



Private Edward Pye (Regimental Number 968) lies in Marcoing British Cemetery – Grave reference: II. G. 14.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman* earning a monthly twenty dollars, Edward Pye presented himself for medical examination on January 14 of the year 1915 in the Conception Bay community of Carbonear. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

(continued)

By the following day, January 15, Edward Pye had made the journey from Carbonear to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, where he was then to enlist at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road – engaged at the private soldier's rate of a single dollar per day plus a daily ten-cent *Field Allowance*.

However, whereas attestation for others had come about on the day of enlistment, he was now to await a further three weeks plus a day, until February 6, before *that* final formality would come to pass.

For Private Pye, Number 968, there was now to be yet another waiting period, a final one of six weeks before being summoned to overseas service. How he occupied himself during that time is not recorded among his papers; he may, of course, have temporarily returned to work in the area of Carbonear – or just gone home - but this is only speculation.



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

Unlike the two previous contingents to have departed Newfoundland (see below) for...overseas service, Private Pye's 'D' Company was not to sail directly to the United Kingdom. On March 20, it embarked – he a soldier of the 7<sup>th</sup> Platoon - onto the Bowring-Brothers' vessel *Stephano* for the short voyage to Halifax, capital city of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, where it was thereupon to board a second vessel, the newly-launched *Orduña*, for the trans-Atlantic crossing\*.



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

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

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



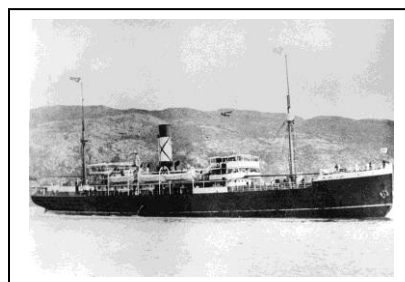
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(Preceding page: *From its vantage point on Castle Hill, the venerable fortress overlooks the city of Edinburgh where in 1915 the Newfoundlanders were to provide the first garrison to be drawn from outside the British Isles. – photograph from 2011*)

\* \* \* \* \*

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

\* \* \* \* \*

As seen in a previous paragraph, for the month of April and the first days of May of 1915, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies, now united, were to furnish the garrison – the first troops from outside the British Isles to do so - of the guardian of Scotland's capital city. Then,

during the first week of May, 'E' Company was to report there... *to duty*...from home. Four days later again, on May 11, the Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

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

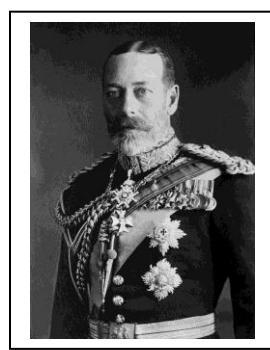
It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent would eventually receive the re-enforcements from home – 'F' Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength\*. The now-formed 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the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

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



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

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot. This force, now the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



Meanwhile the two junior Companies, 'E' – last arrived at Edinburgh - and the aforementioned 'F', were ordered transferred to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, there to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion.

(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.*)

It was while the Newfoundland Battalion was in training during those weeks at Aldershot, on August 15 that Private Pye would be prevailed upon to enlist for the duration of the conflict.

*\*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.*



(continued)

**(Preceding page: Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.)**

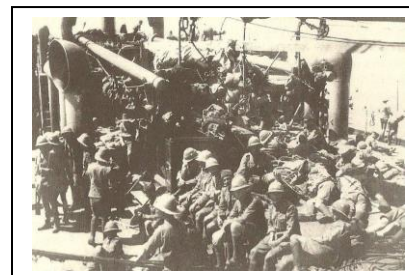


**(Right: The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)**

**On August 20, 1915, Private Maher and his Newfoundland unit 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.**



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



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

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



**When the Newfoundlanders 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*, was proving to be little more than a debacle:**



