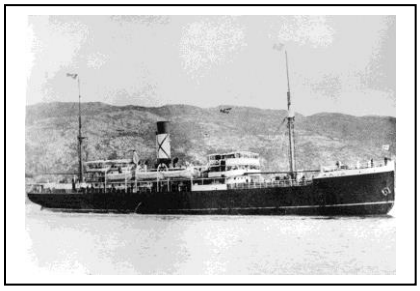
Private Edward George Noftall (also found as *Noftal*), Number 83, of the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment, is interred in Haringhe (Bandaghem) Military Cemetery – Grave reference III. C. 41.



Employed as a clerk working with *George Knowling, Importers & General Merchants*, for a weekly wage of $7.50, Edward George Noftall enlisted on September 2, 1914, a recruit of the First Draft. He was then attested on October 1, and embarked two days later for the United Kingdom on October 3 on board the Bowring Brothers' ship *Florizel*. The ship sailed on the morrow, October 4, in order to join the convoy which was carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas.

(Right above: *The photograph of Florizel is by courtesy of* the *Admiralty House Museum*, Mount Pearl.)

In the United Kingdom Private Noftall trained – as a regimental drummer in addition to his duties as an infantryman - with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England then in Scotland at Fort George, at Edinburgh Castle, and at *Stobs Camp* near the town of Hawick, before a final few weeks of training at Aldershot in the summer of 1915.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *The austere buildings of Fort George on the Moray Firth are still today used by the British Army*. – photograph from 2012)

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

It is likely that, while at Aldershot, Private Noftall was prevailed upon to re-enlist*, on this occasion *for the duration of the war*, on or about August 13.

***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*.**

On August 20, 1915, Private Noftall embarked onto the requisitioned passenger liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting in Gallipoli where, a month later – having spent two weeks billeted in British Barracks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, he disembarked with 1st Battalion at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

(Right above: *The image of the White Star vessel 'Megantic' is from the Old Ship Photo Galleries web-site*.)

(Right: *'Kangaroo Beach', where the men of 1st Battalion landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is 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 from 2011)

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on board a troop-transport anchored at Mudros Bay in the Greek island of Lemnos: the vessel is either Megantic on August 29, Ausonia on September 18, or Prince Abbas on September 19. Whichever is the case, the 1st Battalion was yet to land on Gallipoli*. – from Provincial Archives)

(Right: *A century later, this is the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla Bay, where Private Noftall was to serve during the autumn of 1915.* – photograph from 2011)

(continued)

Evacuated from the forward positions suffering from paratyphoid and pyrexia (fever) on November 17, 1915, Private Noftall was admitted into the 26th Casualty Clearing Station at Suvla before then having been taken on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Nevasa* – a second source has *Soudan* - to the Military Hospital, on the British-held island of Malta on November 26. Following treatment he was subsequently transferred to the Cottonera Convalescent Depot, also on Malta, on December 2.

(Right above: *HMHS Nevasa, in war-time hospital-ship garb, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site*.)

(Right: *One of the several now-abandoned British hospital buildings, facilities which today stand empty and decaying, since independence in 1964, on the Mediterranean island of Malta* – photograph from 2011)

Finally, on January 17, 1916, Private Noftall was invalided from there on board HM Hospital Ship *Mauretania* – a second source has *Gloucester Castle* - to return to the United Kingdom where, on the day of his arrival, he was transported to and admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. The date was January 25 of the New Year, 1916.

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

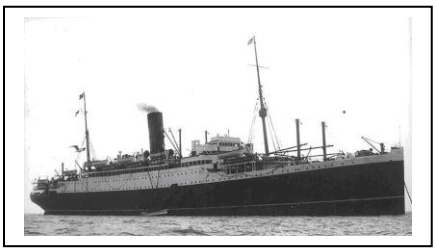
(Right: *Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing at the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth* – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

After convalescence, and the six-week furlough granted military personnel recovering from enteric – from March 13 until April 23 – followed by a posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr in Scotland, Private Noftall returned on leave to Newfoundland on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*. The vessel sailed from Liverpool - a second source says London – on August 4. He may well have then travelled home on her after a turn-around at Québec* where *Sicilian* was to arrive on the 14th. On November 6 he was attached temporarily – at least on paper - to Regimental Headquarters in St. John's: was his period of leave exhausted? Was he recruiting?

