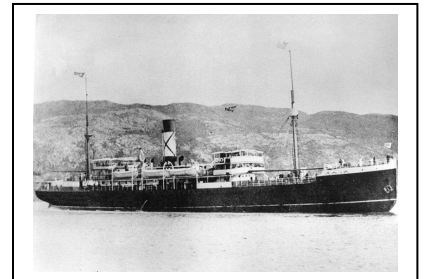


Company Sergeant Major Victor William Miles (Regimental Number 214), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont.



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *tobacco manufacturer* working for the sum of seventy dollars a month, Victor William Miles presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 31 of 1914, four weeks precisely after the *Declaration of War*. The examination having pronounced him as...*fit for foreign service*...he then enlisted eight days afterwards – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 (this included a ten-cent Field Allowance) - on September 8. He was a recruit of the First Draft.

Thirteen days later again, on September 21 Private Miles received promotion to the rank of sergeant – the promotion appears to have been directly from the status of private soldier to that of senior non-commissioned officer.



There was now to be yet a further wait of ten days – although training was to be ongoing - before Sergeant Miles was attested on October 1. He then embarked on October 3 with the others of the *First Five Hundred* onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.

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

The ship sailed on the morrow to its rendezvous off the south coast of the Island where she was to join the convoy transporting the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division across the Atlantic.



In the United Kingdom Sergeant Miles trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; at Edinburgh Castle – where it provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles; and later again at the tented *Stobs Camp* near the town of Hawick to the south-east of Edinburgh.

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

(continued)

It was during this period, just before leaving the posting at the Scottish capital city for *Stobs Camp*, on May 6, that Sergeant Miles was further promoted, to the rank of company quarter-master sergeant.

(Right below: *The Newfoundland Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp and about to be presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915* – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', were then sent south to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot; meanwhile the two junior Companies, the later-arrived 'E' and 'F\*', were sent to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, where they were to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion.



**(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 – photograph from Bain News Services via Wikipedia)**



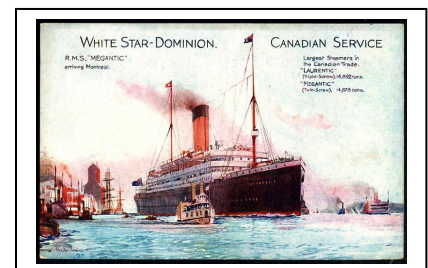
***\*On July 10, 1915, 'F' Company had arrived at Stobs Camp from Newfoundland, its personnel raising the numbers of the unit to battalion establishment strength, and thus permitting it to be ordered to active service. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, comprising those four Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.***

It had then been during that period spent at Aldershot that Sergeant Miles of 'B' Company – he was not alone in doing so - had been prevailed upon, he on August 13, 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 only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.***



**(Right above: Some of the men of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915 – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)**



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

**(continued)**

On August 20, 1915, Sergeant Miles and his charges of 'B' Company 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 two weeks billeted in British barracks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, he disembarked with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(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 below: *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*)



The *Gallipoli Campaign* was to be a debacle: Flies, dust, disease, frost-bite, floods – and 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 it would 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.*

(Right: *A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where Company Quarter-Master Sergeant Miles was to serve in the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011*)



Sergeant Miles was one of the several who would succumb to sickness and he was subsequently evacuated on board – no date appears to be available - His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Karapara* from *Suvla Bay* – possibly via *Mudros Bay* on the Greek island of Lemnos – to be hospitalized on Malta on October 11, 1915. The only diagnosis in his file records that he was suffering from pyrexia (a high fever).

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

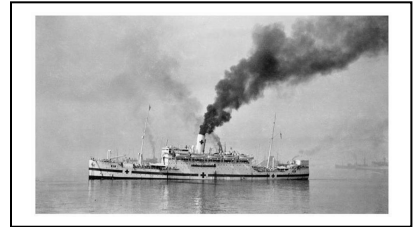


(continued)



\* \* \* \* \*

(Right below: *Karapara* was built for the British India Steam Navigation Company in 1914 but was apparently requisitioned by the government immediately upon entering service. In August of 1915 she sailed to operate during the Gallipoli Campaign. Having survived the Great War, she was again requisitioned as a hospital ship during the conflict of 1939-1945. The image of *Karapara* is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)



(Right: Former British medical establishments, today abandoned, on the Mediterranean island of Malta, a once-British possession at the time of the Great War: The island has been independent since 1964. – photograph from 2011)



There appear to be no further details among Sergeant Mile's papers about this episode until the next entry of some seven weeks later. It records that on December 2 he was taken on board His Majesty's Transport *Nile*, on or about that date having been deemed as *fit for active service* and discharged from hospital.



