



Private William Mews (Regimental Number 3220) is buried in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John's, in the Naval and Military Plot.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman* earning a monthly thirty-five dollars, William Mews was a volunteer of the Twelfth Recruitment Draft. He presented himself for medical examination on November 9 of 1916 at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury** 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*.

**The building was to serve as the Regimental Headquarters in Newfoundland for the duration of the conflict.*

It was to be on the day of that medical assessment, on November 9 and at the same venue that William Mews would enlist. He was thus engaged...*for the duration of the war**...at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was to be appended a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

**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.*

Only a few further hours were now to follow before there then came to pass, while still at the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On the same ninth day of that month of November he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, William Mews became...*a soldier of the King*.

Private Mews, Number 3220, would not now sail to the United Kingdom until a lengthy span of twelve weeks less a day had then elapsed. How he was to spend this prolonged interval after his attestation appears not to have been documented. It may be that he was to return temporarily to work and surely to spend time at the family residence in the small Notre Dame Bay community of Birchy Bay, but this is only speculation, and he well have chosen – or *been chosen* – to remain to be lodged and to undergo training in the capital city.

**A number of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the capital city, or those who had no friends or family to offer them board and lodging, were to be quartered in the curling rink in the area of Fort William in St. John's, a building which was at the time to serve as barracks, and the adjacent Prince's Skating Rink.*

(Right: This photograph of the Prince's Rink with the curling rink to the right in St. John's, and on parade military personnel, attired in uniforms of Great War vintage, is from the Ice Hockey Wiki web-site. There appears to be no further information a propos.)



Those several aforementioned weeks having passed, Private Mews was one of the approximately three hundred twenty...*all ranks*...to leave St. John's on January 31 of 1917 for overseas service on the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel*. The vessel was on its commercial schedule and bound for Halifax from where the detachment had been ordered to take ship to the United Kingdom on board *Saxonia*.

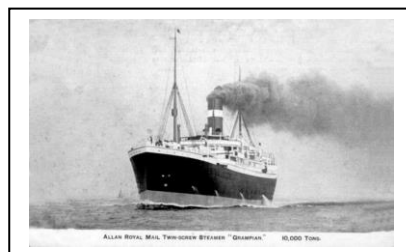
However, preparations for this crossing had gone awry and thus, immediately upon arrival in Nova Scotia, Private Mews and his contingent were forwarded to accommodation –

apparently cramped - in the town of Windsor where the Newfoundlanders were soon to be catching measles, influenza and then the mumps - two of them to become fatalities during what was by then an epidemic.

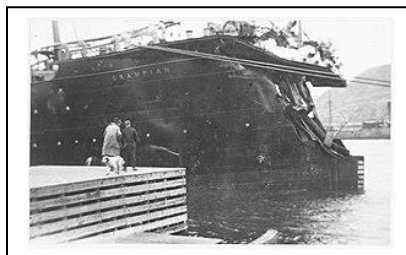
The Newfoundland detachment was thus ordered to remain in Windsor and to be quarantined. Despite this precaution, it was during this period spent in Nova Scotia that Private Mews was admitted into the Military Hospital in Windsor, from February 27 until March 10, finding himself was one of those afflicted with a case of the aforementioned mumps.

It was not until after a lapse of some two-and-a-half months following the Newfoundlanders' arrival in Nova Scotia that transport could be arranged for the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom for the by then so-called *Windsor Draft* – less those twenty-five or so personnel still unable to travel.

On April 17, Private Mews embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Grampian*, one of three ships carrying the Newfoundlanders which were to sail on the next day in a convoy from Halifax. The vessels were also carrying Canadian re-enforcements – in the case of *Grampian*, the 181st and 214th Canadian Infantry Battalions - although likely under-strength - to the English west-coast port of Liverpool, where the ships docked on April 29.



(Right above: *The image of 'Grampian' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Built in 1907 for the Allan Line (to be sold to Canadian Pacific Steamships in 1917), the ship played a dual role during the Great War, transporting Canadian troops overseas but also continuing her commercial services from North America to the United Kingdom. Having survived the conflict the vessel struck an iceberg (see below) off Cape Race on July 10 of 1919.)*



(Right above: *Unlike the Ill-starred 'Titanic', 'Grampian' struck the berg head-on; the vessel did not sink but instead managed to make port in St. John's, Newfoundland. – image from Wikipedia)*

Having arrived in England the Newfoundland contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland and for the town of Ayr where the Regimental Depot and 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had by this time been established for close on two years.

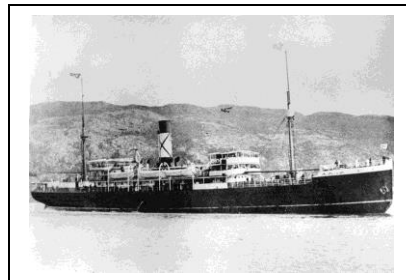
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Some two years and seven months prior to that month of May of 1917 when Private Mews was to find himself in Scotland, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training 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: *The image of 'Florizel' at anchor in the harbour at St. John's in October of 1914 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. 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.

