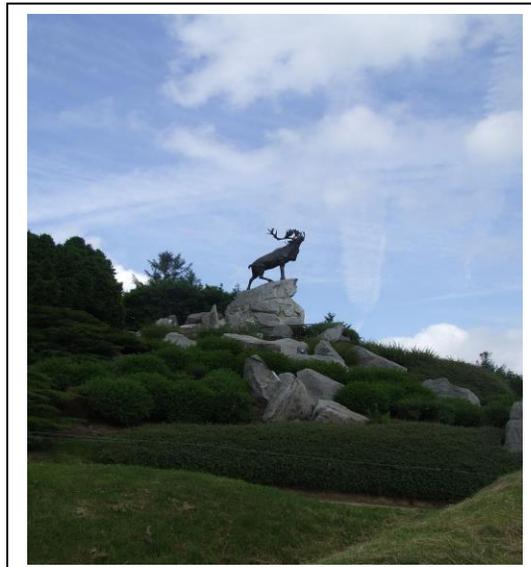




Private Corbett Pitcher (Regimental Number 1961), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman*, Corbett Pitcher was a volunteer of the Seventh Recruitment Draft. He presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on October 25 of 1915 in order to enlist and was thereupon engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar, to which was to be added a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.



Three days following his enlistment, on October 28, and having returned to the same venue, the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, Corbett Pitcher was now to undergo a medical examination. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being...*fit for Foreign Service*.

There were now only hours to wait after that medical assessment before there then came about the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On that same October 28 he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, at which moment Corbett Pitcher became...*a soldier of the King*.

A long waiting-period was now in store for the recruits of this draft, designated as 'H' Company*, before they were to depart from Newfoundland for...*overseas service*.

**In fact, 'H' Company was to depart from Newfoundland in two detachments: the first one-hundred recruits, Private Pitcher among that number, would be the first to leave in that December of 1915. The second part of 'H' Company would not follow until the fourth week of the upcoming month of March. It was to make the journey on board the SS Sicilian and report to Ayr on April 9.*

Until as late as that spring of 1916 it had been the intention to form a 2nd Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment to fight on the Continent. In fact it would seem that the one-hundred sixty-three recruits of the second contingent, 'H' Company, were to form a part of the nucleus of that unit, while the personnel already at the Depot by this time would form a reserve battalion to serve as a re-enforcement pool for both the Regiment's fighting units.

(continued)

It could not have been long before a change of plan came about as, very soon, men of the second half of 'H' Company were being sent to strengthen the 1st Battalion already on the Continent – maybe Beaumont-Hamel had something to do with it.

Private Pitcher, Regimental Number 1961, would be one of the one-hundred men who comprised the first detachment of 'H' Company to travel for...overseas service. He was now to wait fifty-one days after attestation before being called, but where he was to spend this time is not certain: he *may* have temporarily returned to work and was perhaps also to spend time at home in the Trinity Bay community of New Harbour – all of which is of course only to be treated as speculation*.

**It is also likely that some of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the city, or those who had no friends or family to offer board and lodging, were to be quartered in the curling rink at Fort William in St. John's, a building which was to serve as a barracks.*

This first detachment of 'H' Company left St. John's by train to cross the island to Port aux Basques on December 18, 1915. After the short sea-voyage to traverse the Gulf of St. Lawrence the detachment entrained once again, in North Sydney, for Saint John, New Brunswick.

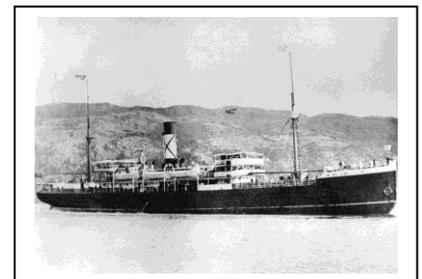


The Atlantic crossing was to be effected from there on board the Royal Mail Ship *Corinthian* and the draft reported to the Regimental Depot at Ayr on January 4 of the New Year, 1916.

