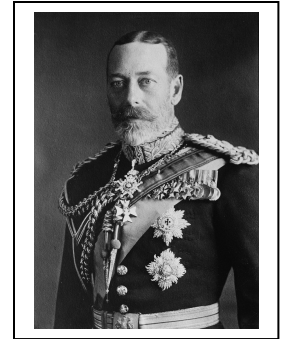
(Right above: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – the photograph is from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.)*

(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 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 – that the new-comers were sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion\*.

(continued)



*\*The first such re-enforcement draft was, in fact, to depart from Ayr for service on the Gallipoli Peninsula on November 15, some seven weeks before the arrival in Scotland of Private Mercer's 'H' Company.*

That November 15 of 1915 (see immediately above) was to see not only the departure of the 1<sup>st</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr to the Middle East and to the fighting of the *Gallipoli Campaign* but also, only five days prior, the arrival from Newfoundland of 'G' Company which would be obliged to take up quarters at *Gailes Camp*, some sixteen kilometres up the coast from Ayr itself – but just over sixty if one went by road.

A further seven weeks plus a day were now to pass before Private Mercer and the first one-hundred of 'H' Company were to present themselves at the Regimental Depot.

\* \* \* \* \*

Transferred upon their arrival in Scotland on January 4 to serve with 'G' Company, the new-comers of 'H' (now 'G') Company were to be quartered in the barracks of the Royal Scots Fusiliers; they, however, had not yet vacated the aforesaid premises, due to an epidemic of measles at the time. It was not long before the disease had also taken its toll on the Newfoundlanders amongst whom there would be fatalities.

However, Private Mercer was not to be one of those affected.

Some twenty weeks after having reported to the Regimental Depot those several months before in early January of 1916, on May 24 of that spring - and three weeks before his eventual departure on *active service* – he was prevailed upon to re-enlist...*for the duration of the War*\*.

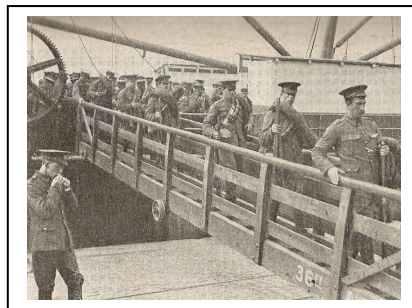
*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for a limited period of a single year. As the War progressed, however, this would likely cause problems and they were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.*

By the time that he, Private Mercer, was eventually to sail from the United Kingdom to...*active service*...the Regimental Depot had witnessed the departure of five re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: In mid-November of the previous autumn the First – already cited in an earlier paragraph - had sailed for the Middle East to serve at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*; the Second had been a convoluted adventure – the draft had taken ship in mid-March for Egypt but upon arrival there had been obliged to turn around for a return voyage as far as the French Mediterranean port-city of Marseille. From that time on, however, the drafts were all to proceed directly across the English Channel to France.

It was on June 14 of 1916, that the Sixth Re-enforcement Draft – with Private Mercer among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent. On the following day, the 15<sup>th</sup>, it disembarked in Rouen, the capital city of Normandy and the site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot where the contingent was now to spend time in final training and organizing\* before moving on to a rendezvous with the parent 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

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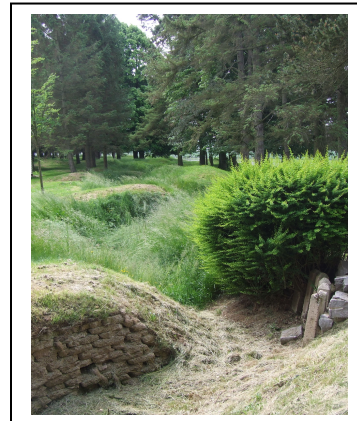
(Right: *British troops disembark at an earlier time in the War at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)



*\*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.*

A draft of sixty-six men from Rouen would arrive to join the parent unit at Louvencourt on June 30\*. At 9:15 on that same evening, most of the Newfoundlanders – minus the ten per cent Reserve Company but including many of the new-comers - marched from there to their assigned...*forming-up place trenches i.e. rear line of trenches in our usual sector* (from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary).

(Right: *Just inside the entrance to the Newfoundland Memorial Park is to be found the re-constituted forming-up trench from where the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion attacked on the morning of July 1. – photograph from 2010*)



*\*Had the attack gone ahead on June 30 as initially had been planned, those men might not have been flung into the imminent maelstrom. Bad weather – fog which had restricted aerial surveillance – had decided the High Command to postpone the attack for one day.*

This contingent of that day from the Base Depot at Rouen had comprised a majority of the personnel of the above-cited Sixth Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr. Among that number had been Private Mercer.

\* \* \* \* \*

A year prior to this juncture, in the early summer of 1915, the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both 'E' and 'F' Companies had only then been beginning their time of training at Ayr; as for Robert Mercer, he had still been waiting at home for enlistment and attestation, after which he would still have those fifty-seven days to wait before the call was to come to sail overseas to the United Kingdom.



