

Private William John Neville (Regimental Number 376), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a *shoe-maker* – likely with the *Nfld. Boot & Shoe Manufacturing Co. Ltd.* on Job Street, as was his father – and working for an annual two-hundred forty dollars, William John Neville presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 29 of 1914 – just three weeks and four days after the *Declaration of War* – for a medical examination. It was an exercise which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

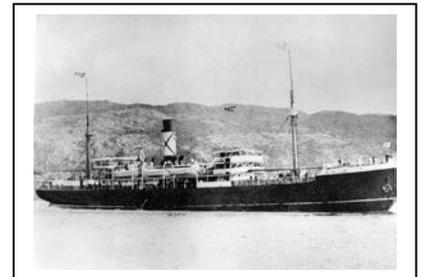
Ten days later, on September 8, William Neville returned to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, on this second occasion for enlistment, whereupon he was engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*. A recruit of the First Draft, he was likely now ordered to the tented area by that time established on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the East End of St. John's where a four-five week course of training was already under way.

The regimental authorities were *also* busy by now, preparing for the transport of this, the first body of volunteers, to *overseas* - and later to *active – service.*

At the beginning of the month of October a large number of the new recruits underwent attestation; Private Neville was one of that number, taking his oath of allegiance on the first day of October.

Two days later, after the Newfoundland contingent – it was not as yet a battalion – of 'A' and 'B' Companies had paraded through the city, it embarked onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* which was awaiting in St. John's Harbour.

Private Neville and his comrades-in-arms of the *First Five Hundred* – also to be known to history as the *Blue Puttees* – were now to sit on board ship for the best part of a day as it was not to be until the morrow that *Florizel* would sail to the south coast of the Island and to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the Canadian Division to the United Kingdom.



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

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

In the United Kingdom this first Newfoundland contingent was to train in three venues during the late autumn of 1914 and then the winter of 1914-1915: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; and lastly at Edinburgh Castle where the unit was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.



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

Some three months later, on May 11, and some seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit – by now ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies re-enforced by ‘C’, ‘D’, and ‘E’ - was ordered moved from the Scottish capital to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.



It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent received the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength\*. The now-formed 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered ready to be ordered on ‘active service’.

*\*The number was about fifteen hundred, sufficient to provide four ‘fighting’ companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

(Right: *The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915.* – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ – Private Neville among their ranks - were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot.



This force, now designated as the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

Meanwhile the two junior companies, the later-arrived ‘E’ and the aforementioned last-arrived ‘F’, were ordered transferred to Scotland’s west coast, to Ayr, there 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* – the photograph is from *Bain News Services* via the *Wikipedia* web-site.)



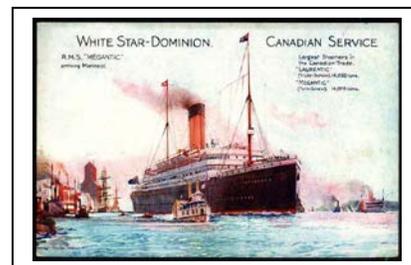
It was also during this period while at Aldershot that on August 14 Private Neville was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion for the *duration of the war*.\*

*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was likely to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

(Right: *Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.)



While 'E' and 'F' Companies were beginning their posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr, on August 20 of 1915 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Plymouth-Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks.

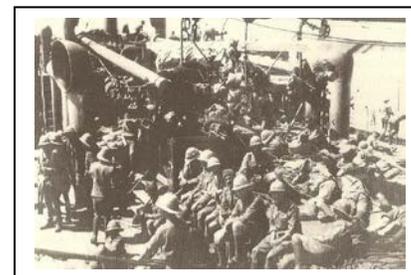


(Right adjacent: *The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

There, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right: *Kangaroo Beach, where the officers and men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is to be seen in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on 'A' Beach.* – photograph taken in 2011)



(Right: *Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros: Megantic on August 29, Ausonia on September 18, or Prince Abbas on September 19* – *Whichever the case, they were yet to land on Gallipoli – Dardanelles to the French, Çanakkale to the Turks.* – from *Provincial Archives*)

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



**When the Newfoundlanders landed from their transport ship at Suvla Bay on that September night of 1915 they would disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.**