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

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*, under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.



(continued)

(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*.

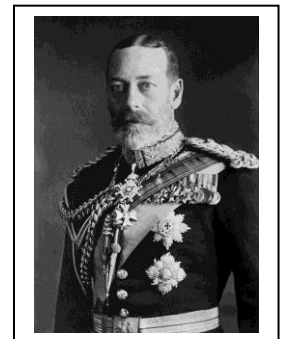
This had been an important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength* of a battalion which could be posted on...active service.

**A number sufficient 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*)

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



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*.

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*)



Ayr was a small town on the west coast of Scotland whose history precedes the year 1205 when it was established as a Royal Burgh (Borough) by the crown of Scotland, an appointment which emphasized the importance of the town as a harbour, market and, later, administrative centre.

By the time of the Great War centuries later it was expanding and the River Ayr which had once marked the northern boundary of the place was now flowing through its centre; a new town to the north (Newton-on-Ayr), its population fast-increasing, perhaps encouraged by the coming of the railway, was soon to be housing the majority of the personnel of the Newfoundland Regimental Depot.



(Right above: 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.

That November 15 of 1915 was to see not only the departure of the 1st 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 the first one-hundred personnel of ‘H’ Company, having sailed in mid-December as recorded in an earlier paragraph, were to present themselves at the Regimental Depot on January 4, some of them to be affected, even fatally, by an ongoing measles epidemic of the time.

After that there was then to be an interlude of three months plus several days before the second detachment of ‘H’ Company reported on April 9, 1916, to the Regimental Depot.

Note: Until as late as the spring of 1916 it had been the intention to form a 2nd Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment to fight on the Continent. In fact it would seem that the last-mentioned contingent of one-hundred sixty-three recruits was to form 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 fighting units.

It could not have been long before a change of plan came about as very soon men of that designated contingent (the second half of ‘H’ Company) were being sent to strengthen the 1st Newfoundland Battalion already on the Continent – maybe Beaumont-Hamel had something to do with it.

A further draft from Newfoundland arrived at Ayr towards mid-summer, this comprising a two-company detachment and some naval reservists, sailors who, having disembarked from *Sicilian* in Devonport, were to remain there in England.

Some weeks later again *Sicilian* would sail from Newfoundland once more to arrive in England in the first week in September, 1916, with two-hundred forty-two recruits on board. By the 5th day of the month the new-comers, formerly ‘C’ Company of the 3rd Battalion stationed back in St. John’s, had reported to the Regimental Depot.

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There was now to be a particularly protracted interval before any large numbers re-enforcements were to arrive from Newfoundland – a problem which was later to affect the capabilities of the parent 1st Battalion fighting on the Continent.

The main cause of the difficulty, as seen further above, would be those troops which had been dispatched from St. John's and had reached Halifax on board *Florizel* at the end of January, 1917, only to be then held there for some three months before they were to arrive in Scotland where the regulation fourteen weeks of training then awaited them – although in the case of most of this draft, this period was to be much shorter as will be seen.

A further fifty or so recruits were to arrive a week later on *Olympic* from Halifax via Liverpool but the number of potential recruits to be found in Newfoundland was by now diminishing.

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The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, and was to eventually serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were despatched in drafts, at first to *Gallipoli* and later to the *Western Front*, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1st Battalion.

(Right below: *Wellington Square seen here almost a century after it hosted the officers of the Newfoundland Regiment* – photograph from 2012)

At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to be able to accommodate the number of new arrivals – plus men from other British regiments which were still being billeted in the area...and a measles epidemic which was to claim the life of several Regiment personnel – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in the town-centre of Ayr itself, and the *other ranks* had been billeted at Newton Park School and otherwise in the grandstand or a tented camp at the newly-built racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr on the far side of the river.

On June 11 of that 1917 the 25th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Private Mews among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to France.

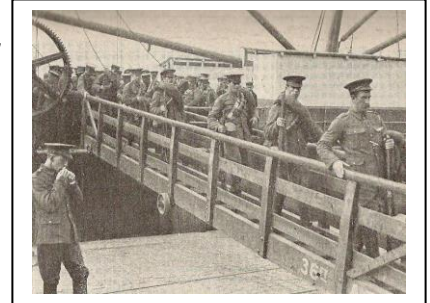


(Right above: *The new race-course at Newton-upon-Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original* – photograph from 2012)

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On the following day, June 12, the contingent disembarked in the Norman capital, Rouen, where time was spent at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, there to be organized and to undergo final training* before moving onward to its eventual rendezvous with the parent 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

(Right: *British troops disembark at Rouen at an earlier time of the Great War on their way 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.*

The records show that it was on July 2 – the *Regimental War Diary* suggests, in fact, on the day before - that Private Mews' contingent of two-hundred fifty *other ranks* reported...to duty...at *Caribou Camp*, behind the lines near Woesten in Belgium.

