



Company Sergeant Major Henry Coulton Noonan (Regimental Number 839) is interred in Étapes Military Cemetery – Grave reference XXII. R. 4, - *not* XXII. B. 18 as in CWGC records – of course, this may be corrected by now.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a *clerk* with the *Dominion Iron & Steel Co.*, and earning a monthly fifty, Henry Coulton Noonan presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on December 29, 1914. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

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He then enlisted on the following day, December 30 – engaged at the private soldier’s rate of a single dollar per diem plus a daily ten-cent *Field Allowance*. It would also appear that Henry Coulton Noonan was attested on that same day.



Now for Private Noonan, Number 839, there was to be an eleven-week waiting period. How he occupied himself during that period is not recorded among his papers; he may, of course, have returned to work but this is only speculation.

(Right above: *The image of the Bowring Brothers’ vessel ‘Stephano’, sister-ship of ‘Florizel’, passing through ‘the Narrows’ of St. John’s Harbour is from Provincial Archives.*)

It was during this time, however, on February 24, that he was to receive a first promotion: he was appointed directly to the rank of corporal of the 7th Platoon of what was now to be designated as ‘D’ Company.

Unlike the two previous contingents to have departed Newfoundland (see below) for...overseas service, Corporal Noonan’s ‘D’ Company was not to sail directly to the United Kingdom. On March 20, it embarked onto the Bowring-Brothers’ vessel *Stephano* for the short voyage to Halifax, capital city of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, where it was thereupon to board a second vessel, the newly-launched *Orduña* for the trans-Atlantic crossing*.

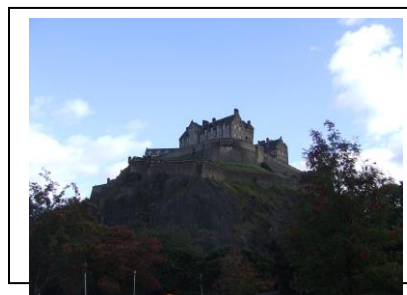


**His papers incorrectly identify the vessel as the SS ‘Dominion’. That ship was the one which carried ‘C’ Company overseas from Bay Bulls Harbour on February 5, 1915.*

(Right above: *The image of Orduña is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel was not to be requisitioned during the Great War but would be used by the Cunard Company to operate on its commercial service between Liverpool and New York.*)

Having then sailed from Nova Scotia on March 22 for Liverpool, Corporal Noonan and his draft landed there eight days later, on the 30th. Once disembarked in Liverpool, the two-hundred fifty men and officers of ‘D’ Company were thereupon transported on the same date by train directly to Edinburgh, the Scottish capital, to join the Newfoundland Regiment’s ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ Companies.

These units were by this time stationed at the historic Castle, ‘A’ and ‘B’ having recently been posted from Fort George and ‘C’ having arrived directly from home (see further below). After ‘D’ Company’s arrival at the end of that month of March, the Newfoundlanders were now to remain at Edinburgh for the following six weeks.

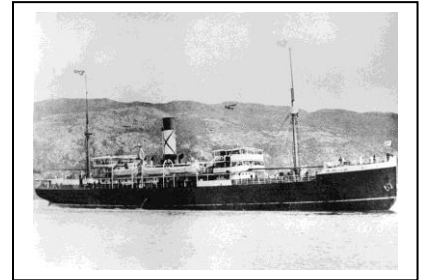


(Right above: *From its vantage point on Castle Hill, the venerable fortress overlooks the city of Edinburgh where in 1915 the Newfoundlanders were to provide the first garrison to be drawn from outside the British Isles. – photograph from 2011*)

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Five to six months before that time, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of some five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's for the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits – these to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after a recruit's enlistment and/ or attestation. To become known to history as the *First Five Hundred* and also as the *Blue Puttees*, on that day they had boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.



The ship had sailed for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

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

(Right adjacent: *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, as recorded beforehand, it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent* - would arrive directly from Newfoundland.