Sicilian was to sail from St. John's on August 28 back to the United Kingdom with some two-hundred fifty re-enforcements from Newfoundland on board.

(Preceding page: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right*. – courtesy of the *Carnegie Library* at Ayr)

Private Noftall was one of the approximately three hundred twenty *all ranks* to leave St. John's on the *Bowring Brothers* vessel *Florizel*, bound for Halifax, on January 31, 1917, to take ship to Europe. Immediately upon its arrival in Nova Scotia, this detachment was forwarded to accommodation in the town of Windsor where it was soon to be quarantined because of an epidemic of measles and mumps.

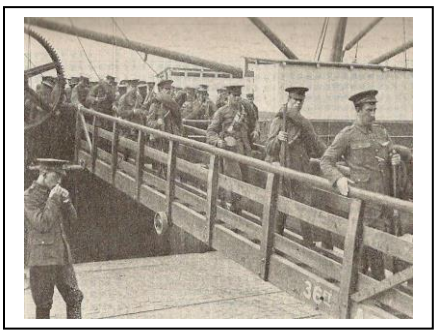


It was not for some three months after its arrival in Nova Scotia that transport could be arranged for the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom for the so-called *Windsor Draft* – minus the twenty-five or so personnel still unable to travel*. On April 16, Private Noftall embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Ausonia*, one of three ships to sail from Halifax at the time.

Two because they had died there

***Ausonia*, originally named *Tortona* before she was bought by the Cunard Line in 1911, was also to carry the 221st Canadian Infantry Battalion on this trans-Atlantic crossing. She was later sunk by the German submarine U-62 on May 30, 1918.**

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



Private Noftall did not re-join the British Expeditionary Force in France until almost five months later, on September 7 of that same year, one of the 29th Re-enforcement Draft from Barrie which passed through the English south-coast port-city on that date and which disembarked in Rouen on the 9th. On the following day, in lieu of the final training and organization* to be undergone by most of the new arrivals, Private Noftall was to be hospitalized at the base in the French city of Rouen almost immediately, suffering from scabies.

(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front*. – from Illustration)

Apparently the standard length of time for this final training had been ten days – although this was becoming more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known as the Bull Rings.

He finally re-joined the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment on the 30th of December of 1917. The unit at the time had been withdrawn from the forward area and was concluding a ten-day Christmas respite in the vicinity of the community of Fressin while recovering from their efforts during the recent *Battle of Cambrai* (see further below). On January 3, the 1st Battalion was on the move again.

* * * * *

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to serve at Suvla Bay for a further month and two days after Private Noftall had reported sick on that November 17, 1918. It then had acted as a part of the rear guard when the British eventually decided to withdraw from the place.

Suvla Bay **had been a sobering experience for all involved there, perhaps particularly so for the British who were to retire from there exactly three months after the arrival of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment. Surrounded by a semi-circle of hills held by the Turks who – contrary to British expectations – had fought very well, the British forces, poorly led by second-rate senior officers, plagued by dysentery and surprised by floods followed by frost-bite, re-embarked on the night of December 19-20 and sailed away.**

(*Right above: 'Kangaroo Beach', where the 1st Battalion landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, 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 from 2011)

The Newfoundlanders, as cited above, were to be among the last to leave the beaches.

Two days later the 1st Battalion would be transferred to Cape Helles on the western tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula where the British had still been holding on. They were soon, however, on January 8-9, to be abandoning Cape Helles as well* and to be sailing back to Egypt.

