



Private Peter Randell (Regimental Number 1276), 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* earning two-hundred fifty dollars per annum, Peter Randell presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on March 13 of 1915. It was a procedure which would pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

He then was to return to the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road on March 15, just two days following his medical assessment, on this second occasion to enlist. He was thereupon engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was added a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*.

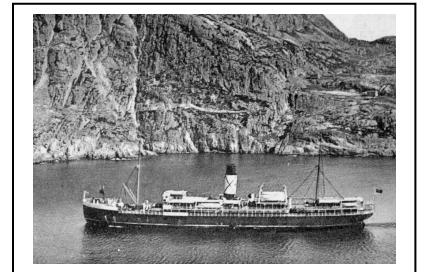
It was to be a further two weeks plus a day, the date March 30, before he was to undertake his attestation, to swear his *Oath of Allegiance*, the concluding official formality. At that moment Peter Randell became...*a soldier of the King*.

There now passed a further lengthy period of three weeks and two days before, on April 22, 1915, Private Randell, Number 1276, embarked in the harbour of St. John's for...*overseas service*...with the two-hundred forty-nine officers and...*other ranks*...of 'E' Company onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* en route for Halifax.

There appear to be no details of how or where he may have spent that final waiting-period before taking ship for...*overseas service*; Private Randell may have returned home to Twillingate and perhaps even to work – but this is mere speculation.

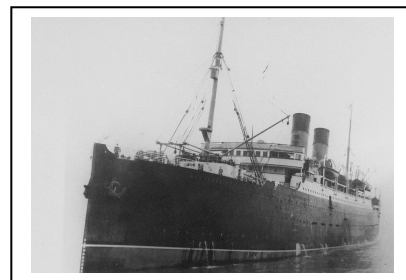
Having arrived in Halifax, on April 24 at eleven-thirty in the evening the detachment began its trans-Atlantic passage on board the trans-Atlantic liner *SS Missanabie* from Nova Scotia to Liverpool. The vessel arrived in that English west-coast port-city on May 2 or 3 – the two dates are recorded although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

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



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

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



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

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

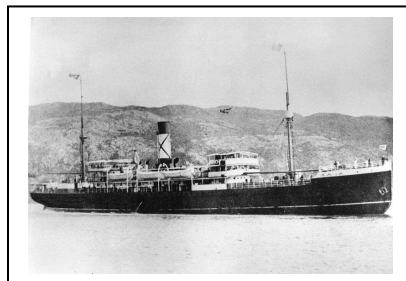


Private Randell and his 'E' Company, however, were to have but a few days to savour the charms of the Scottish capital.

* * * * *

Some seven months before that May 4, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's for the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits – these to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

* * * * *

Seven days after the arrival of ‘E’ Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

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

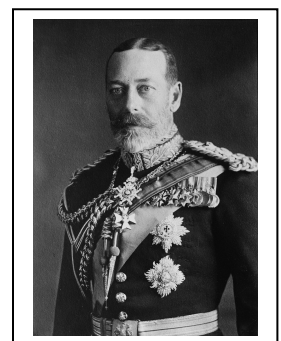
It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent would eventually receive the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength*. On that date the newly-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus now available to be ordered 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 four ‘fighting’ companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

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



(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – the photograph is from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.*)

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

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

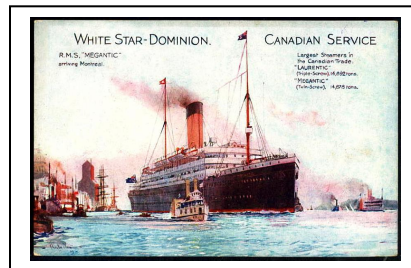
When he had been apprised of this change in plans seems not to be recorded – nor why he was selected - but Private Randell was one of the few from 'E' Company who were to swell the ranks of the units posted to *Aldershot* - thus he became a soldier of 'D' Company. And it was during the period while he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

**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for 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 were to sign on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.*