For the next few days – and nights – the Newfoundland Battalion, itself having arrived there on only the day before and in Belgium just two days prior to that, was now to supply working parties for road-mending and for the construction of infantry tracks.

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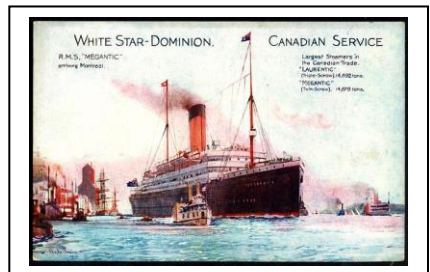
By the time of that July of 1917, the first contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment had already been serving overseas for some two years and nine months. The 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been formed – in the spring of 1916 - and multiple drafts had been dispatched from Ayr to supplement the strength of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment (see immediately below).

(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.)*



William Mews, by that July 2, 1917, had been a soldier of the Newfoundland Regiment for two-hundred thirty-seven days.

The four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', had become in the summer of 1915 the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment and had thereupon been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. The force had soon been dispatched from *Camp Aldershot* to...active service.



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

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.



(Right above: *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*)

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: *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.

**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.*

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(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)



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: No-Man's-Land at Suvla Bay as seen from the Newfoundland positions – from Provincial Archives)

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.

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



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: 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 at Cape Helles under shell-fire only days before the final British evacuation – from *Illustration*)

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

(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 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 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 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* and published in *Illustration*)



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

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.

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.



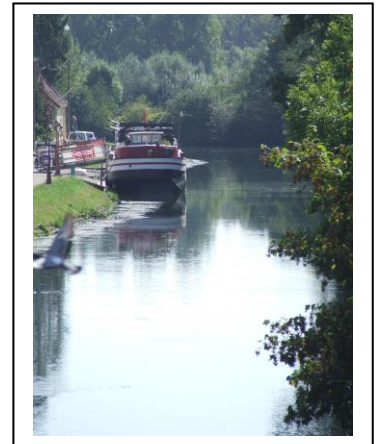
(Right above: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseille.* – from a vintage post-card)

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.

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



But some three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.

On April 13, the entire 1st 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*, two of the four Companies – 'A', and 'B' – were to take over several support positions from a British unit* before the entire Newfoundland unit had then been 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 below: A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?))

Having then been withdrawn at the end of that April to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders had soon been 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: 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 to the right in the photograph – photograph from 2009)



(Right below: Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2, one of three burial grounds in the Newfoundland Memorial Park – 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 below: A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?)



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...*First Battle of the Somme*...was to continue for four and a half months.

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(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village. – photographs from 2010 & 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. Today a third village is a part of the commune.



After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that any German counter-assault might well annihilate the shattered survivors 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.

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

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

There at Mailly-Maillet 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, 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.*



Of course, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had not been the only unit in the British Army to have incurred horrific losses on July 1, 1916, even though it had indeed been one of the most devastated. But even with its depleted numbers, the Battalion was needed and, after that first re-enforcement, it had almost immediately again been ordered to man the trenches of the front line: as of that July 14, undermanned as seen above, the Newfoundlanders began another tour in the trenches where...*we were shelled heavily by enemy's 5.9 howitzers and a good deal of damage was done to the trenches* (excerpt from the 1st Battalion War Diary).

(continued)

A second re-enforcement draft from Rouen had then arrived days later, on July 21, while the Newfoundland Battalion was at Acheux and then, only three days afterwards – at the very time day that the Prime Minister of Newfoundland had visited the unit – a third draft of sixty other ranks had arrived in Beauval and reported...to duty.

(Right above: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time – sunk in the ramparts of the city of Ypres, when the Newfoundland Battalion was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *The same re-constructed ramparts as shown above, viewed from just outside the city and the far side of the moat which still partially surrounds it – image from 2010*)

On July 27-28 of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – maybe even fewer - even after still further re-enforcement – would move north and enter the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

The unit 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: *Canadian trenches in Sanctuary Wood, not far removed from the Newfoundland Battalion's positions during August and September of 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 would incur casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

And it was to be there in *the Salient* in the sector of a place called *Railway Wood*, that the Newfoundland Battalion would soon be serving after its transfer from France.

(Right above: *Railway Wood, the Newfoundland positions at the time, almost a century later – a monument to the twelve Royal Engineers buried alive there may just be perceived on the periphery of the trees – photograph from 2014*)

(Right: *The already-battered city of Ypres seen here towards the end of the year 1915 – and some eight months before the Newfoundlanders were to be posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)



On October 8, 1916, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return southwards.