(Right above: The Allan Line Ship 'Corinthian' was built in 1899 and was to serve mainly on trans-Atlantic routes between Great Britain and Canada. At the beginning of the Great War she formed a part of the convoy carrying the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the United Kingdom although after that it appears that she resumed her commercial work, transporting troops only if and when it suited her schedule. In December of 1918 she was driven ashore in the Bay of Fundy and although there was no loss of life, the ship was wrecked.)

* * * * *

Some sixteen months prior to that January 4 of 1916, 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, and were formed into '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.)

(continued)

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

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.



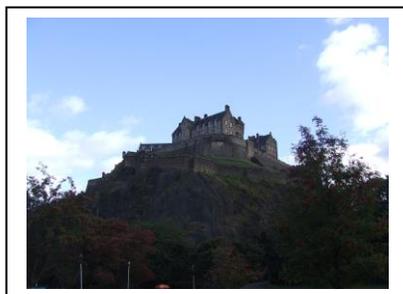
**It was to do so at Devonport through which 'G' Company was to pass eleven months later.*

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: *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 had been ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit had been dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.



(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 of Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



Two months less a day later, on July 10, 'F' Company would march into *Stobs Camp*.

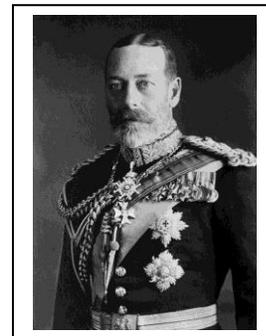
This had been an important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength* of a battalion which could be posted on...*active service*.



**A number sufficient for 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*)

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, had been transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before the Battalion's departure to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



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.

(Right above: *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.*)

(Right: *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 below: *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.*



The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer and the early autumn of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the newly-forming 2nd (*Reserve*) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 – that the new-comers were sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion*.

****The first such re-enforcement draft was, in fact, to depart from Ayr for service on the Gallipoli Peninsula on November 15, some seven weeks before the arrival in Scotland of Private Pitcher's 'H' Company.***

That November 15 of 1915 (see immediately above) was to see not only the departure of the 1st Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr to the Middle East and to the fighting of the *Gallipoli Campaign* but also, only five days prior, the arrival from Newfoundland of 'G' Company which would be obliged to take up quarters at *Gailes Camp*, some sixteen kilometres up the coast from Ayr itself – but just over sixty if one went by road.

A further seven weeks plus a day were now to pass before Private Pitcher and the first one-hundred of 'H' Company were to present themselves at the Regimental Depot.

* * * * *

Transferred upon their arrival in Scotland on January 4 to serve with 'G' Company, the new-comers of 'H' (now 'G') Company were to be quartered in the barracks of the Royal Scots Fusiliers; they, however, had not yet vacated the aforesaid premises, due to an epidemic of measles at the time. It was not long before the disease had also taken its toll on the Newfoundlanders amongst whom there would be fatalities.

Private Pitcher, however, was not to be one of those so affected.

Some five months after having reported to the Regimental Depot in early January of 1916, in June of that spring (the month but not the date is recorded) – or perhaps during the first days of that summer – he was prevailed upon to re-enlist...*for the duration of the War**.

****At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for a 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.***

By the time that he, Private Pitcher, was eventually to sail from the United Kingdom to...*active service*...the Regimental Depot had witnessed the departure of eight re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: In mid-November of the previous autumn the First – already cited in an earlier paragraph - had sailed for the Middle East to serve at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*; the Second had been a convoluted adventure – the draft had taken ship in mid-March for Egypt but upon arrival there had been obliged to turn around for a return voyage as far as the French Mediterranean port-city of Marseille.

From that time on, however, further drafts from the Depot in Scotland were all to proceed directly across the English Channel to France.