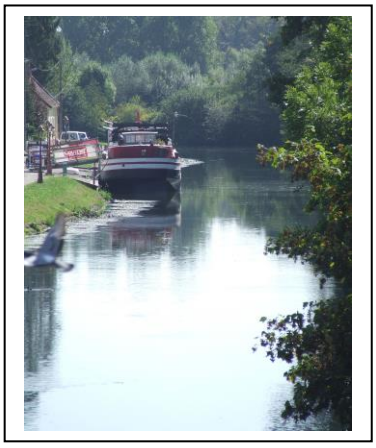
****The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment once more supplied personnel for the rear guard, and it was Lieutenant Owen Steele from St. John's who was the last soldier to step into the final boat to leave Gallipoli behind.***

(Right above: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was days before the final British evacuation* – from *Illustration*)

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

Having then spent two months in Egypt in the area of Suez at the south end of the Canal of the same name, the 1st Battalion was now to be transported back to France where the 29th Division - it had finally been decided - was to fight on the *Western Front*. Having embarked on March 14, the ship carrying the Newfoundlanders had docked eight days later in the French Mediterranean port of Marseilles.

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



From Marseilles the 1st Battalion would take a train for the three-day journey northwards to the nondescript community of Pont-Rémy where it had alighted at two o'clock in the morning of March 25 for the long march to its billets. An even longer march was now to be in the offing before its destination would be reached.

(Right: *The Somme seen from the bridge at Pont-Rémy as it flows through the community* – photograph from 2010)

On April 13 the Newfoundland unit marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy and two kilometres behind the front lines. There the Newfoundlanders were billeted, welcomed re-enforcements on the 15th and, on the evening of that same day, were introduced into the British lines of the *Western Front*, there to be immediately set to work to improve the communication trenches.

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river flowing through the region, and over which the parent unit of the 1st Battalion had marched some three weeks previously at Pont-Rémy, *the Somme*.

(Right: *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 or one date in Newfoundland history which is etched into 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*.

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)

(continued)

(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 had been 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.

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking forces that it had been feared a German counter-assault might well annihilate what had survived of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*. The remnants of the 1st Battalion had thus remained in the trenches, at night searching for the wounded and burying the dead. It was to be July 6 before the Newfoundlanders were to relieved from the forward area and to be ordered withdrawn to Englebelmer, and then yet a further two days before the unit had marched to Mailly-Maillet.

(Right above: *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 disaster at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion 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 1st Battalion - still under battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into 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.

(Preceding page: *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)

(Right: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916* – from *Illustration*)

***The Salient* – close to the front lines for almost the entire 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 there for some ten weeks, the 1st Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.**

Four days after its return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again passed to the offensive at a place called Gueudecourt, some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.

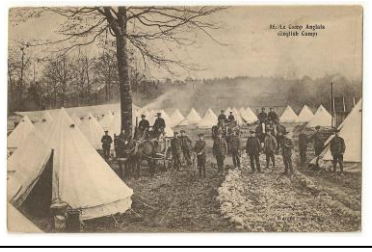
The encounter had proved to be another costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

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

After Gueudecourt, the Newfoundland Battalion 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 the several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, during which the Regimental personnel was to be encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

(Right: *The Caribou at Gueudecourt stands at the furthest point of the 1st Battalion's advance of October 12, 1916* – photograph from 2012)

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



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

The only infantry activity directly involving the 1st Battalion during that entire period – from the action at Gueudecourt in mid-October of 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and 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: *The fighting during the time of the Battalion's posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time.* - photograph from 2009(?))

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March was to be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they had now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had 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 1st Battalion encamped at Meaulté* – from *The War Illustrated*)

On March 29, the 1st Battalion had begun to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond. The march was to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.

(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place of the city of Arras in early 1916 after some eighteen months of bombardment* – from *Illustration*)

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

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 Canadian National Memorial which has stood on Vimy Ridge since 1936* – photograph from 2010)

The 1st Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at a 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 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 men of the Battalion and one from the Essex Regiment .