The aforementioned four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', of the Newfoundland Regiment, having now become the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had at this same time been attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been dispatched to...*active service.*

(continued)



**(Preceding page: Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment awaiting the King's inspection at Aldershot in August of 1915, prior to its departure from the Camp to active service on the Gallipoli Peninsula – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)**

**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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.**

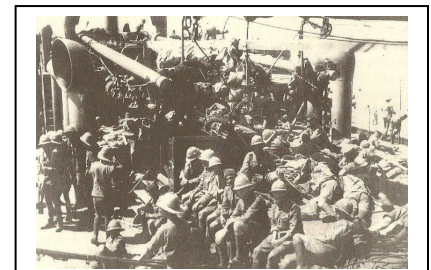


**(Right above: *The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)**

**(Right: *Kangaroo Beach, where the officers and men of the 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*)**



**(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 adjacent: *A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.**

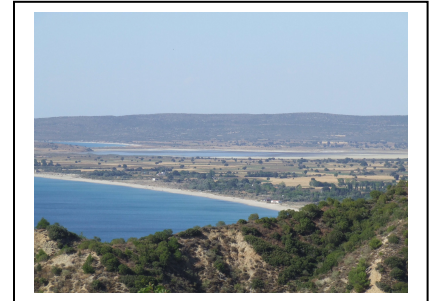
**Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would now serve but, even ever since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, had been proving to be little more than a debacle:**

**(Right: *No-Man's-Land, Suvla Bay, seen from the Battalion's positions – from Provincial Archives*)**



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: *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)



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



By this time the situation there had daily been ever-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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would 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 by now simply been marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.

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.

(Right: *‘W’ Beach under shell-fire at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation in January, 1916 – from Illustration*)



*\*Lieutenant Owen Steele of St. John's, Newfoundland, is cited as having been the last soldier of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force to step into the final small boat to sail from the Gallipoli Peninsula.*

(Right: *‘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. 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 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 29<sup>th</sup> 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.*)



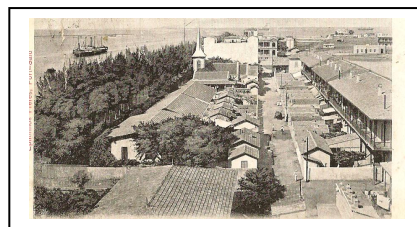
(Right: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis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





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

***(Right: Port Tewfiq, adjacent to Port Suez at the south end of the Suez Canal, at a time 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 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.**

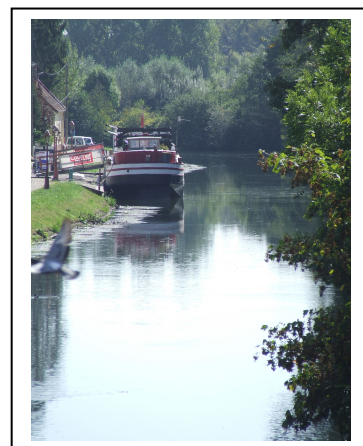
***(Right: British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseille. – from a vintage post-card)***



**Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on 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* was to have become a part of their history.**



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

**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 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* in mid-April, 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.**

**(continued)**



***\*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: 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 beginning of that month of May 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.

And it was, as related in an earlier paragraph, on the very eve of the onset of that campaign that a certain draft of sixty-six men dispatched from the Base Depot at Rouen, arrived to report to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at Louvencourt.

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 front lines down the hill towards the Y Ravine Cemetery visible in the distance and which today stands atop a part of the German front-line defences of the time: 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: A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland - dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?)***



**(continued)**

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 separating Beaumont from Hamel.*



The son of Eliol Mercer\*, labourer – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of fifty cents from his pay - of Blaketown, Trinity Bay, he was also brother to Eldred, to Samuel\*\*, and also to three unidentified sisters and a fourth, Frances (Ernest) Ellis of Bishops Falls.

*\*Was his wife Julia Anne?*

*\*\*Private Samuel Mercer, Regimental Number, 3479, went overseas in June of 1917, served in France and Belgium as of July of that year. He survived the conflict and was repatriated and demobilized in 1919.*

Private Mercer was reported as...*missing in action...*at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting of the first day of the...*First Battle of the Somme*. Some thirty weeks later, on December 31, he was officially...*presumed dead*.

Robert Mercer had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-four years and eleven months – birth possibly in November of 1890.

Blaketown  
Trinity Bay  
Sept. 19, 1916

To Honourable J R Bennett

Dear Sir

On behalf of Mr Eliel Mercer of this settlement I beg to ask for information regarding his son Robert Mercer who according to latest reports received he was numbered with the missing during the big drive of July 1<sup>st</sup> /16 when the Nfld Regiment sustained such a heavy loss. It would

not at all be possible I suppose for him to be a prisoner of war in one of the prison camps of Germany. No word has been received from him by his father for a long time and his people seem rather anxious as to his whereabouts. The slightest information regarding him would be gratefully received by his father.

Should anything be known he would like to receive it at your earliest convenience.

Hoping I am not trespassing (as I am fully aware of your position) and that you will do your best.

Communication might be sent to me or to his father.

I have the pleasure to remain on behalf of said person

Your humble servant

Garnet Cook /Church of England Teacher

**Excerpt from reply: ...I very much regret that I am unable to furnish any further information than what has already been communicated...**

**Private Robert Mercer was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also 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 4, 2023.