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

**Flies, dust, disease, the frost-bite and the floods – and of course the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command\* had ever anticipated – were eventually to overwhelm the British-led forces and those of the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only Suvla Bay but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.**

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

***\*Many of the commanders chosen were second-rate, had been brought out of retirement, and had little idea of how to fight – let alone of how to win. One of the generals at Suvla, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.***



**November 26 would see the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm was to strike the Suvla Bay area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be the priority.**

**There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.**

**On the night of December 19-20, the British 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 were to be evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of Cape Helles, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.**



**(continued)**

**(Preceding page: *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* – were now to be only 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 above: *‘W’ Beach at Cape Helles as it was 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 above: *‘W’ Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in that January of 1916 and by the Newfoundlanders who were to be the last soldiers off the beach: Vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011)***

**Immediately after the British evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, to arrive there on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to the vicinity of Suez, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division had yet to be decided\*.**



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

**(Right above: *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)***



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

**(continued)**

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



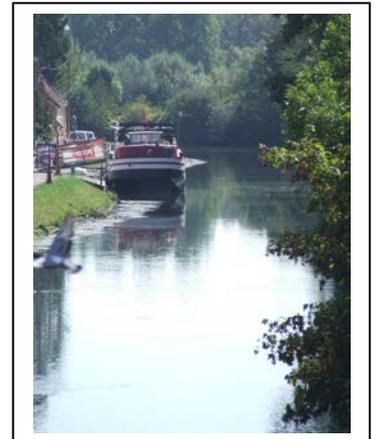
(Right above: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles.* – from a vintage post-card)

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

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

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

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



On April 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive reinforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front*, two of the four Companies – 'A', and 'B' – were to take over several support positions from a British unit\* before the entire Newfoundland unit was then ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.

*\*It should be said that the Newfoundland Battalion and two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles who were serving at the time in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lincolnshire Regiment Battalion, were then the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles - true also on the day of the attack on July 1.*

(continued)



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

Having then been withdrawn at the end of that April to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders were soon to be preparing for the upcoming British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, that flowed – and still does so today – through the region.

If there is one name and date in Newfoundland history which is etched in the collective once-national memory, it is that of Beaumont-Hamel on July 1 of 1916; and if any numbers are remembered, they are those of the eight-hundred who went *over the top* in the third wave of the attack on that morning, and of the sixty-eight unwounded present at muster some twenty-four hours later\*.



(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel: Looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences: The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009*)

(Right: *A view of Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)*)



*\*Perhaps ironically, the majority of the Battalion's casualties was to be incurred during the advance from the third line of British trenches to the first line from where the attack proper was to be made, and while struggling through British wire laid to protect the British positions from any German attack.*

There are other numbers of course: the fifty-seven thousand British casualties incurred in four hours on that same morning of which nineteen-thousand were recorded as having been *killed in action or died of wounds*.

It was to be the largest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, just as depressing, the carnage of *the Somme* would continue for the next four and a half months.

(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village. – photographs from 2010 and 2015*)

*In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists today – at the time comprising two communities: Beaumont, a village on the German side of the lines, and Hamel which was behind those of the British. No-Man's-Land, on which the Newfoundland Memorial Park lies partially today, was on land that separated Beaumont from Hamel.*



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



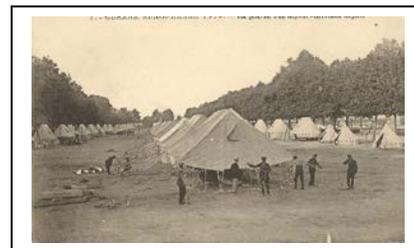
Private Neville was reported wounded at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, the first day of *the Somme*, having incurred gunshot wounds to the back. He is recorded as eventually evacuated to the 8th Casualty Clearing Station at Bailleul(?\*), being transferred from there to the 29<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Gezaincourt on July 2.