The unit was thereupon to be transported by train back into France, back into the area of the...*First Battle of – the Somme.*

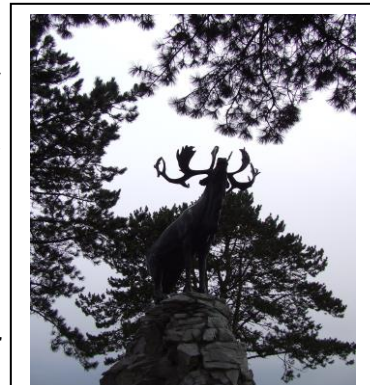
Just four days after unit's return to France from Belgium, on October 12 of 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to take to the offensive; it was at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.



(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)

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

(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 then to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it had furnished 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 Infantry Brigade of which, of course, the Newfoundland unit was a battalion.

(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 retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving continuously in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks retired to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the Battalion had started to wend its way back to the front lines.



(continued)

Back at *the Front* the Newfoundland unit had continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties, almost all likely due to enemy artillery – during the late fall and early winter. It was to be a period interrupted only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas season, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

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

The parent unit had therefore begun to retire in anticipation thereof once again from *the Front* on December 8, although a goodly number of its personnel, two-hundred-sixty *other ranks* - more than fifty per cent of its strength at the time - was to be seconded on December 11 for several days' work at Carnoy and at Fricourt.

The afore-mentioned Christmas festivities – apparently a turkey dinner washed down with...*real English ale*...- having been completed, it was not to be until a further sixteen days had passed that on January 11 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 town of Airaines.

From the railway station there it had then entrained for the small town of Corbie where it thereupon took over billets which it already occupied for a short period only two months before. Days later again the unit had continued its progress, once again on foot, back up to the forward area and to...*active service*.

That recent six-week Christmas respite spent far to the rear by now a thing of the past, 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 fatalities – of 1917.

And it had been by then the beginning of the winter period. As had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the *Great War* – that of 1916-1917 would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable – there was to be a shortage of fuel and many other things - for most of the combatants of both sides.

It would also be a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were to be kept busy, particularly, so it seems - from at least Canadian medical documentation - with thousands of cases of dental work.

This period had also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and the recent weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion these exercises had been at least partially undertaken from February 4 to 18 in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.

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



On February 18 the 1st Battalion would begin a five-day trek back from there to the forward area where it was to go back into the firing-line on February 23 to relieve a unit of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. It had been at a place called Saily-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans would be both lively – and deadly: 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 to be withdrawn on February 25...to return just three days later.

The Battalion had by then been carrying with it orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Saily-Saillisel...to be carried out on March 1.

(Right: *The fighting during the period of the Battalion's posting to Saily-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(?))



The aforesaid planned raid of the German positions at Saily-Saillisel was to go ahead a little later than scheduled as it appears that the enemy had also made plans. The reciprocal infantry action(s) had thus continued for the better part of two days, March 2 and 3.

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

After the confrontation at Saily-Saillisel, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered retired to the rear by train, to an encampment at Meaulté. There, and later at *Camps-en-Amienois* – even further behind the lines and where the unit had spent the preceding Christmas period – the 1st Battalion would spend almost the entire remainder of the month.

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



After Saily-Saillisel the month of March would be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near those communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events.



They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band come from Ayr, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.

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

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had commenced making 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: *The Canadian National Memorial which has stood atop Vimy Ridge since its inauguration in 1936 – photograph from 2010*)



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



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

(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen in 1917, from the western, 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 would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, the ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux had proved to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war: four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone*.

After the debacle of April 14 the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux for but a few days. 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.

(Right: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the vestiges of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed community. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

When the thirty-nine *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen had reported to the 1st Battalion on April 18, they were to be just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers.



(continued)

There had been by that time only two-hundred twenty *other ranks* in number plus twelve officers serving with some two-hundred personnel of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. Those of the 1st Newfoundland Battalion would spend the 19th salvaging equipment and burying the dead.

They had then remained *in situ* until the 23rd.



(Right above: *Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras.– photograph from 2007*)

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 had in fact been an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies.

It apparently had not been a particularly successful venture, at least not in the sector of the 1st Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

And the Newfoundlanders had also sustained further casualties: ten...*killed in action*, three ...*missing in action*, and forty-eight...*wounded*.

Late on that evening of April 23, the 1st Battalion had been ordered to retire 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*)

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



The *Battle of Arras* had by that time been proceeding to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-month – May 15 - but the Newfoundland unit was not to be further involved in any co-ordinated offensive action – it had been too exhausted; this now would be a period when the 1st Battalion was to be posted in a nondescript fashion on the *Arras Front*, in and out of the quieter trenches.

On May 7 it had been on the move once again and marching to different billets in Berneville where it was to be the subject of a war journalist and photographer.



(Preceding page: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – as cited immediately above - in early May, perhaps the 7th, of 1917 – from The War Illustrated*)

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.

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 days to be spent at *Caribou Camp*, where – as seen in an earlier paragraph – they were to be joined almost immediately by Private Mews and his re-enforcement draft having arrived from Rouen on July 2.