**(continued)**

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

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



(Right: *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.*

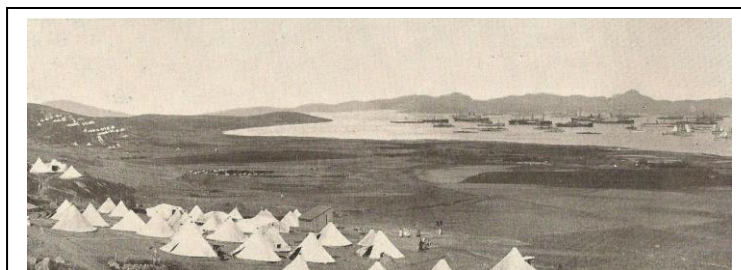
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On November 20, Private Pye was to be evacuated from Suvla Bay to Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos, some seventy kilometres distant, *possibly* suffering from a urinary tract infection and *certainly* suffering from trench-foot. There he was admitted into the 16<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital for medical attention. Five weeks later, on Christmas Day of that 1915, he was taken on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Aquitania*, at the time being readied for passage back to the United Kingdom. She sailed on the morrow.



(Right above: *A calm and deserted Mudros Bay ninety-six years after Private Pye's visit – photograph from 2011*)

(Right: *By the end of the year 1915, the bay at Mudros with its busy but minuscule harbour was almost entirely surrounded by Allied medical facilities, the majority of them, as seen here, under canvas. – from Illustration*)



(Right: *Some of the peace-time facilities on board the peace-time passenger vessel 'Aquitania' by this time in use as war-time hospital wards – the original photograph from the Cunard Archives*)



Upon arrival in England he was transported to and admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth on January 3 of the New Year, 1916.

Private Pye was to remain there for the following six weeks.

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



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



Private Pye was discharged from hospital on February 13 and was immediately granted the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel upon release from hospital.

The Waverley Hotel in Edinburgh, where Private Pye had already been stationed, offered special rates for servicemen, and it was there that he spent his leave until February 26 - except that Private Pye then overstayed his leave and was to report late – on the 29<sup>th</sup>\* - to duty to the Regimental Depot.



That error of judgement was to cost him three days *confined to barracks.*

(Right above: *Because of those special rates, the small chain of Waverley Hotels was very popular with those in uniform during the Great War. – The image of the Waverley Hotel in Edinburgh is from Wikipedia.)*

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 the 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front.*

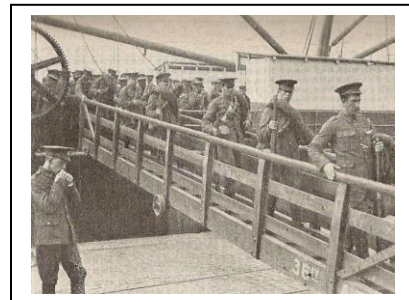


(Right above: *An aerial view of Ayr, likely from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr, where were quartered the 'other ranks', is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)



(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.*

Just a little more than six weeks later, Private Pye was to be a soldier of the 5<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft that passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on April 13 en route to the *Western Front*. The detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and the site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot on April 15, thereupon proceeding to the aforementioned Depot for several days of final training and organization\*.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. The photograph is from early in War. – from Illustration*)

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

By the time the draft of one officer and forty-one...*other ranks*...arrived at the front on April 26, the Newfoundland Battalion had vacated the relative comfort of the village of Englebelmer where it had ended its journey from Egypt thirteen days prior, and had already been serving in the front-line trenches – with ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies in the firing-line – for four days. During that time the Newfoundlanders had incurred their first wounded from artillery fire in France.



Those trenches were to be *home* for yet another week.