*\*The 8<sup>th</sup> CCS reported here is likely to have been, in fact, the 8<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance: not only would this be the normal chain of transfer from front to rear area, but the 8<sup>th</sup> CCS at the time was established in the area of the northern French town of Bailleul, some eighty kilometres away. Two moves of that distance in the space of twenty-four hours – particularly at that time – hardly seem feasible.*



*The 8<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance in question on the other hand was attached to the British 3<sup>rd</sup> Division at the time, only kilometres distant from the area where the Newfoundlanders were fighting.*

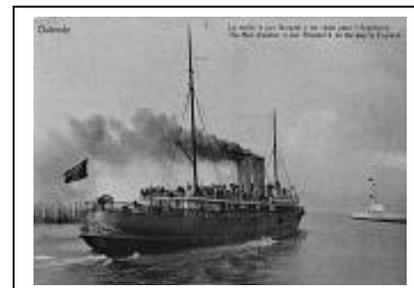
(Right above: A further view of the re-constructed trench system in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?))



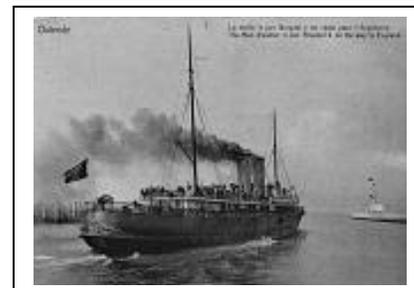
(Right: A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War: Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card)



(Right: Many of the Field Ambulances and Casualty Clearing Stations of the Great War, if in situ for any length of time, cleared ground for use as cemeteries. This is Gezaincourt Communal Cemetery Extension, built for the use of, among others, the 29<sup>th</sup> CCS. Within its bounds are the remains of just fewer than seven-hundred soldiers, mostly British and Empire (Commonwealth) but among which are those of seventy-six former adversaries. – photograph from 2015)



From Gezaincourt Private Neville was forwarded to and admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian General Hospital at Boulogne on July 4. Later on that same day, he was taken on board the Belgian hospital ship *Jan Breydel* – a second source has HMHS *Dieppe* - for the cross-Channel journey to the United Kingdom.



**(Preceding page: Seen here before the Great War, a well-known ferry plying the waters of the North Sea between Belgium and England, the 'Jan Breydel' was one of four vessels of that nationality which were converted for use as hospital ships. – the image is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)**

Arriving back in England, Private Neville was admitted on July 5 into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth for further treatment to the gun-shot wounds to his back that he had incurred.

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



**(Right: A party of Newfoundland patients dressed in hospital uniform, here seen convalescing in the grounds of the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital, Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)**



He was to spend the next month at Wandsworth, until August 5, when he was discharged and granted the customary ten-day curfew accorded to military personnel upon release from hospital – where and how he was to spend this interim is unfortunately undocumented.

Immediately following this leave, Private Neville was posted to the Regimental Depot where he reported *to duty* on August 14, the last day of his furlough.

At the end of this summer of 1915, the once-Royal Borough of Ayr on Scotland's west coast was to begin to serve as the overseas base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment from where – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 - re-enforcement drafts from home were to be despatched to bolster the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.

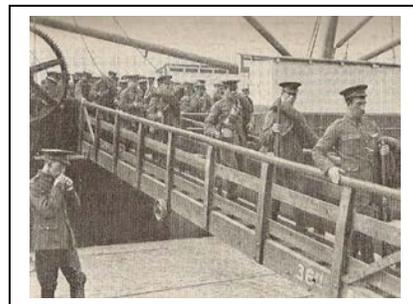


**(Right above: An aerial view of Ayr, likely from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr, where were quartered the 'other ranks', is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)**

**(Right: 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.**



On November 30, 1916, the 14<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr embarked in the English south-coast port of Southampton for the short voyage across the English Channel to the Norman capital city of Rouen where it landed on the next day. Having landed, the contingent proceeded to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot nearby. There the new arrivals underwent final training and organization\* before moving on to their rendezvous with the parent unit.



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

When the rendezvous was effected it was late in the day of December 11 – late enough to be recorded as the 12<sup>th</sup> elsewhere. On those same days, the parent unit had retired from the front but many of the men had been seconded for work at Carnoy and at Fricourt. Those spared had marched on to Méricourt l'Abbé which is where the one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Base Depot – Private Neville one of its number – were to report *to duty*.



The newcomers were just in time for the six-week Christmas period to be spent in *Corps Reserve*, encamped well behind the lines.

(Right above: *a British camp, in not particularly clement conditions, somewhere on the Continent during the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

\* \* \* \* \*

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, and the evacuation of Private Neville from the field of battle, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that a German counter-assault might well annihilate what had managed to survive of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*.