**This contingent, while a part of the Newfoundland Regiment, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

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As seen in a previous paragraph, for the month of April and the first days of May of 1915, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies, now united, were to furnish the garrison – the first troops from outside the British Isles to do so - of the guardian of Scotland's capital city. Then, during the first week of May, 'E' Company was to report there...*to duty*...from home. Four days later again, on May 11, the Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

On that day, three weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit was dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

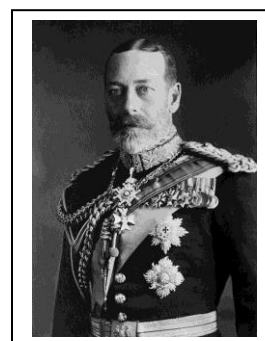
It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent would eventually receive the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength*. The now-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland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

(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*)



**This was approximately fifteen hundred, sufficient to furnish two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, 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 the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



Meanwhile the two junior Companies, ‘E’ – last arrived at Edinburgh - and the aforementioned ‘F’, were ordered transferred to Scotland’s west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (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.*)

For whatever the reason, Corporal Noonan was not to travel to Aldershot with his ‘D’ Company but was ordered to the new Regimental Base Depot in Scotland.

Towards the end of that 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 2nd (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 1st 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*)



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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.*

It was while he was in Scotland during this time, that Corporal Noonan was to receive further promotion: to the rank of sergeant on October 12. Some two months later again and while still in Scotland, Sergeant Noonan was prevailed upon to re-enlist, *for the duration of the war*, which he did on December 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.*

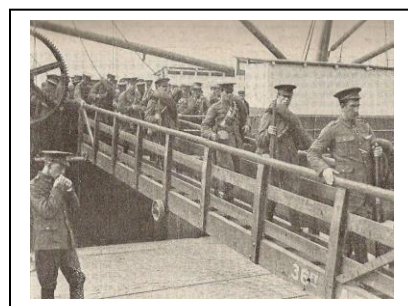
Four days following this, on the 17th, he was appointed as (*Acting*) Company Sergeant-Major of 'D' Company. Given that 'D' Company was still serving at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula, this was surely a sign that he was soon to see active service.

On March 28 of 1916, the 3rd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, CSM Noonan among its numbers, embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Archangel* in the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the large British Expeditionary Base at Rouen, the capital city of Normandy. The contingent disembarked there on the 30th, two days later, thereupon to make its way to the nearby British Base Depot for organizing and for final training* before moving on to its rendezvous with the Newfoundland Battalion.



(Right above: *A troop-laden 'Archangel' seen here leaving port is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

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



**Apparently the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

The date on which Company Sergeant-Major Noonan reported to duty with the 1st Battalion* appears not to be documented among his papers. Most of that particular draft from Ayr, however, did so in the village of Englebelmer, some three kilometres behind the front lines, on April 15.

**CSM Noonan must at the very latest have been with the 1st Battalion before May 7, because the 87th Field Ambulance, where he was to be admitted, was attached to the 29th Division on the Western Front at that time (see below).*

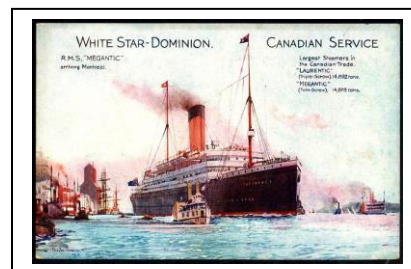
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In the meantime, some seven months earlier, when Corporal Noonan had been ordered to Scotland's west coast and the Regimental Depot, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had travelled to...*active service*...at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, there to fight in the *Gallipoli Campaign*.

(Right: *Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915, prior to its departure to active service on the Gallipoli Peninsula – from The Fighting Newfoundlander by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.*)



On August 20, 1915, the Newfoundland unit had embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks. There, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, the 1st Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



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

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



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



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



When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* on that September night of 1915 they were to 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: *No-Man's-Land at Suvla Bay as seen from the Newfoundland positions – from Provincial Archives*)

(Right: *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.*



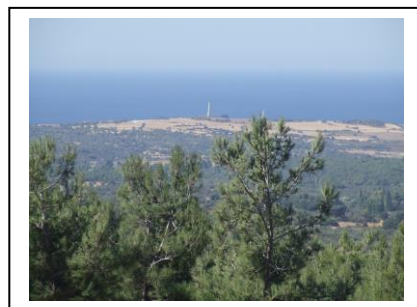
During the short three-month period which had now followed, things were to worsen at *Gallipoli** for the British in general and for the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in particular.