Private Pitcher had not been selected to serve in any of the first eight drafts; he was to have been posted in Scotland for some seven months before his turn would come. When it *did* come, his draft would be dispatched directly to France.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *British troops disembark at an earlier time of the Great War at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

On July 16 the 9th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Pitcher marching in its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to France. On the following day, the 17th, it landed in the capital city of Normandy, Rouen, where it made its way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base there. It was now to spend some days there undergoing final training and organizing* before moving off to its rendezvous with the parent unit...*in the field.*

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

When this union eventually came to pass, it was to be only a single day after the parent Battalion had arrived at the Belgian community of Poperinghe; Private Pitcher reported...*to duty...*, one of a small detachment of twelve *other ranks* who de-trained there on July 29, having travelled up from Rouen. On the following day the Newfoundlanders travelled the twelve kilometres or so by train to arrive at Ypres where they were to be billeted. 'B' Company, of which Private Pitcher was a soldier, moved into quarters similar to those of 'A' Company pictured several pages below, and at only a hundred metres distant.

When he was not in the trenches, this was to be home to Private Pitcher for the following ten weeks.

* * * * *

Fourteen months months prior to this juncture taking place, in the early summer of 1915 the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both 'E' and 'F' Companies, as seen further above, had only then been beginning their period of training there at Ayr; as for Corbett Pitcher, he had still been at home awaiting enlistment and attestation after which he still would have those fifty-one days to wait before the call was to come to sail overseas to the United Kingdom.

The aforementioned four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', of the Newfoundland Regiment, having now become the 1st Battalion had at this same time been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been dispatched from Aldershot 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.)*

(continued)

(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: *'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.

(continued)

(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: *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*)



(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.



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.

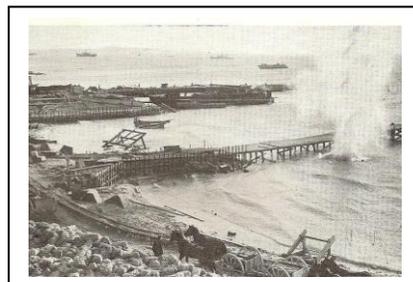
Some of the Battalion personnel had thereupon been evacuated to the nearby island of *Imbros*, some to *Lemnos*, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *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.

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

(Right: ‘W’ Beach at Cape Helles under shell-fire 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 and beyond.

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.*)



(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*)



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



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)

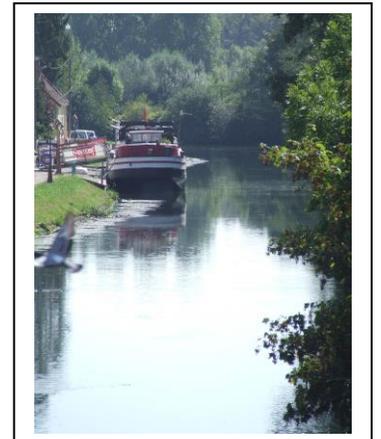


Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille.

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.

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



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.

On April 13, the entire 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 re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

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



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

**It might be added here 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.*

Having then been withdrawn at the beginning of that May to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders had soon been 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: *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 right in the photograph.* – photograph taken in 2009)



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.*

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...*First Battle of the Somme...was to continue for four and a half months.*



(Preceding page: *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 image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?*)

(Right: *A further view of the re-constituted battle-field in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – today the barbed wire is there to control the tourists – photograph from 2007(?)*)



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 any 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.

There were then 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 11-12, 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, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion was still to number only... *11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

Of course, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had not been the only unit in the British Army to have incurred horrific losses on July 1, 1916, even though it had indeed been one of the most devastated. But even with its depleted numbers, the Battalion had still been needed and, after that first – above - re-enforcement, it had almost immediately

again been ordered to man the trenches of the front line: as of July 14 the Newfoundlanders were to begin another tour in the trenches where...*we were shelled heavily by enemy's 5.9 howitzers and a good deal of damage was done to the trenches* (excerpt from the 1st Battalion War Diary).

On July 27-28 of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, maybe fewer even after two further re-enforcement drafts – would move northwards and enter into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time. As they – and the British - moved in the Canadians who had been there for eighteen months began to move in the opposite direction, towards the...*First Battle of the Somme*.