The few remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion – and of the other depleted British units - had thus remained in the trenches perhaps fearing the worst, and at night searching for the wounded and burying the dead. It was to be July 6 before the Newfoundlanders were to be relieved from the forward area and to be ordered withdrawn to Englebelmer.



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

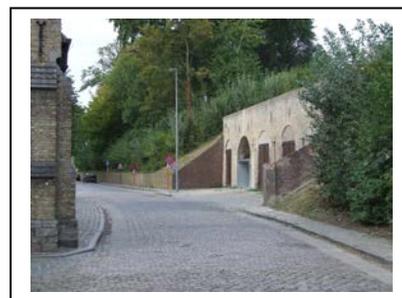
(Preceding page: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John's East. – photograph from 2009*)

There on July 11, a draft of one-hundred twenty-seven re-enforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported *to duty*. They had been the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

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

It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.

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



*The Salient* – close to the front lines for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict - was to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there; yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

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



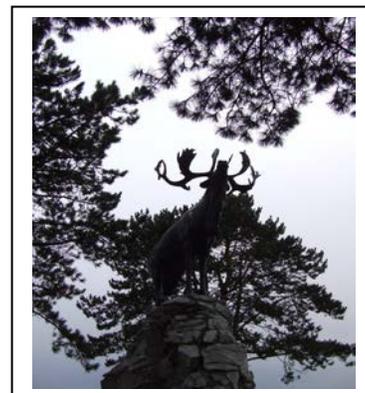
Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was to be at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.

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



(Preceding page: *This is the ground over which the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)

(Right: *The Caribou at Gueudecourt stands at the furthest point of the Newfoundland Battalion's advance of October 12, 1916. – photograph from 2012*)



The Newfoundland Battalion was not to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it would supply two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires and the Worcestershires, of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

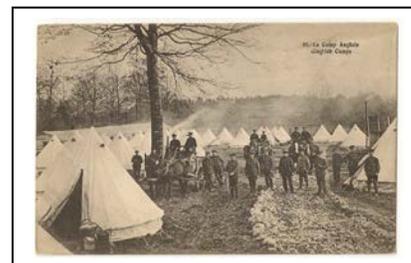
(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme. – from Illustration*)



On October 30, the Newfoundland unit had eventually been retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to wend its way back up to the front lines.

There it continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period broken only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.



It had been while the Newfoundland Battalion was *en route* to this posting that Private Neville and his re-enforcement draft from Ayr via Rouen had reported *to duty*.

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

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It was then not to be until January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois*, from where it would make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it was to

entrain for the small town of Corbie where it had thereupon taken over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

After that recent six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve* far to the rear, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to *active service* on January 23, although they apparently had already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

Those casualties, however, were only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig casually referred to as *wastage* as the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches.



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

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



(Right: *The fighting during the period of the Battalion's posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time. - photograph from 2009(?)*)

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



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

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



On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had begun to make their way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, the march to finish amid the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.

(continued)

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

(Right below: *The Canadian National Memorial which has stood atop Vimy Ridge since 1936 – photograph from 2010*)

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



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

(Right: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community: The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)



The 1<sup>st</sup> 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 would prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone\*.

*\*It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

The son of Michael Neville, an employee of the *Nfld. Boot & Shoe Manufacturing Co. Ltd.*, and of Alice Neville (née Keefe) of 39, Young Street in St. John's, he was also brother to Bridget-Joseph (*Bride*), Gertrude, James-Joseph, Catherine-Joseph (*Katie*), Mary-Josephine, Alice-Janet and Annie-Mary.

Private Neville was recorded as *missing in action* while serving with 'A' Company in the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux on April 14, 1917. Some thirty weeks later, on November 17, 1917, he was officially *presumed dead*.

(Right: *The Caribou stands atop the vestiges of a German strong-point in the centre of the village of Monchy-le-Preux. – photograph from 2012*)



**William John Neville – Willie to his friends – had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty years: date of birth in St. John’s, Newfoundland, April 2, 1897 (from Roman Catholic Parish Records).**



***(The photograph at right of Private Neville is from the Provincial Archives.)***

**Private William John Neville was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).**

