



Private Stewart Pinsent (Regimental Number 1158), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



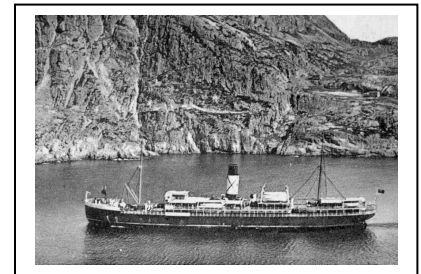
His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman* working for five-hundred dollars per annum, Stewart Pinsent presented himself for medical examination in the central Newfoundland community of Bishop's Falls on February 9, 1915. It was a procedure which would pronounce him as...*fit for Foreign Service*.

Having then travelled by train to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, he enlisted six days later at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road – engaged at the private soldier's rate of a single dollar per diem, plus a daily ten-cent *Field Allowance* - on February 15.

Exactly two weeks after enlistment, on March 1, he was now to swear his *Oath of Allegiance*, the *final* formality. At that moment Stewart Pinsent thereupon became...*a soldier of the King*.

There now passed a lengthy period of seven weeks and three days before, on April 22, 1915, Private Pinsent, Number 1124, embarked in the harbour of St. John's for...*overseas service*...with the two-hundred forty-nine officers and...*other ranks*...of 'E' Company onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* en route for Halifax. There appear to be no details of how or where he may have spent this intervening period – he may have returned home, perhaps even to work – but this is mere speculation.

Two days later, on April 24 at eleven-thirty in the evening, the detachment began its trans-Atlantic passage on board the trans-Atlantic liner SS *Missanabie* from Nova Scotia to Liverpool. The vessel arrived in that English west-coast port-city on May 2 or 3 – the two dates are recorded although the second may well have been the date of disembarkation.

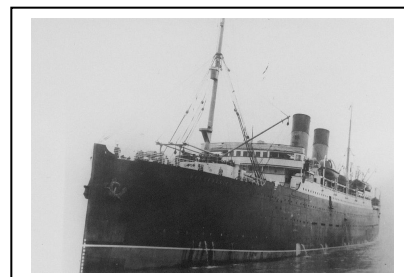


The Newfoundlanders on this occasion had sailed from Halifax in the company of the Canadian Army Service Corps *Railway Supply Depot*.

(Right above: *The image of 'Stephano' passing through the Narrows of St. John's Harbour is shown by courtesy of the Provincial Archives.*)

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(Right: The image of 'Missanabie' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries website. The vessel was of the Canadian Pacific Line and, although transporting troops during the Great War, did so as part of her commercial services which continued during the conflict. On September 9, 1918, she was torpedoed and sunk off the south coast of Ireland with the loss of forty-five lives.)



From Liverpool the contingent travelled northwards by train to the Scottish capital, Edinburgh where, on May 4, 'E' Company joined 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies which had already taken up station as the garrison at the historic Castle, the first troops from outside the British Isles ever to do so.



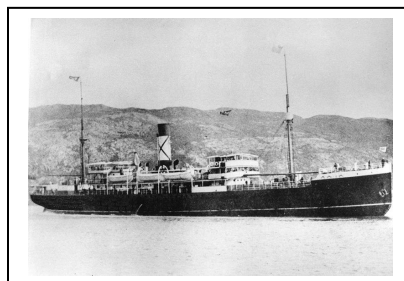
(Right: The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011)

Private Pinsent's 'E' Company, however, was to have but a few days to savour the charms of the Scottish capital.

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Some seven months before that May 4, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of 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.



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

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, 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 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.*

**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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Seven days after Private Pinsent’s ‘E’ Company’s arrival 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, 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*. On that date the newly-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus now 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 *Camp 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.



(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.*)

Meanwhile the two junior Companies, 'E' – as seen, the 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.

Private Pinsent, however, although having left Newfoundland as a soldier of 'E' Company, was not to be posted to the Regimental Depot but to southern England.

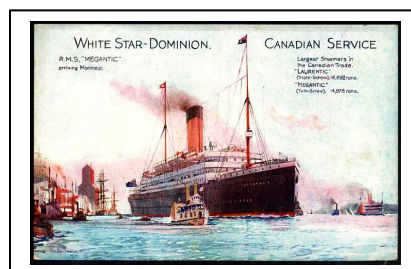
When he had been apprised of this change in plans seems not to be recorded – nor why he was selected - but Private Pinsent was one of the few from 'E' Company who were to swell the ranks of the units posted to Aldershot - thus he became a soldier of 'A' Company. And it was during the period while he was at Camp Aldershot, and as was the case with the great majority of the Newfoundland troops there, that Private Pinsent was prevailed upon to re-enlist...for the duration of the war. This he did on August 15*.

**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. Later recruits signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their enlistment.*

(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.)



