



Private John Charles Piercey (Regimental Number 1535) is interred in Y Ravine Cemetery – Grave reference D. 107.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of *railroading*, and earning an annual two-hundred fifty-dollars, John Charles Piercey was a recruit of the Fifth Draft. He presented himself for enlistment at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on May 11 of 1915. There he was to be engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar to which would be added a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

Three days after having enlisted, on May 14 he returned to the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, on this second occasion to undergo a medical examination. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

There was now to be a wait of a single day before, on May 15, he would undergo his attestation, to swear his *Oath of Allegiance*, the concluding official formality. At that moment Charles John Piercey became...*a soldier of the King*.

**A second source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.*

Thereupon followed yet a further waiting period, a lengthy one of five weeks plus a day, before Private Piercey, Regimental Number 1535, was to embark onto His Majesty's Transport *Calgarian* on June 20 in St. John's Harbour and sail (*almost**) directly to the United Kingdom. He was one of the two-hundred forty-two men of 'F' Company and eighty-five naval reservists to take passage on that day.

(Right above: *Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from The War Illustrated*)

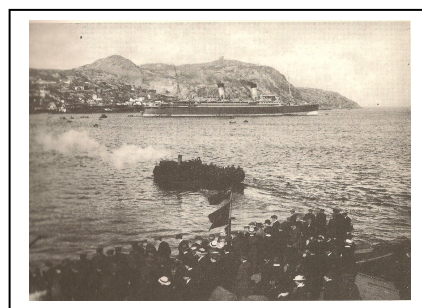
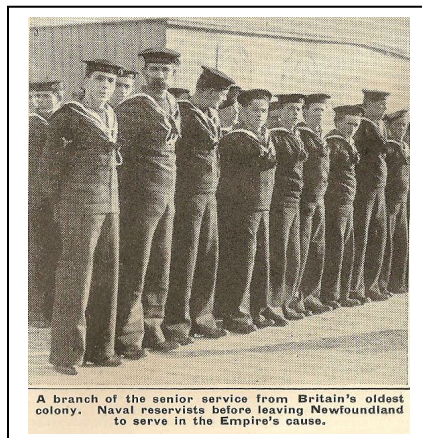
Where Private Piercey was to spend the interim between his attestation and his departure on...*overseas service*...is not clear – and is not documented among his papers.

It may well be that he returned temporarily to work and perhaps that he was to spend some time at his home in the Trinity Bay community of Long Cove, Norman Cove - but this of course is only speculation.

(Right above: *The photograph of Newfoundland military personnel in tenders on their way to board 'Calgarian' is from the Provincial Archives. 'Calgarian' was not a requisitioned troop transport but in September of 1914 had been taken over by the British government to serve as an armed merchant-cruiser. She did, however, as on this occasion, at times carry troops and civilian passengers across the Atlantic. She was later torpedoed and sunk by U-19 off the north of Ireland on March 1, 1918.*)

**Apparently the ship took nineteen days to make what was usually the journey of about a week. Not only was Calgarian escorting three submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders apparently even having the time to cross the straits to spend a few hours in North Africa. She reached Liverpool on July 9.*

(continued)



(Preceding page: *The British Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-Great War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background beyond the harbour and Royal Navy dockyard. – from a vintage postcard*)

On the day after its arrival in the United Kingdom, 'F' Company travelled from Liverpool by train to Hawick from where the detachment marched and then reported...*to duty...at Stobs Camp* on the evening of July 10. It was an important moment: the Newfoundland Regiment, as of that day counting fifteen hundred personnel*, was now at establishment strength and could be posted on...*active service*.

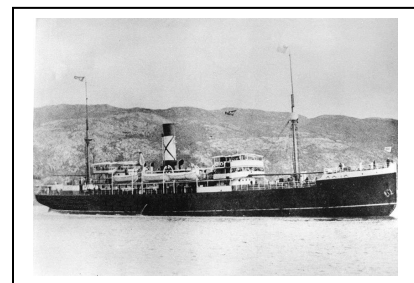


**A number sufficient to furnish four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

(Right above: *The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles. – original photograph from the Provincial Archives*)

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Almost nine months before that June 20 of 1915, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914, the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, they to become 'A' and 'B' Companies.



During that same period the various authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

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

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

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

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



(continued)

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

Only days after ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, ‘C’ Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of ‘D’ Company to arrive – they via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty*...at Edinburgh, and then ‘E’ Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4*.



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

(Right above: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011*)

Seven days after the arrival of ‘E’ Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit was dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.

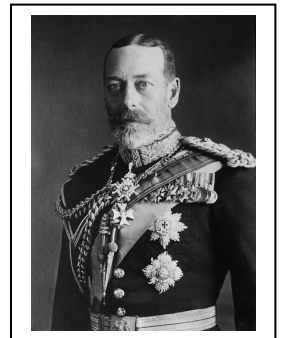


(Right above: *The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915. – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

Two months less a day later, on July 10, ‘F’ Company marched into *Stobs Camp*.