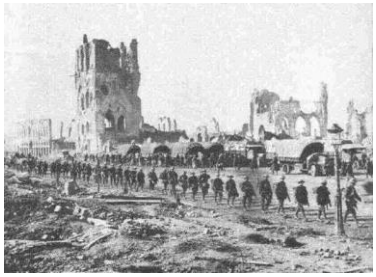
(Preceding page: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community: The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera*. – photograph from 2013)

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

After Monchy-le-Preux, May of 1917 had been a period when the Newfoundlanders were to be moving hither and thither on the *Arras Front*, in and out of the trenches. Apart from the ever-present artillery, there had been little activity – except for the marching. At the beginning of June, the 1st Battalion had retired from the forward area to Bonneville and there had spent its time again in re-enforcing and re-organizing…and in training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it was to transpire, the autumn as well.

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on the march parading through in the community of Berneville in early May of 1917* – from *The War Illustrated*)

The Newfoundlanders had then once again moved north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the area of Ypres – *the Salient*. This low-lying ground had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917.



Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

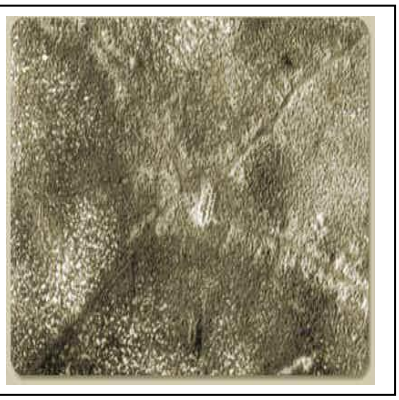
(Right above: *Troops file past the vestiges of the historic Cloth Hall and through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer or early autumn of 1917*. – from *Illustration*)

(continued)

(Preceding page: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn 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 – as were to be then the Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians – all of which had floundered their way across the sodden countryside of Flanders.

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



Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* had fought in two major engagements, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* 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 had been higher: forty-eight *killed* or *died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

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

It was to be only two days after this last-mentioned confrontation that the 1st Battalion had marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe from there to be transported to Swindon Camp in the area of Proven. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit once more boarded a train. By ten-thirty that same evening, the 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.

On November 17 the Battalion had once again travelled by train, on this occasion in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it had begun to move further eastward on foot towards the theatre of the battle now imminent. On November 19, while on the move once more, it had been issued as it went with…*war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of that night it was to march to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – Zero Hour – the Newfoundland 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, bugles blowing, the 1st Battalion would advance to the fray.

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.

(continued)

The battle had begun well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were to be squandered and there were no troops available to exploit what was, admittedly, a hoped-for yet unexpected success. 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 1st Battalion was to again be dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing, Masnières - where a Caribou stands today - and the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who were to advance into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day*.

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 were encountering the same problem.

(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)

(Right: *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 the termination of the final fighting retreat of the *Battle of Cambrai* on December 4, the Newfoundlanders of the 1st Battalion had then left behind them the chaos and the exertions of it all – it had been a difficult period. The unit would subsequently be billeted in the vicinity of the community of Humbercourt, a number of kilometres just to the south-west of Arras and not far from Berles-au-Bois whence they had gone into battle less than three weeks before.

(Right above: *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)

(continued)

The Newfoundland Battalion remained there at Humbercourt until December 18 when it marched to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There the unit was to spend both Christmas and New Year. The weather obliged and even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow - a bit too much at times apparently – and it was into this wintry scene that Private Noftall had marched on December 30 to re-join his unit.

*** * * * ***

At the beginning of January of 1918, after what had been snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion 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.

(Right: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916* – from *Illustration*)

In the meantime, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the 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 in the East now allowed them. It was expected by all that they would launch a spring offensive.

(Right above: *countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele* (*today Passendale*) *in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918* – photograph from 2011)

The Germans did as was expected of them. Ludendorff's armies had already launched a powerful thrust on March 21, the first day of spring, striking at first in the area of *the Somme*, overrunning the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for some two weeks the German advance seemed unstoppable.

Then a second offensive, *Georgette*, was launched in the northern sector of the front, in Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders were stationed: the date was April 9. Within two days the situation of the Allies was desperate.

(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918* – from *Illustration*)

On the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due to come out of the line and to move back to *the Somme*, boarded buses at three o'clock in the afternoon and were suddenly directed southward, towards Nieppe. Three hours later they were in action, attempting to stem this latest enemy thrust.