(Right above: *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*)

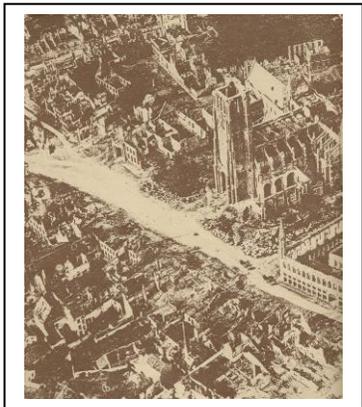
And as recorded in a previous paragraph, it was on July 29 that Private Pitcher reported to duty from Rouen and on the morrow was to be billeted under the ramparts of the city in quarters similar to - and at about a hundred metres distant from - those pictured above.

* * * * *

The unit 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.

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 would incur casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

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



Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to return south and was thereupon transported back into France and into the area of the...*First Battle of the Somme*.

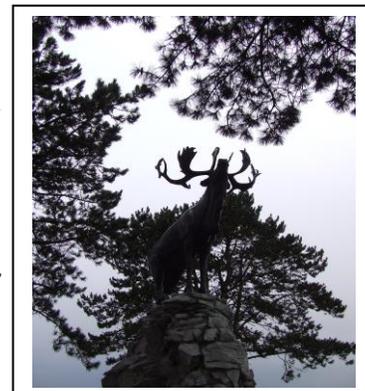
Just four days after the unit's return to France from Belgium, on October 12 of 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.



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

(Preceding page: *This is the ground over which the 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 would not be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it furnished 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 Infantry Brigade of which the Newfoundland unit was a battalion.



(Right above: *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 then eventually retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. By then it had been serving continuously in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks retired to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the Battalion began to wend its way back 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.



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

Those Christmas festivities completed – turkey dinner washed down with...*real ale*...apparently – it was not to be until a further sixteen days had passed that on January 11 the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* to make its way on foot to the town of Airaines.

From the railway station there it entrained for the small town of Corbie where it thereupon took over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before. Days later again the unit continued its progress back up to the forward area and to...*active*

service. That recent six-week Christmas respite having been spent far to the rear and by now a thing of the past, 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.

It was now the beginning of the winter period. As had been and as was to be the case of all the winter periods of the *Great War* – that of 1916-1917 would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable – there was a shortage of fuel and many other things, particularly in 1917 - for most of the combatants of both sides. It was also to be a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were kept busy, particularly, so it seems - at least according to Canadian medical documents and records - with thousands of cases of dental work.

This period would also provide the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and the recent weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion these exercises were to be at least partially undertaken in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.



On February 18 the 1st Battalion started a five-day trek back from Coisy to the forward area where it went back into the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers.

This relief came about at a place called Sailly-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans was warm and lively: after only two days the Battalion had incurred four dead, nine wounded and three gassed without there having been any infantry action. The Newfoundlanders were to withdraw on February 25...to return three days later.

They were carrying with them orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Sailly-Saillisel... an operation to be carried out on March 1.

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

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 that 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: *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(?)*)

(continued)

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 come from Ayr, 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*)

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

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders commenced 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 Canadian National Memorial which has stood atop Vimy Ridge since 1936 – photograph from 2010*)

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



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

(Right below: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen in 1917, from the western, 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 remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux for but a few days. 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.

When the other thirty-nine *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen reported to the 1st Battalion on April 18, they were just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers. They had been only two hundred twenty in number plus twelve officers now to serve with some two hundred of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. Those of the 1st Battalion then spent the 19th salvaging equipment and burying the dead...and they then remained there until the 23rd.



(Right above: Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras.– photograph from 2007)

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 in fact was just a single 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 sector of the 1st Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions which had been accompanied by heavy losses.

And the Newfoundlanders also had sustained further casualties: ten...*killed in action*, three ...*missing in action*, and forty-eight...*wounded*.

Very late on that same evening of April 23, the Newfoundlanders retired the dozen or so kilometres 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)



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

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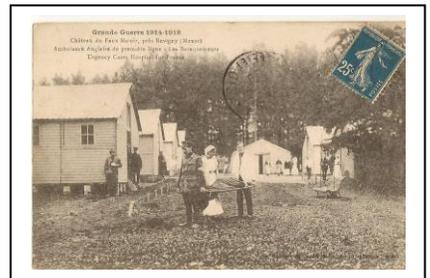
During the action of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm* – specifically at the time of a German counter-attack which was eventually driven back - Private Pitcher was wounded: not only did he suffer contusions to his back but he was buried by a nearby shell-blast and had to be dug out.