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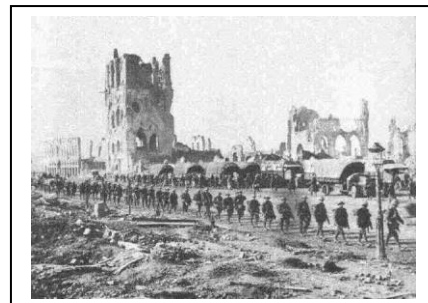
The Newfoundlanders, having moved across the Franco-Belgian frontier at the end of June and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, were to spend only their first few days, enough time to be re-enforced, at the aforementioned *Caribou Camp*.



The unit's next posting, on July 5, was to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city. The Battalion remained in the area for a week before it was withdrawn to prepare for the upcoming offensive to commence on July 31.

(Right above: *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*)

The low-lying area, Belgian *Flanders*, in which the 1st Battalion now was - 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.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – Passchendaele field in the fall of 1917 – 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.



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

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 below) on October 9.

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



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

A week and a day following the mid-August engagement at the *Steenbeek* there were then four weeks of relative calm for the Newfoundland Battalion. This period began on August 24 with a four-day withdrawal from the fighting and the forward area to *Penton Camp* situated to the north-west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe.



The reprieve continued while the British forces were to re-enforce and re-organize after a month of fighting that had not been proceeding as well as the British High Command had optimistically anticipated.

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

The Newfoundland unit was to go back to war during the last days of what had been a fine month of September. The weather of that month was to be in contrast to what had gone before – but, as the fighting at *Passchendaele* started once more...so also did the rains.

(continued)

Once back in their trenches in late September and early October the personnel of the Newfoundland unit prepared for their next concerted attack on German positions. It would come some two weeks later, on October 9, and it would come about at the *Broembeek*,

* * * * *

Private Mews may well have served at the *Steenbeek*, but he was surely not at the *Broembeek*. After those aforesaid four weeks of being withdrawn to the rear of the lines during a lull in the fighting, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had, as seen above, moved to the front-line trenches and there relieved the 4th Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment.

The Newfoundlanders were to serve there for a brief four days, but long enough for the Battalion War Diarist to record on or about September 29 that...*During tour in line there were 34 Casualties viz: 7 killed & 27 wounded – all other Ranks.*

Private Mews had been among that number. He is recorded as having incurred a gun-shot wound to the right knee*. He was evacuated from the field to the 87th Field Ambulance and forwarded from there to the 4th Casualty Clearing Station at Lozinghem** before being transferred once again, on this occasion to the 53rd General Hospital (also known as the *London General*) at the coastal town of Wimereux – although a second source cites nearby Boulogne.

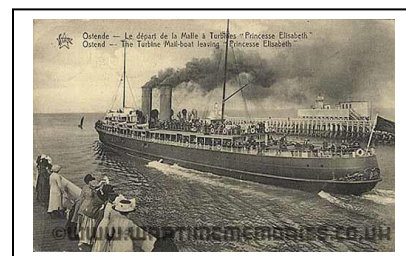


**His record documents his wound as occurring on September 27 but, then again, the same record has him at the 87th Field Ambulance on the 26th.*

***Several names such as Mendinghem, Bandagehem and Dozinghem were invented by the British troops as they resembled the Belgian and northern-French fashion of naming villages. These sites were occupied by medical facilities only – and the inevitable cemeteries which today remain. But Lozinghem seems to be an exception in that it is a real place – however much the name lends itself to the morbid spirit of the British soldier.*

(Right above: *The coastal resort of Wimereux – which during the conflict was to become part of a large medical complex – here seen at some time just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Not long afterwards, Private Mews' condition was deemed to be such as to merit his passage back to the United Kingdom. This came to be on October 20 when the hospital ship *Princess Elisabeth* carried him back to England whereupon he was admitted for further treatment into the King George Hospital on Stamford Street, London, where he was to remain for some three-and-a-half months.



(Right above: *The image of the 'Princess Elisabeth' leaving the port of Ostend(e) is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. A Belgian vessel, she was loaned to the British, apparently from November, 1916, until September of 1919 for use as a hospital ship –*

although other sources disagree on these dates. Neither does the available accommodation for sick and wounded appear to be very clear: perhaps some three-hundred thirty.)

On January 29 of the New Year, 1918, Private Mews was released from care and was thereupon granted the customary ten-day furlough granted military personnel upon discharge from hospital. He apparently then reported to the new Regimental Depot on February 11.

The Depot and the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the now-Royal Newfoundland Regiment* had recently moved quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to *Hazely Down Camp*, Hampshire, not far distant from the cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was to there that Private Mews would have reported...*to duty*...– with ‘H’ Company - at the beginning of that February.



**An official letter to that effect is dated January 25, 1918.*

(Right above: *Troops march through a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – image from The War Illustrated*)

It was during this period that he was admitted into the Hilsea Military Hospital in the naval port-city of Portsmouth for three weeks of attention to a venereal complaint. On April 17 of 1918 the medical authorities pronounced him to be...*fit to re-join unit*.