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



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



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



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

(continued)

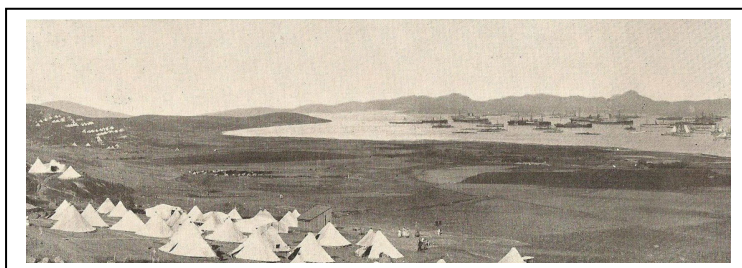
(Right: Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros: either *Megantic* on August 29, *Ausonia* on September 18, or *Prince Abbas* on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on Gallipoli. – from Provincial Archives)



Private Randell, however, was by that time no longer among the Newfoundland unit's ranks.

* * * * *

As part of the preparation for the *Gallipoli Campaign* the troops had been obliged to submit to vaccinations. On September 20 - while his comrades were adapting themselves to conditions at the newly-opened front at *Suvla Bay* – Private Randell was being admitted into the 1st Stationary Hospital at Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos.



He was suffering from ill-effects of the inoculation(s) to which he had recently been subjected.

(Right above: By the end of the year of 1915, much of Mudros Bay and its small harbour had been surrounded by Allied – French and British and Commonwealth - medical and other facilities, a great number of them, as seen in the above panoramic photograph, working under canvas. – from *Illustration*)

Six days later, on September 26, Private Randell was forwarded to an undocumented convalescent depot, also on Lemnos. Then, for the next five months, there is no record of him, although at some point he must surely have been discharged...*to duty*..., likely to the British Sidi Bishr Base Depot in Alexandria.



(Right: A Europeanized city by the time of the Great War, this is the Place Mohamed Ali in Alexandria at or about that period. – from a vintage post-card)

From there he would eventually re-join the Newfoundland Battalion on March 1 of 1917, having travelled from north to south down the length of the Suez Canal to where the Newfoundland unit by that time was encamped in the vicinity of Port Suez itself, at the entrance from the waterway into the Red Sea.

* * * * *

(continued)

(Right: 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)



In the meantime, and while Private Randell was being taken into medical care, 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 were to serve but, even ever since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, had proved to be little more than a debacle:

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

(Right below: 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.*



November 26 would see 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.

(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)



(continued)

By this time the situation there was daily becoming more and more untenable; thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, ordered 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 1st Battalion was to be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

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



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

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

Immediately after the British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria. On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived there with the 1st Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16th, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she arrived on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders landed and marched to their encampment.



(continued)

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

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

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

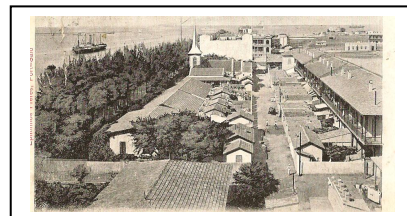
(Right: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration*)



It was to be just more than six weeks into the period that was now to follow at Port Suez, on March 1, that Private Randell after an absence of more than five months would report back to his unit.

* * * * *

After that two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* – once again including Private Randell - of the 1st Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.



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

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



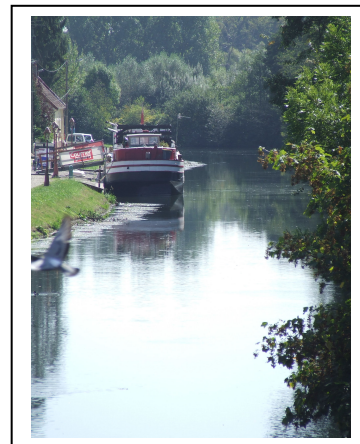
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably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

(continued)

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

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.

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



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

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

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

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



Having then been withdrawn at the end of that April to the areas of 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.