(Right: *Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras. – photograph from 2007*)

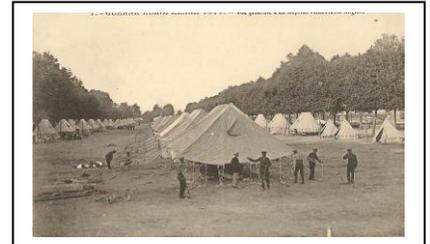


Sent immediately to the 87th Field Ambulance, it was still April 23 when he was received for further treatment, firstly at an unidentified Casualty Clearing Station, then at the 6th Stationary Hospital at Frévent.

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



(Right: *A British casualty clearing station being established 'somewhere on the Continent', this one, like many, under canvas to facilitate mobility if or when it were to become necessary – from a vintage post-card*)



(Right: *Transferring sick and wounded from the forward area to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)



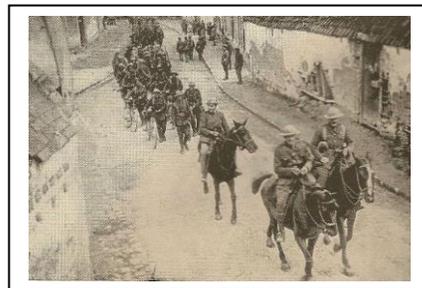
Finally, if all the records are viable, he was despatched on the 110th Temporary Ambulance Train to the 16th General Hospital at the coastal community of Le Tréport where he arrived on April 24.

It was May 6 when Private Pitcher was discharged to the Divisional Base Depot at Rouen – released from the 16th General Hospital. A month later, on June 7, he reported...*to duty*...back to the Newfoundland Battalion, being one of a draft of fourteen officers and ninety-two *other ranks* to arrive in the community of Bonneville on that day.

* * * * *

(continued)

The *Battle of Arras* had by that time proceeded to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-month, but the Newfoundland unit had not been further involved in any further co-ordinated offensive action – it was too exhausted; this now would be a period when the Battalion was to be moving in a circular fashion on the *Arras Front*, in and out of the trenches.



On May 7 it was on the move once again and marching to different billets in Berneville where it was to be the subject of a war journalist and photographer.

(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – as cited immediately above - in early May, perhaps the 7th, of 1917 – from The War Illustrated*)

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

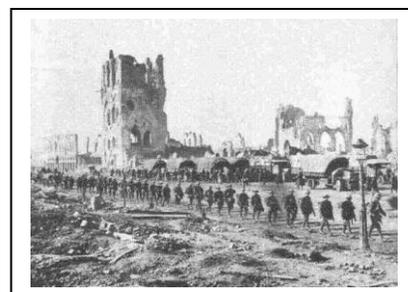
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The Newfoundlanders were then soon once again to be moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the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



(Right: *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: *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*)

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.



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

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army. 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.



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

Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* 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 the unit had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost would be that much higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

(Right: *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*)



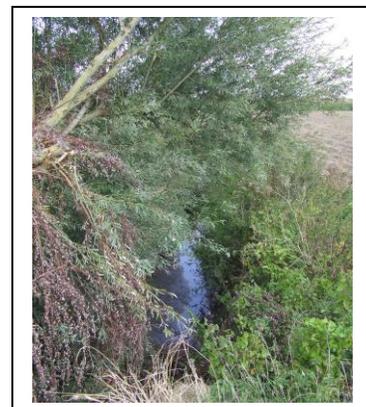
(Right below: *The once-village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

After the operation at the *Steenbeek* for the Newfoundlanders there were then to be four days and four weeks of relative calm. The four days were to comprise the trek which began on August 24 in the forward area, to finish at *Penton Camp* to the north-west of the town of *Poperinghe* on August 28 and which would continue while the British forces re-enforced and re-organized after a month of fighting that had not gone as well as the British High Command had optimistically anticipated. The Newfoundland Battalion would go back to war during the last days of what had been a fine month of September, in contrast to the foul weather that had gone before – but, as the fighting started once more...so did the rain.