Some three months later again Private Mews was ordered to return to the Continent and so it was as a soldier of the draft from *Hazely Down Camp* of May 10 (either the 44th or the 45th) that he sailed from England – likely from the Channel port of Folkestone – to report to the Base depot at Rouen on May 13 for that inevitable period of final preparation. In this instance it seems to have been only a matter of a few days as he is recorded as having reported...*to duty*...with the 1st Battalion – with ‘C’ Company - in the field only four days later again, on May 17.



He was one of a draft of thirty-five other ranks to report to the Newfoundland Battalion on that day.

(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)

* * * * *

The action at the *Broembeek* had come about on October 9, some twelve days after Private Mews’ departure for medical treatment. Having been relieved only two days after the fighting, on October 11 the Newfoundlanders had then marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe to be transported to *Swindon Camp* near Proven.

Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit was once more to board a train.

(Right below: *An innocuous, placid stream shown here, in 1917 the Broembeek was a torrent which would flood the surrounding terrain, transforming it into a quagmire. – photograph from 2009*)

By ten-thirty that same evening, the Newfoundland Battalion had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and would now march the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.

The Newfoundlanders were still there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and three days later when, on November 17, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to be ordered yet again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it had begun to move further eastward, by this time on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.



On November 19, while on the move, the Battalion would be issued as it went with...*war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of the night it had marched to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, had moved up into its forming-up area.

From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten that morning, and with bugles blowing, the 1st Battalion had advanced to the fray.



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

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

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

The Newfoundland Battalion thus once again had been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of the communities of Marcoing and Masnières where a Caribou stands today and in the area of the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred

fifty-three officers and men who had advanced into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day*.

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

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



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



After the exertions of *Cambrai*, the Newfoundlanders had been withdrawn from the line, the last casualties incurred on December 4. The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment by then numbered the strength of only a single company - whereas a full battalion comprises four.

The withdrawal from the theatre of battle had begun at half past five on the morning of December 5 with an eleven-kilometre march. On the evening of the same day the Newfoundland unit had taken a train which was to become the victim of an enemy artillery bombardment with the engine hit and forced off the track. Thus it was not until the morning of the morrow that the 1st Battalion had reached its destination, Humbercourt.

The 1st Battalion had then remained in the vicinity of Humbercourt, to the west of Arras, until December 18 when it was to march to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There the unit would spend both Christmas and New Year.

The weather was now to oblige during those later days at Fressin where the Newfoundland Battalion was to be posted for sixteen days; the gods would allow the Newfoundlanders a reminder of home: snow – perhaps a bit too much at times apparently.

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



(continued)

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

The 1st Battalion's posting during that winter and early spring was to be divided into the usual duties: the front-line trenches, behind them the support positions and, yet further to the rear again the various reserve sectors.

The troops would move in a rotating pattern which would see them spend approximately a week in each posting – although the arrangement was very flexible – and at times there had been further and longer withdrawals to the rear for training, re-organization and what was often to be called *rest*: it hardly ever was.

The eight-day respite at *Brake Camp*, Vlamertinghe from February 4 to 11 (*inclusive*) was to be an example of the last-mentioned: work-parties, inspections by...*the Brass...*, the awarding of decorations and the announcement that the Newfoundland Regiment was now to be, as of January 25 of that 1918, the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment*, had been some of the highlights of that particular period.

**The title had been granted on January 25, 1918, in a War Office Letter (Number 058/4282 (AG 10)) – Document Collection 145.2R21 (D6).*

On the above-mentioned February 11 the Newfoundland unit had moved westward across the Franco-Belgian border to the area of Steenvoorde where it was to be billeted for the following eight days. There, and elsewhere, there was yet work to do: on the 19th day of that February the Newfoundland Battalion had marched back into Belgium and into the town of Poperinghe (today *Poperinge*) where it was to be billeted for a further eight days to be employed in the construction and amelioration of nearby defences.

During the interim of the late autumn of 1917 and the early part of the winter that had followed, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the *Great War*: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians on the *Eastern Front* now allowed them.



It had been expected that they would launch a spring offensive - which they would – in fact they were to unleash a number of them*.

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

(continued)

(Preceding page: *Some of the countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders had built a tram-line in January and had been stationed for a week and then five days in March and likewise for five days in early April – photograph from 2011*)

In the area of Zonnebeke, the sector where the Newfoundland unit was now to serve in March and April when at *the Front*, the personnel of the Battalion had continued to dig and build and wait. While the Germans had gone to the offensive elsewhere on earlier dates, the blow would not fall in the northern area until April.

As suggested in the above paragraphs, the Germans, by this time re-enforced, had done as was expected of them: Ludendorff's armies had launched a powerful thrust against the British on March 21, the first day of that spring of 1918, although not in the North where the Newfoundlanders were stationed; they had struck at first in the area of - and just south of - *the Somme*, there to overrun the battlefields of 1916 and well beyond. For a while their advance had seemed unstoppable.