(Right above: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)

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In the meantime, back at *Suvla Bay*, bad as conditions had been at the time of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion’s arrival there, during the first days and weeks of Private Pye’s absence, the British positions – and thus those of the Newfoundland unit – had been becoming yet more and more untenable

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

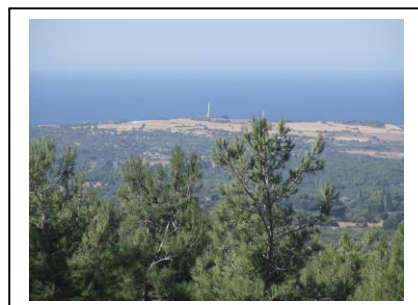
There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

(continued)



On the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the 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 was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 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 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 had evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of *Alexandria*, to arrive there on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to the vicinity of *Suez*, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division had yet to be decided\*.



(Right above: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 soon to become a theatre of war.***

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



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage through the *Suez Canal* en route to France. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseilles, on March 22.

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



Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.

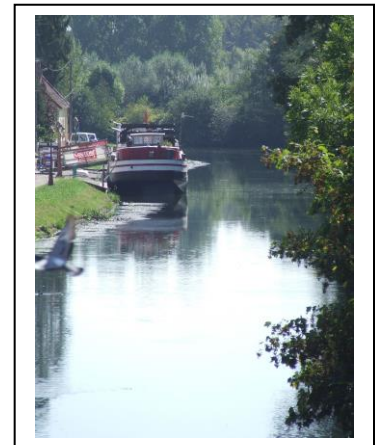
Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they had then 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 was to then be ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.



And it had been, as related above, during this time that on April 26, Private Pye had reported back...*to duty*...with the parent Newfoundland Battalion.

***\*It should be said that the Newfoundland Battalion and two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles who were serving at the time in the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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: Today the wire serves only to control the tourists. – 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.



One of the lesser highlights of Private Pye's month of May surely occurred on the 5<sup>th</sup> when, while in billets at Mailly-Maillet, he lost his cap – seemingly a frequent occurrence among the Newfoundland soldiery - and was obliged to pay the cost of a new one – also a frequent occurrence.

On June 18, Private Pye was one of twenty-two men to become attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade Machine-Gun Company and it was in that capacity that he played his part in the fighting of July 1, the first day of *the Somme*.

If there is one name and date in Newfoundland history which is etched in the collective once-national memory, it is that of Beaumont-Hamel on July 1 of 1916; and if any numbers are remembered, they are those of the eight-hundred who went *over the top* in the third wave of the attack on that morning, and of the sixty-eight unwounded present at muster some twenty-four hours later\*.



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

***(Right: A view of Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?))***

***\*Perhaps ironically, the majority of the Battalion's casualties was to be incurred during the advance from the third line of British trenches to the first line from where the attack proper was to be made, and while struggling through British wire laid to protect the British positions from any German attack.***



There are other numbers of course: the fifty-seven thousand British casualties incurred in four hours on that same morning of which nineteen-thousand were recorded as having been *killed in action or died of wounds*.

It was to be the largest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.



(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village*. – photographs from 2010 and 2015)

*In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists today – at the time comprising two communities: Beaumont, a village on the German side of the lines, and Hamel which was behind those of the British. No-Man’s-Land, on which the Newfoundland Memorial Park lies partially today, was on land that separated Beaumont from Hamel.*



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

How close Private Pye and the twenty-one other Newfoundlanders who had been seconded to man the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade’s machine-guns were to the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel on that day is not recorded, but Private Pye was one of those very few of the Newfoundland Battalion to come through that cataclysmic experience unscathed\*.

*\*His personal papers document Private Pye as having been...with Battalion...on July 4, but this is a little misleading. Despite the date, it refers to July 1 and it records the personnel who were on the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion nominal roll on that day. That roll includes not only those who fought and survived the attack by the Battalion at Beaumont-Hamel but also the ten per-cent reserve who spent that morning at Louvencourt before moving forward to the field at a time when the fighting had all but subsided and, as in the case of Private Pye, those who had been seconded to serve in other units – the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade Machine-Gun Company and the Mortar Battery, for example.*

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that a German counter-assault might well annihilate what had managed to survive of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*.