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From *Stobs Camp*, some three weeks after the arrival of ‘F’ Company, in early August, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, the four senior Companies, having now become the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, were transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before departing to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(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.*)

(continued)

The later arrivals to the United Kingdom, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were eventually to form the nucleus of the soon to be formed 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

The Depot was to be Private Piercey`s home for the next seven months.

At the end of the summer of 1915, the once-Royal Borough of Ayr on Scotland`s west coast was to begin to serve as the overseas base for what was to become 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)

(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.



In was on February 1 of 1916 – some nine months after he had first enlisted - while he was still serving at the Regimental Depot, that Private Piercey was to *re-enlist* into the Newfoundland Regiment; on this occasion it was to be for the...*Duration of the War**. He had already seen the departure of the 1st Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr in mid-November on its way to *Gallipoli*, but had not been selected as a soldier of that initial detachment. For him at that time, there had been yet four months to wait.

**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 limited period of a single year. As the War progressed, however, this would likely cause problems and they were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.*

On March 13, six weeks less a day after re-enlistment, Private Piercey, as a soldier of the rank and file of the 2nd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the naval establishment of Devonport on the English south coast, en route – although nobody was aware of it at the time – for France. The Newfoundlanders were to travel to *the Continent* – western Europe - by way of Egypt*.

**At the time there was some confusion as to whether the 1st Battalion as a unit of the 29th Division would stay in the Middle East or not, and this draft from Ayr apparently had orders to set sail for Egypt. However, there was surely a bureaucratic foul-up as the Newfoundland Battalion, once having arrived there, was then to re-embark in Egypt on only the following day for passage back to France.*

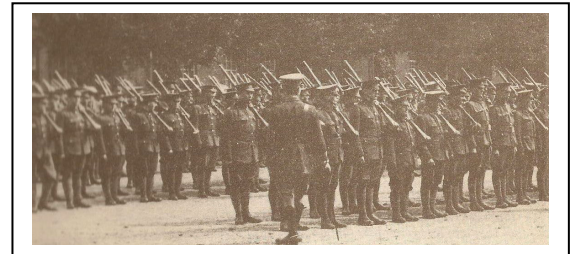
The two ships – one carrying the re-enforcements eastward, the other carrying the parent 1st Battalion westward to France from Port Suez (see further below) - likely passed each other in the Mediterranean Sea, going in opposite directions.

Private Piercey`s draft of one-hundred forty other ranks, under the command of Captain Ledingham, having disembarked in the French Mediterranean port-city of Marseille from HMT *Kingstonian* (right) on April 3, joined the Newfoundland Battalion on April 8 in the community of Louvencourt where the parent unit – still on its march towards the forward area of the *Western Front* - had already been billeted for two days.



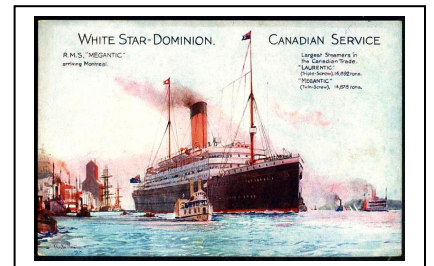
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While Private Piercey and his 'F' Company had been beginning their time of training at Ayr in the summer of 1915, the aforementioned four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', of the Newfoundland Regiment, having now become the 1st Battalion, had thereupon been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been despatched to...*active service.*



(Right above: 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.)

(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.)



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



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

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

When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* they were to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.



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

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



(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.***

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

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



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

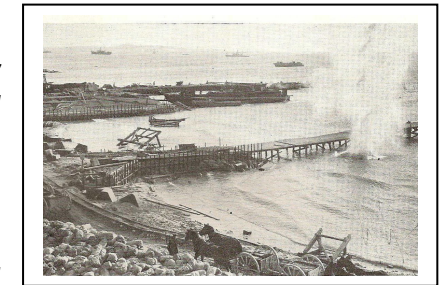
(Right: This is Anzac Bay in the fore-ground with the Salt Lake in the centre further away. The bottom of Suvla Bay is just to be seen on the left and adjacent to the Salt Lake, and further away again. The hills in the distance and the ones from which this photograph was taken were held by the Turks and formed a horse-shoe around the plain surrounding the Salt Lake - which was where the British and Newfoundlanders were stationed. – photograph from 2011)



By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard. Some of the Battalion personnel had thereupon been evacuated to the nearby island of *Imbros*, some to *Lemnos*, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *Cape Helles* as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed *Achi Baba*, positions which were never breached: The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011)



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

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

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.

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



(Right: ‘*W*’ Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in that January of 1916 and by the Newfoundlanders who were to be the last soldiers off the beach: Vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011)

Immediately after the British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of *Alexandria*.