(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, 1915, Private Pinsent and his 1st 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: *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)



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(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 Bay, 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 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 above: No-Man's-Land at Suvla Bay as seen from the Newfoundland positions – 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: An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at Suvla Bay – from Provincial Archives)

(Right: This is Anzac Bay in the foreground 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)



November 26 of 1915 had seen 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 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.

By this time the situation there was daily 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 been 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 was to be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(Right: *Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed Achi Baba, positions which were never breached: The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side 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 now 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.

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



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

(Right: '*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 arrived on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders landed and marched to their encampment.



Once at Suez, the Newfoundlanders were now to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.

(Right above: *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.*)

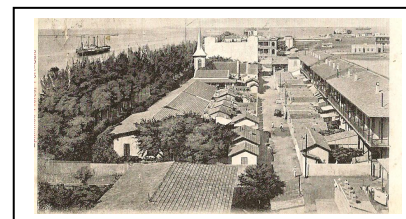
**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.*

(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*)



(Right below: *Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal 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 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. 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.



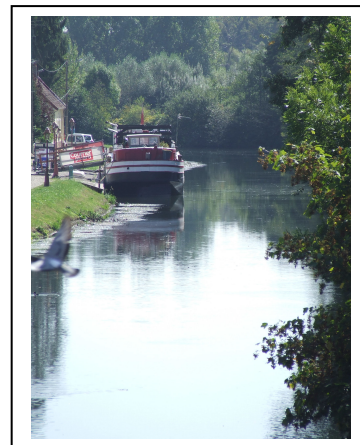
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Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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

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



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

**It should be said that the Newfoundland Battalion and two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles who were serving at the time in the 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: *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 Maily-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.

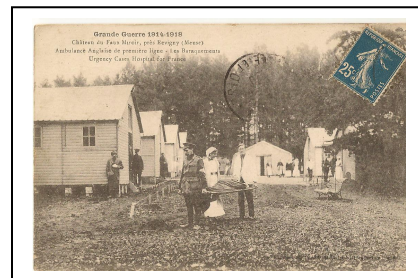


(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel: Looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences: The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009*)

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May 13 saw Private Pinsent sent to and admitted into the 87th Field Ambulance where he was diagnosed as suffering from rheumatic fever and bronchitis and immediately forwarded on the same day to the 29th Casualty Clearing Station at Gezaincourt. Two days later he had been transferred for further treatment to the 22nd General Hospital at Camiers.



(Right: A British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card)

Following another two weeks of medical attention in hospital, Private Pinsent was subsequently discharged...to duty...eventually to Base Details in Rouen, but not *directly* as recorded on some papers: another source has him having been ordered to the 6th Convalescent Camp at Étapes on the same date - on the last day of the same month, May 31 – and on June 1 he sent a letter from there, the 6th Convalescent Depot, to the Pay & Records Office in London, requesting an advance of two pounds (money).

He was now not to report back...to duty...with the Newfoundland Battalion until, as one of a draft of sixty-six...other ranks...to arrive from the Base Depot at Rouen, he re-joined the unit on the day on which it moved from Louvencourt up to *the Front* to do battle on the morrow: the date was June 30.

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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: 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.*



(Right above: Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from *Le Miroir*)

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*.

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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 the following 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.



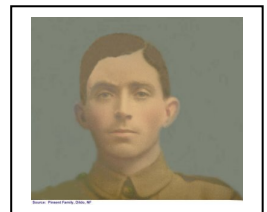
(Right: *A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland - dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?)*

The son of Samuel Pinsent, fisherman, and of Emma Pinsent (née *Hawkins*)* – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Dildo, Trinity Bay, he was apparently brother to twelve siblings: Christiana (*Chrissie*), Lilian (*Lily*), Amelia (*Minnie*), Francis, Ralph, Samuel, Kenneth (died young), Phoebe, Bessie, Laura, Sophia, and Kenneth (born after the death of first Kenneth).



**The couple was married on December 7, 1874.*

Private Pinsent was reported as...*missing in action*...on July 1, 1916, at Beaumont-Hamel while serving with 'A' Company during the fighting of the first day of...*First Somme*. This was later amended, for a reason undocumented in his files, so as to read...*killed in action**.



William Stewart Pinsent had enlisted at a *declared* twenty-five years of age - another source has him five years older: his birth in Dildo, Newfoundland, was recorded in July of 1888 (from records of the Reformed Episcopal Church which also document the name *William*).

(The above image of Private Pinsent has been donated by the Pinsent family to the Grand Banks Genealogy web-site)



**In his files it is cited that Private Pinsent was...‘buried in Knightsbridge Military Cemetery’. It is perhaps worth noting that this claim has been documented only once, on the same page on which he is recorded, also on only a single occasion, as having been...‘killed in action’. Could this be two mistakes, the second the result of the first?*

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(Preceding page: *The War Memorial in the town of Dildo honours the sacrifice of Private Pinsent.* – photograph from 2014)

Private William Stewart Pinsent was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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 6, 2023.