The few remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion – and of the other depleted British units - had thus remained in the trenches perhaps fearing the worst, and at night searching for the wounded and burying the dead. It was to be July 6 before the Newfoundlanders were to be relieved from the forward area and to be ordered withdrawn to Englebelmer.

It had then been a further two days before the unit had marched further again to the rear area and to billets in the village of Mailly-Maillet.

(Right: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John's East. – photograph from 2009*)

There on July 11, a draft of one-hundred twenty-seven reinforcements – 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 manpower having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.*



On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

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

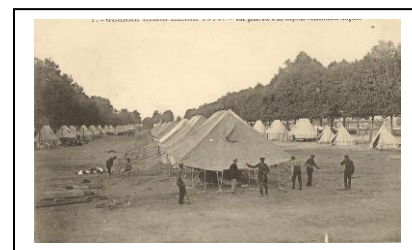
(Right: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



*The Salient* – close to the front lines for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict - was to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there; yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

When exactly it was that Private Pye had left the Machine-Gun Company to re-join his unit does not appear to be recorded among his papers. However it was at some time either before the move into Belgium or very soon afterwards since he was to be one of the first of the above-mentioned casualties.

His personal record cites that on August 9 – the Regimental War Diary does *not* mention casualties on that particular date – Private Pye was admitted into the 10<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at the Rémy Sidings near the town of Poperinghe, having incurred a wound to the skull from shell-fire and another to the left leg.



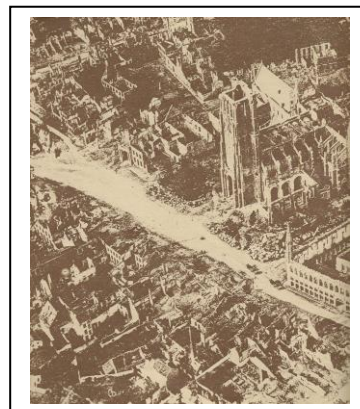
(Right above: *A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War. Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card*)

After only a single day spent receiving treatment in the 10<sup>th</sup> CCS, he was forwarded on to the 8<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital on the Channel coast at Wimereux, and then to No. 1 Convalescent Depot, Boulogne, on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the month. Discharged to duty to the Base Depot at Rouen on August 29, Private Pye is recorded as having re-joined his Battalion just over three weeks later again, on September 21, while the unit was out of the line – even out of *the Salient* – and back at the town of Poperinghe.



(Right above: *The coastal resort-town of Wimereux seen at a time just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.



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

Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was to be at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.

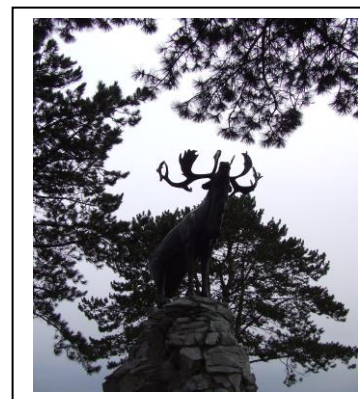


The encounter had proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

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

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

The Newfoundland Battalion was not to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it would supply two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires and the Worcestershires, of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.



(continued)

(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme. – from Illustration*)



On October 30, the Newfoundland unit had eventually been retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to wend its way back up to the front lines.



There it continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period broken only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

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

It was on January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* from where it would make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it was to entrain for the small town of Corbie where it had thereupon taken over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

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

\* \* \* \* \*

It was now at about this time, on January 20 of the New Year, 1917, that the personal record of Private Pye recommences, on this occasion at the 36<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station in the vicinity of the community of Heilly where he was admitted, having been diagnosed as suffering from pthisis (tuberculosis).

Forwarded on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of that month to the 12<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Rouen, he was then placed on board His Majesty's Australian Hospital Ship *Warilda* on the 28<sup>th</sup> for the crossing back to the United Kingdom. There Private Pye was admitted for the second time into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital, Wandsworth where the diagnosis was revised to bronchitis.