The offensive recommenced for the Newfoundland Battalion on September 25, although the unit had incurred four wounded two days prior to that date due to long-range artillery fire. Back in their trenches they prepared for their next concerted attack on German positions. It came some two weeks later and it came at the *Broembeek*.

(Right: *An innocuous, placid stream shown here, in 1917 the Broembeek was a torrent which would flood the surrounding terrain, transforming it into a quagmire.* – photograph from 2009)



It was to be only two days after the confrontation of October 9 of 1917 at the *Broembeek* that the Newfoundland Battalion marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe, from where it was to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of the community of Proven. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit once more boarded a train.

By ten-thirty that same evening, the Battalion arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and then marched the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.

* * * * *

Only days later, Private Pitcher would go on leave. Having been granted a two-week furlough commencing on October 23, he was one of a number of men permitted to spend this time in the United Kingdom. He reported back to Berles-au-Bois on November 3.



(Right: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

* * * * *

The Newfoundlanders were still there, at Berles-au-Bois, two weeks after Private Pitcher's return from that period of leave when, on November 17, the 1st Battalion was to be ordered once again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it began to move further eastward, now on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while still on the move, the unit was issued as it went with... *war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of that night it then marched up to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the Newfoundland unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, was to move forward into its forming-up area. From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten, bugles blowing, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment advanced to the fray.



(Right above: *The Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai* – photograph from 2009)

(continued)

This new offensive – apparently initially conceived to be no more than a large-scale raid - the so-called *Battle of Cambrai*, was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders having been directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle was to begin well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities were again squandered. There had been no troops made available to exploit what had been a hoped-for - yet admittedly unexpected - success, and by the close of the battle, the Germans had counter-attacked and the British had relinquished as much – more in places - territory as they had originally gained.

The Newfoundland Battalion had once again been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing, Masnières - where a Caribou stands today - and in the area of the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who had advanced into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day*.



(Right above: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of the 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether its capture was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012)*

**At five-hundred fifty-three all ranks – not counting the aforementioned ten per cent reserve - the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment even at the outset of the operation was operating at just over fifty per cent of establishment strength: not that it would have been any consolation had it been known, but a goodly number of battalions in all the British and Dominion forces – with perhaps the exception of the Canadians - were encountering the same problem.*



(Right above: *A number of graves of soldiers from the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery. Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, has identified them as being Canadian. – photograph from 2010),*

The son of Japhet (also found as *Joseph*) Antel Pitcher, fisherman – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of seventy cents from his pay, and of Emily Pitcher (née *Smith**, deceased from consumption on April 19, 1894) of New Harbour, Trinity Bay - the family originally from nearby Hope All (also found as *Hopeall*) - he was also step-brother to Samuel.

**The couple had married in Hope All on June 16, 1889. After Emily's passing, Japhet married Eliza Cranford in Dildo on September 23, 1896. The following year the couple had a son, Samuel.*

(continued)

Private Pitcher was reported as having been...*killed in action*...on December 1, 1917, while serving with 'B' Company during the British fighting retreat near the French villages of Marcoing and Masnières in the last days of the *Battle of Cambrai*.

At home, it was Adjutant Oldford of the Salvation Army in Dildo who was requested to bear the news to his family.

His subsequent burial was reported as attended by the Reverend W. Keary, Chaplain of the Forces attached to the 17th Field Ambulance, but his grave was apparently destroyed or its whereabouts forgotten during the fighting and upheavals of the next twelve months.



Corbett Pitcher had enlisted at a *declared* twenty-five years of age: date of birth in Hope All, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, September 13, 1889 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).



(Right above: *The New Harbour War Memorial honours the sacrifice of Private Pitcher.* – photograph from 2012)

(*The photograph above right of Private Pitcher is from the Provincial Archives.*)

Private Corbett Pitcher was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also 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 4, 2023.