**The French know the place as 'Les Dardanelles' while the Turks call it 'Çanakkale'.*

November 26 of 1915 would see perhaps the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; there was to be a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy had been the priority.

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

At *Suvla Bay*, the British positions had been becoming more and more untenable and thus on the night of December 19-20, the area had been abandoned – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit serving 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 had the respite been of a long duration; the 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

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(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)

(Right below: ‘W’ Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration)

The British, Indian and Anzac forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at Gallipoli – had by that time only been marking time until a complete withdrawal of the Peninsula could be undertaken.

This final operation had taken place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion to furnish part of the British rear-guard on this second occasion also.

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

(Right: ‘W’ Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in 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 had 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 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders had then immediately been 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 29th 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis 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)



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1st Battalion had boarded 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.

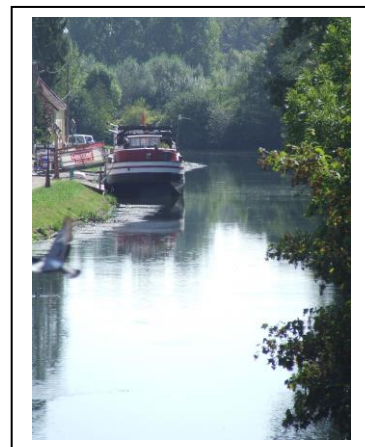
(Right: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles. – from a vintage post-card*)



Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train had 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 had marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to have 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 1st Battalion subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

And as seen in an earlier paragraph, it was likely as a soldier of those...re-enforcements from Scotland... that Company Sergeant-Major Noonan reported...to duty... with the Newfoundland Battalion.

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Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's – and then CSM Noonan'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 unit and two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving at the time in the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment Battalion, were then the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles - true also on the day of the attack on July 1.*

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

Having then been withdrawn at the end of that April to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders 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.



But by early May, Company Sergeant-Major Noonan's first service on the *Western Front*, would have come to an end and he was to have hospitalized and invalided back to the United Kingdom.

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On May 7 CSM Noonan was again to be in need of medical attention, and was admitted into the Divisional Rest Station run by the 87th Field Ambulance on that date for treatment for *ametropia*, a problem with his vision. Forwarded to a casualty clearing station specializing in ophthalmology for treatment on the following day, there he remained until May 14.

Company Sergeant-Major Noonan was admitted on that May 14 into the 2nd Canadian General Hospital in the coastal town of Le Tréport. Seventeen days later again, on May 31, it had been decided that he be invalided back to England on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Newhaven* and thence on to hospital, to the 3rd London General Hospital in the south-western borough of Wandsworth, where he arrived and was admitted on the same date for treatment to keratitis.



(Right above: *The cross-Channel steamer 'Newhaven', despite carrying the name of an English coastal town, was a French ship built in 1911 which, during the Great War was to serve in the French navy before being transferred to the British for use as a hospital ship. She survived the conflict to be returned to her French owners in 1919. When the Germans occupied France in 1940 she was taken and used by them in the Baltic sea as a troop transport. She survived that second war as well only to be scrapped in 1949.*)



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



(continued)

(Preceding page: *A party of Newfoundland patients, dressed in hospital uniform but otherwise unfortunately unidentified, is seen here convalescing in the grounds of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

On the 8th day of June Company Sergeant-Major Noonan was granted the customary ten-day furlough allowed those military personnel discharged from hospital, before being immediately posted to the Regimental Depot at Ayr where he reported *to duty* on June 20. He was now to serve there for almost a full year.

(Right: *The new race-course at Ayr - opened in 1907 – where some of the men of the Newfoundland Regiment were at times billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden: Part of the main grand-stand dates from that period. – photo from 2012*)



A single medical report was to interrupt that period in Scotland: he was to be hospitalized – once again for medical attention to his eyes – on September 15. Eight days of drops and eye-baths afterwards, on the 23rd of the month he was released from care.