**(Preceding page: *The image of HMAHS 'Warilda' clad in her war-time hospital garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Built for service on Australia's east coast, the vessel was requisitioned at the outbreak of war in 1914 for use at first as a troop-transport before her conversion to a hospital ship in 1916. On August 3 of 1918 while carrying wounded soldiers to England from France she was torpedoed. 'Warilda' sank in about two hours and one-hundred twenty-three of the eight-hundred one souls on board were lost. Her wreck lies in the English Channel.*)**

**A ten-day furlough commencing on or about March 14, a posting *to duty* at the Regimental Depot at Ayr as of March 23, and a subsequent three-week spell in hospital due to exhaustion - on this occasion in the 4<sup>th</sup> Scottish General Hospital, Glasgow - from May 14 to June 6, then succeeded one another.**



**(Right: *The new race-course at Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden: A part of the original grand-stand is still visible. – photo from 2012*)**

**Private Pye was once more to pass through Southampton – on August 5 with the 28<sup>th</sup> Reinforcement Draft from Barry\* – and disembarked in Rouen on August 7 to report to the Base Depot. Three weeks later he reported...*to duty*...with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, on the 28<sup>th</sup>. It was the start of the three-week lull in the British offensive during *Passchendaele*, and the Newfoundland unit was out of the line at *Penton Camp*, close to the Belgian town of Poperinghe, once more re-enforcing and re-organizing.**

**Private Pye was one of one-hundred sixty-four...*other ranks*...to report the Battalion on that day.**

**\**During the summer months of 1917, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.***

\* \* \* \* \*

**As seen in a previous paragraph, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had moved forward, and back into...*active service*...on January 23 of 1917. That winter was to be quiet, much like all the other winters of the *Great War* – at least on the *Western Front* – with little concerted infantry activity apart from the everyday patrolling and the occasional raid, this latter activity encouraged by the High Command who felt it to be good for morale and for the offensive spirit.**

**Of course, those called upon to participate in these...*morale-boosting activities*...were not necessarily always in agreement with their comfortably-lodged, well-watered and well-fed superiors.**

**(continued)**



In the case of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, the sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during that entire period – from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Saily-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: A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, their unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold and ice of the trenches at Saily-Saillisel during the winter of 1916-1917. – from *Illustration*)

(Right: *The fighting during the period of the Battalion’s posting to Saily-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time. - photograph from 2009(?)*)



After Saily-Saillisel the month of March had been a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events. They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick’s Day.



(Right: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from *The War Illustrated**)

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had begun to make their way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, the march to finish amid the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.



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

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



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

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

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

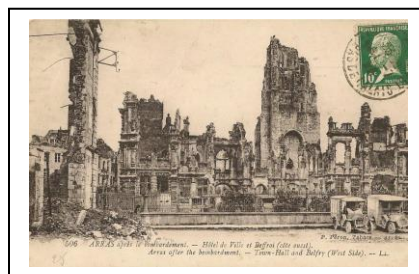


The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, the ineptly-planned action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

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

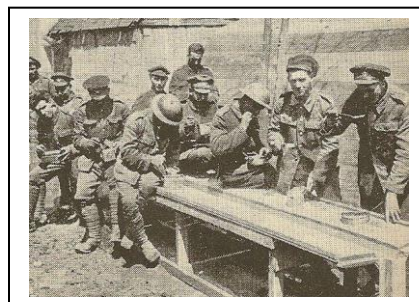
After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, be amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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



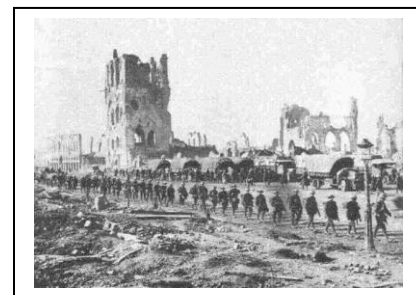
The Newfoundlanders had then soon once again been moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.