(Right below: *British troops accompanied by refugees in Flanders in April, 1918 – from Illustration*)

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



On the day after the first heavy bombardments of April 9, and as the Germans had approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were to be deployed to meet them. On that April 10 the Newfoundlanders, having been due to come out of the line and to move back to the area of *the Somme*, were instead to board buses at three o'clock in the afternoon, thereupon to be directed southward, towards the border town of Nieppe.



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

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



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

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

(Preceding page: *Ground just to the east of Bailleul where the 1st Battalion was to be in action during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

Then, as the 1st Battalion War Diary cites...*the remainder of 'C' Coy. under Capt. Paterson, M.C. and Hqrs. took up a position along a light railway line and prepared to fight to a finish. ...there can be no doubt that it was Hqrs., 'A' & 'C' Coys. that by their resistance saved what would have been at least a very serious position for the whole 34th Division**.

'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening – would be equally heavily involved.

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

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

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



By April 18 the Newfoundland Battalion had taken over a sector of the new *Front Line* to be relieved by French troops three days afterwards, on the 21st. It had then retired in preparation for a more permanent departure from the field (see further below).

By this time, the German advance having been held and the danger passed, on April 24 the 1st Battalion of the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* was to bid farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the 88th Brigade and 29th Division. On the morrow, April 25, there had been a full recessional parade complete with speeches from Brigadier-General Freyberg, Commanding Officer of the 88th Brigade.

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

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

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

following day, April 30, they had been on the march again, a further eight kilometres to the community of St-Josse where they would remain for the next ten days.

St-Josse is at a distance of some five or six kilometres from the coast and about ten kilometres from the well-known sea-side resort of Le Touquet with its fine beach, Paris-Plage. During the next week, and at times afterwards during its next posting, the Battalion would avail of this luxury – on that part of the beach not reserved for officers.

The Newfoundland Battalion had remained posted at St-Josse until May 10 when it had then marched a further six kilometres inland to the south-east to the community of Écuire. There it was to relieve the troops responsible for the safety and security of the nearby British General Headquarters at Montreuil-sur-Mer and of Douglas Haig, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



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

The protective role of the Newfoundland unit was now to continue until the end of June but the cosmetic honour of this duty was to mask the reality that the 1st Battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment had no longer been capable of serving in the field.

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

And while it is true that a number of re-enforcement drafts were to arrive at Écuire during this period, for the most part their numbers – but not that of Private Mews - had been in single digits or only just higher.

As recorded in an earlier paragraph, it had been during this period spent at General Headquarters that Private Mews, on May 17, was to report to the Newfoundland Battalion as one of a re-enforcement drive.

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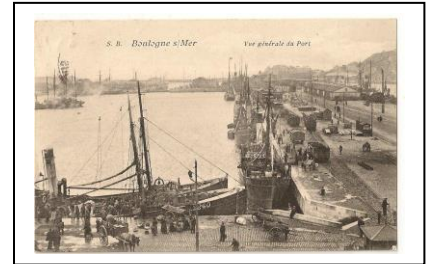
The posting to Écuire completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders were encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihe – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.



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

(continued)

For some of that time, however, Private Mews was to be receiving medical attention in the 7th General Hospital, also known as *Malassa Hospital*, established at the time in nearby Boulogne. Neither the reason for his hospitalization nor the date of his admission seems to be recorded, but he was released...*to duty*...at the Base Depot at either Rouen or Etaples on or about August 16, and ordered from there to re-join the 1st Battalion...*in the field*...which he did on August 23.



(Right above: *The French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

Re-enforced, the Newfoundlanders returned to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28th Brigade of 9th Scottish Division. 1st Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it would finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (*Ingooigem*).

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2nd British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive**. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge.



After almost four years of stalemate, it was once again to be a conflict of movement.

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

**This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3rd Somme.*

It had been just before mid-night of October 1 that the Newfoundland Battalion was to take up positions in the area of the railway station at Ledeghem and to relieve the Royal Scots. On October 2...*Orders had been received to prepare to continue the advance but final orders were never received.*



The Newfoundland unit would not attack nor was the enemy to counter-attack on that day and both sides had remained where they were.

In fact, the 1st Battalion retired on October 6. But when it returned on October 14 it was to be a part of an attack which would drive the enemy out of Ledeghem. The cost was to be steep: the fighting of those two weeks in the area was to result in some three-hundred Newfoundland casualties. But the momentum was there and the offensive was to continue.

(Preceding page: *The re-constructed village of Ledeghem, as it appeared almost a century afterwards – photograph from 2010*)

It, the advance, despite still fierce resistance at times, was relentless. On the night of October 19-20, 1st Battalion crossed the Lys Canal under fire just to the east of Courtrai – today *Kortrijk* - on barrel bridges and on the morrow was advancing towards the village of Vichte. Almost another week of combat saw the Newfoundland unit in Inghoyghem.