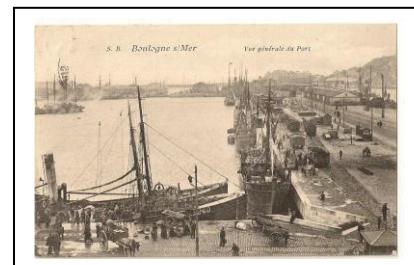
Company Sergeant-Major Noonan did not leave the United Kingdom again until some eleven months later, on June 3 of 1917, when it was as a non-commissioned officer of the 24th Re-enforcement Draft which was to pass through the Channel port of Folkestone en route to Boulogne. From there the detachment was surely ordered to the Base Depot at Rouen where the newcomers would have spent the next two weeks before leaving to seek out the parent unit.



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

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

On June 19, the Newfoundland Battalion, at the time billeted in Bonneville, received a re-enforcement draft of one-hundred eighteen *other ranks*. CSM Noonan, one of that number, was re-attached to 'D' Company.



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When CSM Noonan had departed for medical attention on early May of 1916, he had left a Newfoundland Battalion which had been preparing for the upcoming British offensive of that summer and autumn of 1916. It is doubtful, however, whether anyone – in particular the High Command – had ever foreseen the catastrophe which was soon to come to pass.

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, perhaps just as depressing, the butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.



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

(continued)

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that 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.



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.

(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 events 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 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.

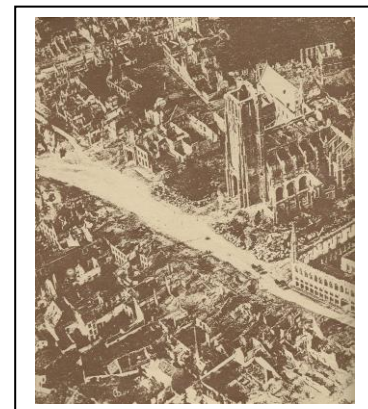
It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.

(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*.



(Preceding page: *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 1st 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.

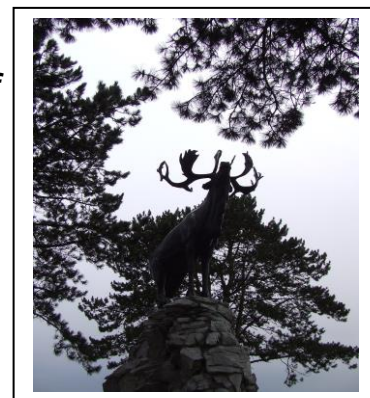
The encounter had proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right: *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*)



(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 88th 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 1st 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.



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

It had been on January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion was to 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from The War Illustrated*)

(continued)

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.

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

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.



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

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

(Right below: *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 1st Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, the ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux would prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone*.



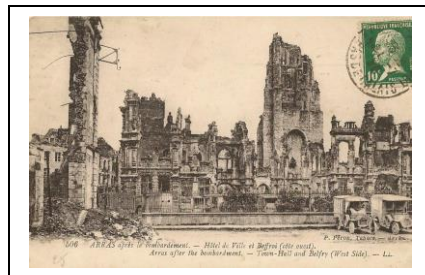
**It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, be amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming re-enforcements would allow the two units' strengths to once more resemble those of bona fide battalions.

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This was in fact an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies. It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1st Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

Late on that same evening the Newfoundlanders had retired to the relative calm of Arras.

(Right above: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card*)



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

That month of May was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders would move hither and thither on the *Arras Front*, marching into and out of the trenches. While there was to be the ever-present artillery-fire, concerted infantry activity, particularly after May 15 – *officially* the last day of the *Battle of Arras* – had been limited, apart from the marching.

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – not Bonneville - in early May, perhaps the 7th, of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)



At the outset of June, the 1st Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and in training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

And it was to Bonneville, of course, that CSM Noonan had reported *to duty* on June 19.

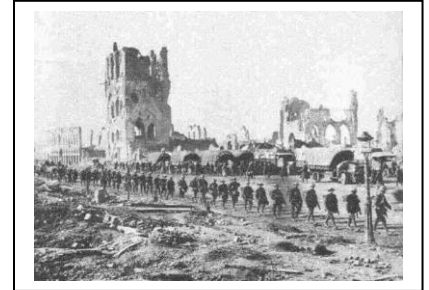
* * * * *

The Newfoundlanders then soon once again were to be moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.