He thereupon took passage from Malta for Egypt where he almost certainly spent the following eight weeks at the British Base Depot of Sidi Bishr, established in proximity to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria.

He eventually re-joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on January 26 of the New Year, 1916, some eleven days after the Newfoundlander unit had been posted to Suez (see below).

\* \* \* \* \*

Ten weeks after Sergeant Miles' hospitalization on the island of Malta, on the night of December 19-20, 1915, the British had abandoned the 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 was to be evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, and some to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case would the respite be of a long duration; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been transferred only two days later to re-enforce the failure at *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 in the picture. – photograph from 2011)

(continued)



The British and the Anzac forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps were also to serve at *Gallipoli* – had by then been only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the Peninsula would be undertaken. This operation had taken place on the night of January 8-9, and the Newfoundland Battalion was to provide some of the rear-guard for this second withdrawal as well\*.



(Right above: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was 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: *The same 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces and by the Newfoundlanders who were the last soldiers off the beach: vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011*)



(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*)



After the British evacuation of the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been shipped to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, having arrived there on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month.

The Newfoundlanders were thence to be immediately transferred southward to Suez, one of the ports at the southern end of the canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders – and the arrival of Sergeant Miles from Alexandria - since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division to which the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was attached had not yet been decided\*.

*\*Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.*

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

On March 14, the Newfoundlanders had taken ship through Port Tewfiq, also at the southern end of the *Suez Canal*, for the French port of Marseilles, and had disembarked there on March 22, en route to the *Western Front*.



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

Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train would arrive at the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having travelled unused in a separate wagon.

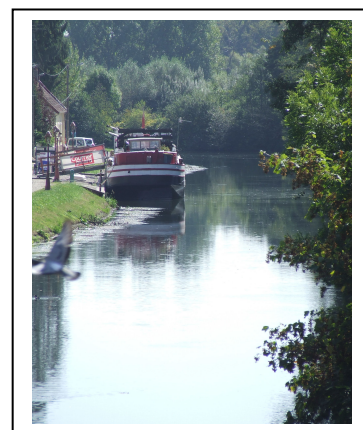


De-training at the local station at two in the morning, the Newfoundlanders still were to have a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they had marched on their way from the station. But some three months later, *the Somme* would have become a part of their history.

On April 13, the Newfoundland Battalion paraded into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy. There its personnel would be billeted, would receive reinforcements and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the trenches of the *Western Front*.



For the remainder of the spring of 1916, the Newfoundlanders were to be preparing for the British campaign of that upcoming summer, the battles to be fought on the ground named for that languid, meandering river flowing through the region, and over which the parent unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had marched only weeks previously at Pont-Rémy: *the Somme*.

During that period, on May 29 Sergeant Miles received further advancement and was appointed to the rank of acting company sergeant-major, a promotion which would subsequently be confirmed on June 11 while the Battalion was in billets at Louvencourt and in training for the imminent British summer offensive.

(Right below: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)

If there is one name and one 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\*.



(continued)

***\*Perhaps ironically, the majority of the Battalion's casualties was sustained while advancing 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: Looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences - The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009)***



***(Right: Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village (see below). – 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.***



**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 would prove to be the biggest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps worse, it was to continue for the next four and a half months.**

**The son of Henry Miles (former planter and fisherman) and of Selina Miles\*, his own address was recorded as 14, Pennywell Road in St. John's. He had perhaps but a single sibling, his brother Frank (Francis) – to whom he had willed his all - of the same address – but by 1921 Quidi Vidi Road - and working with *Harvey & Co.*, and whom Sergeant Miles recorded as being his next of kin. Frank apparently later moved to the U.S.A..**



***\*Henry Miles was a widower, Selina Miles a widow (formerly Cassel, née Philpott). The couple was married on November 21, 1880 at Herring Neck.***

***(Right: a grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after the action at Beaumont-Hamel – from ...)***

**Company Sergeant-Major Miles was reported as having been *killed in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*.**



Victor William Miles had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-eight years: date of birth at Herring Neck, District of Twillingate, May 24, 1885 (from Anglican Parish Records).

*(The photograph at right of Private(?) Miles is from Provincial Archives.)*

Company Sergeant-Major Victor William Miles was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 12, 2023.