(Right: *The area of La Crêche - the buildings of the village 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 were pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium and in places, beyond. On the 12th of April the 1st Battalion of the by-now Royal Newfoundland Regiment*, fighting separate actions, in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

As of January 23, 1918

On April 13, during the defensive stand near the De Seule Crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening - were equally heavily involved.

(Right above: *Ground just to the east of Bailleul where the 1st Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21* – photograph from 2013)

What exact role Private Noftall played is not known – except that he was a soldier, and drummer, of 'A' Company - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.

The Regimental 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*.*

During this short but critical period, 88th Brigade – and thus 1st Battalion, the Newfoundland Regiment, was temporarily seconded to the 34th Division.

(Right: *These are the De Seule Crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, the scene of fierce fighting involving 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today it is the site of several houses and a convenience store*. – photograph from 2009(?))

On April 24, the 1st Battalion said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the 88th Brigade and the 29th Division. The Newfoundlanders would later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 they were to move a world away from Flanders where they had just fought, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders took a train from Belgium to the French town of Étaples, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening, still with a long march to billets ahead of them.

The last of that spring and then the summer of 1918 were to pass peaceably enough for the personnel of the 1st Battalion. For the months of May, June and until early July, the unit had been posted to Écuires, to the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.

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

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1st Battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was no longer capable of serving in the field.

Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that the 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.

The posting to Écuires completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders were to be encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihen – 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: *The image of the village of Équihen is from a vintage post-card*.)

The Newfoundlanders were to return to the fight on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of 9th (Scottish) Division. The 1st Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian Front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today *Ingooigem*).

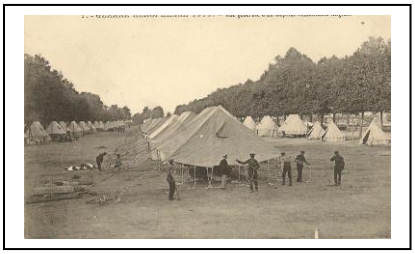
(Right: *British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days* – from *Illustration*)

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 a conflict of movement.**

(continued)

***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*.**

Private Noftall, however, was not to see that day. On September 26, 1918, he was serving with 1st Battalion just to the north-east of the Belgian medieval city of Ypres. The Newfoundland unit was to be engaged two days later, as recounted in a previous paragraph, in the last massive operation of the *Great War*, the *Hundred Days Offensive*, but he, sick, was admitted to the 2/1st East Lancashire Field Ambulance on that same September 26, there to be diagnosed as suffering from acute appendicitis.



(Right: *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*: *Other such medical establishments were of a much more permanent nature*. - from a vintage post-card)

Later again on that same date, Private Noftall was transferred to the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearing Station.

The son of Henry Noftall, employee of *George Neal, Provision Merchants*, and of Rachel Noftall (née *Fagner*)* Street – to whom he initially allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay, later to Laura Noftall (sister?) – of Rocky Lane in St. John's – later of 14, Prince of Wales Street, and to whom he had willed his all, he was apparently one of eight children, Laura already mentioned. Three of the others were Ethel-May, William-James and Henry-Thomas.

Private Noftall was reported as having *died of sickness* - of the aforementioned appendicitis - at the 3rd Australian CCS, situated at the time close to the Belgian community of Haringhe, on September 29, 1918.

Both parents were originally from the District of Bay de Verde.

Edward George Noftall had enlisted at a *declared* nineteen years of age: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, April 30, 1895.

(Right above: *The Caribou near the Belgian city of Courtrai (Kortrijk) stands only a few metres from the Lys Canal and River which the 1st Battalion crossed under fire on the night of October 19-20, 1918. It stands as a reminder of the sacrifices of the Newfoundlanders' last campaign of the Great War.* – photograph from 2012)

(*The photograph of Private Noftall is from the Provincial Archives*.)

(continued)

Private Edward George Noftall was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as 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.* Last updated – February 13, 2023.