(Right above: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right – photograph from 2014*)

This low-lying area, Belgian *Flanders*, the only part of the country unoccupied by German forces, had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917.



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

(Right: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)



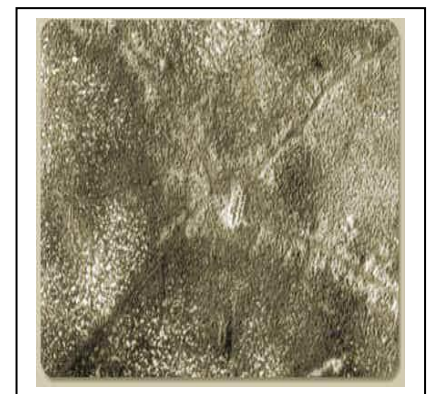
Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

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



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

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army. This had been or was also to be the case with the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians, all of whose troops had floundered or would soon flounder their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Belgian Flanders.



Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9. At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost would be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

It was to be at the first of those two major confrontations that Company Sergeant-Major Noonan was to play his final role of the *Great War*.

(continued)

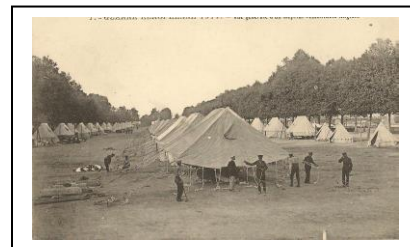
(Right below: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010*)

On August 14, while it was moving into the firing-line at the Steenbeek in readiness for the attack which was to take place on the 16th, the Newfoundland Battalion was subjected to heavy enemy shelling. The Regimental War Diary entry of the day reported... *O.R. 8 killed, 25 wounded...* During the bombardment, CSM Noonan was to incur gun-shot wounds to his left thigh.



He was evacuated to the 4th Casualty Clearing Station at Lozinghem on the following day and forwarded immediately to the 26th General Hospital at Étaples. On the 19th, he was reported as...*dangerously ill.*

(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*)



The son of Edward Mortimer Noonan (deceased on June 15, 1915), former clerk at *Harvey & Company*, and of Margaret R. Noonan (née *Coulton*) – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay* - of 15½ Cochrane Street in St. John's – he was also brother to sisters Kitty*, Margaret-Emily, Gertrude and to Catherine Mary.

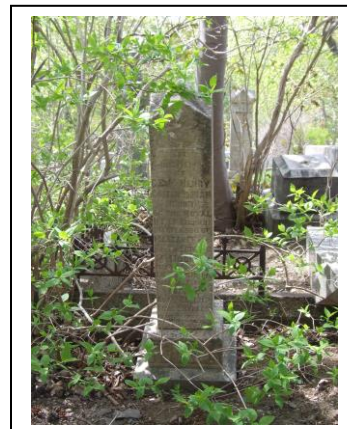
**Kitty may have been the nick-name of one of the three other sisters – Catherine? – and in 1920 was named by her mother as being her only – surviving? – child.*

Company Sergeant-Major Noonan was reported as having *died of wounds* in hospital at Étaples on August 26, 1917.

Henry Coulton Noonan had enlisted at a declared twenty-five years of age: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, May 9, 1889 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

**He also allotted twenty cents per diem to Mark Chaplin (Merchant Tailor) up to the sum of twenty-four dollars.*

(Right: *This family memorial commemorating the sacrifice of CSM Henry Colton Noonan stands in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John's. – photograph from 2015*)



(continued)

Company Sergeant-Major Henry Coulton Noonan was entitled to the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



Record Office
58 Victoria St.
London

91 Wallace St.
Ayr NB
Sept 5th 1917

If it is possible, will you let me have the address of the Hospital in France in which #839, C.S.M. H.C. Noonan, 1st Newfoundland Regmt died of wounds on August 16th (sic).

Yours faithfully
(Miss) Jean McCulloch
91 Wallace St.,
Ayr, Scotland

Jean McCulloch and Henry Noonan had apparently been engaged to be married.

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 8, 2023.