(Right: *The Lys – both canal and river – at a point not far from the crossing-place – right to left - of October 19-20, 1918 - The Harlebeke Caribou stands about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *The valley of the Scheldt as seen from Inghoyghem, the Newfoundlanders' furthest point of advance on October 26, 1918 – photograph from 2010*)

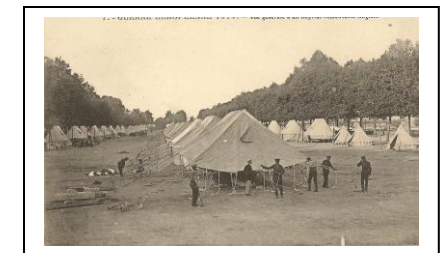


The 1st Battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, turned its back on the Great War on October 26 and from Inghoyghem marched to quarters in the rear area at Harlebeke. Whether or not they realized it at the time, for the Newfoundlanders their part in the Great War was over although the unit was to be a part of the Allied occupation force in Germany before it was to retire from the Continent.

By the time that the Newfoundland unit crossed the frontier into Germany, however, Private Mews was once more in hospital. On this occasion it was to the 3rd Canadian General Hospital in Boulogne that he had been evacuated on November 5. He was there diagnosed as suffering from bronchitis. After discharge from hospital to the 10th Convalescent Depot on an unspecified date, Private Mews was released on the 17th of the same month to the Re-enforcement Depot at Étaples.

He is documented as having subsequently joined his unit on the following day, but exactly where is not cited.

Private Mews' medical problems were to continue: he is recorded as *Admitted with Bronchitis 22/12/18* into the 44th Casualty Clearing Station. Then, on January 4 of the New Year 1919, he was admitted into the 32nd Stationary Hospital at Wimereux.



(Preceding page: *A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)

Six days later again, Private Mews embarked for the United Kingdom - on January 10 - on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. Denis* and there was admitted on the same day into the 4th London General Hospital at Denmark Hill in south-east London.

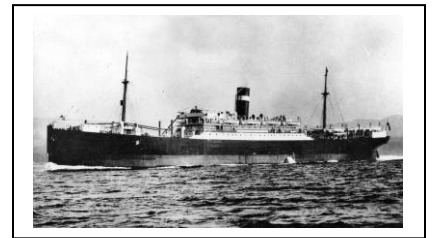
(Right: *The image of a peace-time St. Denis is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel was originally built for use by the Great Eastern Railways as a cross-Channel ferry and was given the name 'Munich' which was quickly changed after the outbreak of the Great War. Requisitioned for use as a hospital ship, she served as such from October of 1914 until October of 1919 and was capable of accommodating two-hundred thirty-one sick and wounded.*



During the Second World War she was captured by the Germans during their advance in 1940 into the Netherlands before being re-taken by the Allies five years later. She was used by them until 1949-1950 when she was retired to be broken up.)

Re-diagnosed by this time as having contracted pulmonary tuberculosis, Private Mews was to remain at Denmark Hill until March 5 when he was transferred across the city to the Brompton Road Hospital in West London for further treatment. He remained in that institution until June 23 when he was released, his condition by then reported as...*much improved*.

This release from *the Brompton* came about as the result of the decision to re-patriate Private Mews back to Newfoundland. He must have travelled from London to Glasgow by train on that same time of June 23-24, as he is then documented as having sailed from that above-named Scottish port on the evening of the next day, the 24th, on HM Transport *Cassandra*.



(Right above: *The image of the steamship 'Cassandra' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)*

Cassandra sailed directly to Newfoundland and arrived in St. John's on July 1, 1919, the third anniversary of the debacle at Beaumont-Hamel. Upon his arrival, Private Mews was admitted into the *Escasoni Hospital* on Portugal Cove Road. Two weeks later, on July 15, he was accorded a month's leave and ordered to report to the Depot on August 16.

On September 2, a Medical Board *Recommended Discharge from the Army* and also that he...*Remain in Escasoni Hospital*. About this time, on September 5, he filled in and signed a document to the effect that he hoped...*to resume former occupation...*, that of a fisherman. It was, alas, not to be.

His discharge from the Newfoundland Regiment was confirmed on September 19, 1919.

(continued)

The son of Samuel Mews (often also found simply as *Mew*), lumberman (likely deceased by the time of enlistment, certainly by that of the 1921 Census), and of Elizabeth Mews (née *Godwin/ Godden* (?)) – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Birchy Bay, Notre Dame Bay, he was also brother to Susannah, Anna-Maria, Adolphus and to Edmond.



**The couple had been married on the Barr'd Islands on November 24 of 1887.*

**This family monument (in the centre of the photograph) which stands in Birchy Bay Methodist Cemetery commemorates the life and service of Private William Mews.*

Private Mews was reported as having...*died in hospital*...in St. John's on April 17, 1920.

William Mews had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-two years and eleven months: date of birth in Wild Bight, Newfoundland, December 22, 1894 (from his Discharge Papers) but also November 21, 1893 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

Private William Mews was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 30, 2023.