(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)



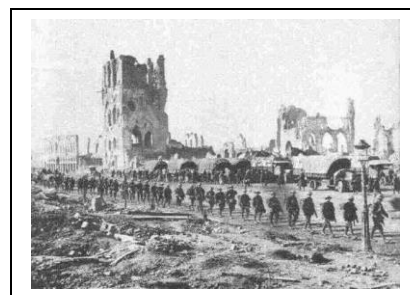
Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British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

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



(continued)

The Newfoundlanders had once again moved north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again to the area of Ypres. This had been selected as the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, borrowing that name from a small village on a ridge that was one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right above: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

The battle, having commenced on the final day of the month of July, had therefore been ongoing for a month by the time of Private Pye's return to...*active service*...with the Newfoundland Battalion on August 28. Once again, things had not been going as well as the High Command had anticipated and a halt to the proceedings was called in September to allow for re-enforcements – the casualty rate had been enormous – and re-organization.

Ironically, the weather which had been poor and worse during the early weeks, was to ameliorate and be fine in that September. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, the day on which hostilities had recommenced, so had the rains.

\* \* \* \* \*

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

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



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



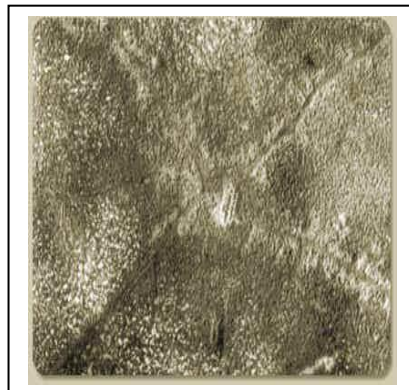
Private Pye had, of course, reported back to his unit too late to play a role at the former action, but he surely must have done at the *Broembeek*.

(continued)

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

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



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

The Newfoundlanders was still there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and two days later when, on November 17, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would 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 to be 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, and with bugles blowing, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced to the fray.

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

The battle was to begin well for the British who would use tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities had been squandered. There were to be no troops available to exploit what was, admittedly, a hoped-for yet 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.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The Canal St-Quentin at the village of Masnières, the crossing of the waterway and the establishment of a bridgehead having been the first objectives for the Newfoundland Battalion on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would once again be 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Elijah Pye (former fisherman, drowned) and of Dorcas Pye\* (née *Summers*, then Mrs. Moses Vaters by the time of her son's enlistment) he was from Victoria Village, Carbonear.

*\*The couple had married on November 2, 1896, in St. James' Church, Carbonear.*

Private Pye was at first reported as *missing in action* on November 20, 1917, while serving with 'D' Company in fighting near Marcoing and Masnières.



His burial in Marcoing Copse Cemetery – before the subsequently transfer of his remains to where they lie today - was later reported by Reverend T. Nangle, *Chaplain of the Forces* to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion – the date is not cited – and his record amended so as to read *killed in action*.

At home it was the Reverend C.W. Hollands of Carbonear who was requested to bear the news to his family.

Edward Pye had enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years: date of birth in Victoria Village, Carbonear, Newfoundland, August 4, 1897 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

(Preceding page: *The Carbonear Cenotaph honours the sacrifice of Private Pye.* – from 2010)

Private Edward Pye was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



Colonel Randell  
Militia Dept  
St. John's

Carbonear July 20, 1920

Dear Sir:-

I have been importuned by the mother of Edward Pye #968 D Co. Nfld Regiment killed in France to write you regarding his estate. This poor woman with a blind husband and two small children is in a desperate plight and she says that the last payment she received on account of her boy was April 1919 when she received a cheque for 16.00.

?????? administered ?????? for the Estate of her boy when she was led to believe that there was some 500.00 for her.

Can you kindly give me any information regarding the case  
obliged very truly  
??? Penney

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 7, 2023.