On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived there with the 1st Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16th, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she had docked early on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders had landed and marched to their encampment.

There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.

(Right: The image of the Blue Funnel Line vessel ‘Nestor’ is from the Shipspotting.com web-site. The vessel was launched and fitted in 1912-1913 and was to serve much of her commercial life until 1950 plying the routes between Britain and Australia. During the Great War she served mainly in the transport of Australian troops and was requisitioned once again in 1940 for government service in the Second World War. In 1950 she was broken up.)



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

(Right: The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and other ranks of the 1st Battalion were to board His Majesty’s Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.



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

The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.

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



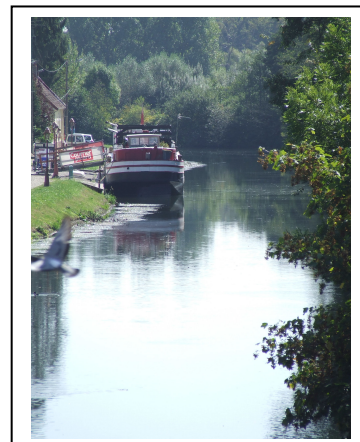
Some three days after the unit’s disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion’s train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille.

It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.

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

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge which they had then traversed on their way from the station. 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)



And as related in an earlier paragraph, it was to be during the trek from Pont-Rémy towards the area of *the Front* that Private Piercey, accompanied by Captain Ledingham and the other personnel of the 2nd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – via Egypt – had reported...*to duty...with the 1st Battalion on April 8 in the Community of Louvencourt.*

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On April 13, the entire 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*.

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 to then be ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.

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

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

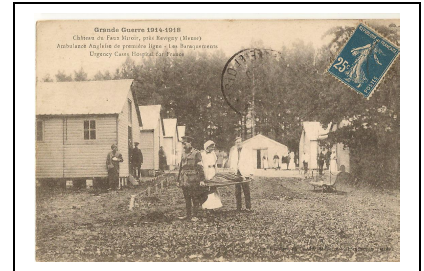
Having then been withdrawn at the end of that April to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders were soon to be preparing for the upcoming British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering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



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(continued)

During that aforementioned period and only days after that first withdrawal from the forward area, on May 5 Private Piercey was admitted into the 87th Field Ambulance seeking medical attention for the common problem of trench-foot. He was discharged from there back...to *duty*..., apparently directly back to his unit, only four days later.



(Right above: A *British Field Ambulance*, more permanent than some nearer to the front, in north-eastern France at a later date in the War – from a vintage post-card)

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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 greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage of *the Somme* was to continue for 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...?)

The son of Robert Piercey Deceased April 4, 1917) and of Patience Piercey (née *Newhook) – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of fifty cents from his pay – of Long Cove, Norman’s Cove, Chapel Arm, Trinity Bay (and later of Bay Bulls Arm, today *Sunnyside*), he was also one of as many as ten children of whom three brothers and a sister were apparently still by 1920 living with their mother**.**

****The couple had been married in Norman’s Cove on January 1, 1893.***

*****Robert, Hugh-Baxter and Garfield are recorded as being three of the children by the Ancestry.ca web-site. Private Robert Piercey (Regimental Number 5067) went overseas in July of 1917 but likely saw no action: he was de-mobilized in 1919.***

Private Piercey was at first reported as...*missing in action*...on July 1, 1916, while serving with ‘B’ Company during the fighting of the first day of the...*First Battle of the Somme*. Some six months later, on December 31, he was officially...*presumed dead*.

However, a subsequent report submitted by the Officer Commanding the 3rd Army Mobile Graves Registration Unit, and dated June 15, 1917, recorded the identification and then burial of his remains at or about that same time. The record of Private Piercey was thereupon amended so as to read...*killed in action 1/7/1916*.



He shares a grave marker with an unknown corporal (likely John Thomas Doyle, Chester Cameron Guy, Wilfred T. Harbin, or William Joseph Ryan) of the Newfoundland Regiment.

John Charles Piercey had enlisted at a *declared* nineteen years of age: date of birth in Bay Bulls Arm (its name later changed to *Sunnyside*), Newfoundland, June 17, 1896 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

(Right: The sacrifice of Private Piercey is honoured on the Isthmus War Memorial which stands in Norman’s Cove. – photograph from 2014)

Private John Charles Piercey was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



Pay & Record Office
18/17

Long Cove Sep

Dear Sirs, I am writing you about my son's money. My son was killed the 1st of July, 1916, and the rest of the mothers that had sons killed got so much money. I am a poor widow eight children in family if there is any money for these mothers can I get some too.

My son's name John Piercey Norman's Cove, Trinity Bay No. 1535

Yours Truly
Patience Piercey

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 5, 2023.