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*.



(continued)

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

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



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

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

It was to be the greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage of the *First Battle of the Somme* was to continue for a further four and a half months.

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

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



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

* * * * *

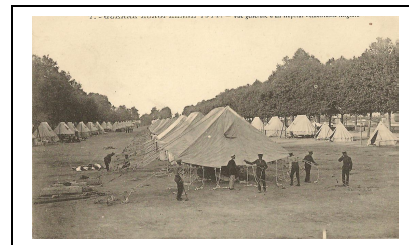
On July 1, 1916, the first day of the...*First Battle of the Somme...*, Private Randell was one of the many wounded during the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel. By the following day, July 2, he had been evacuated from the forward area to the 4th Casualty Clearing Station at Beauval, having incurred an injury to the left arm – including a fracture - inflicted by enemy artillery fire.



On the next day again, Private Randell was forwarded to the 24th General Hospital in the coastal town of Étaples.

(Right below: 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)

It was an un-recorded hospital ship which transferred him back across the Channel to England on July 5. Upon his arrival there he was admitted, on the 6th, into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth: *From France. Perforating GSW (gun-shot wound) left fore-arm causing fracture of ulna. Wound healed. Sent to Brooklands & then furlough.* (Medical report upon release to convalescence)



Following treatment which apparently was to last for more than five weeks, Private Randell was discharged for convalescence and transferred to the *Brooklands* Military Hospital in the town of Weybridge. The date was August 11 and there at *Brooklands* he would remain until September 7.

On that above-noted September day, Private Randell began the customary ten-day furlough granted to those military personnel having convalesced from wounds or sickness in hospital in the United Kingdom. On September 16 – the British Army counted its days in the manner of the Romans - he reported as he had been ordered,...*to duty...to* the Regimental Depot at Ayr.

(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)



At the end of this summer of 1915, the once-Royal Borough of Ayr on Scotland’s west coast was to begin to serve as the overseas base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment from where – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 - re-enforcement drafts from home were to be despatched to bolster the 1st Battalion’s numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.

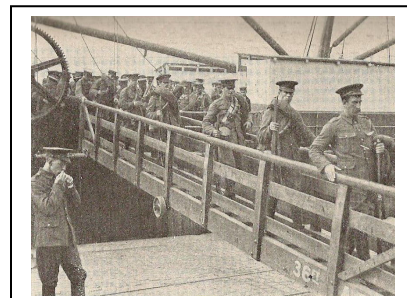


(Right: *The High Street in Ayr as shown on a postcard of the time, the imposing Wallace Tower – it stands to this day (2017) - dominating the scene* – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo.

Some three months later, on December 30, the penultimate day of 1916, Private Randell, as a soldier of the 16th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on his way to re-join the Newfoundland Battalion on the Continent.

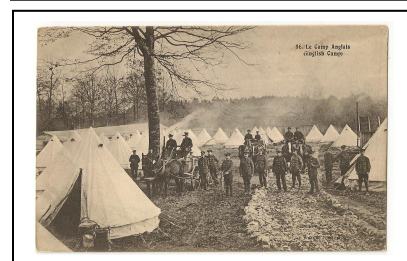
Having arrived on the following day, New Year's Eve, in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot in Western Europe, the contingent reported there for several days of final training and organization* before moving out to a rendezvous with the parent unit.

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



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

It was on January 17 of the New Year, 1917, that Private Randell's draft of fifty-one...other ranks...arrived to report...to duty...with the 1st Battalion at Carnoy Camp No. 1. The Newfoundlanders were at the time ending a five-week Christmas and New-Year term spent in *Corps Reserve*.



(Right: *a British camp, in not particularly clement conditions, somewhere on the Continent during a winter of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

* * * * *

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, and immediately following the departure of Private Randell for medical attention to the CCS at Beauval, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it was to be 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.

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 re-enforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported to duty.

They had been the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion had still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

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

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

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



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

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

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



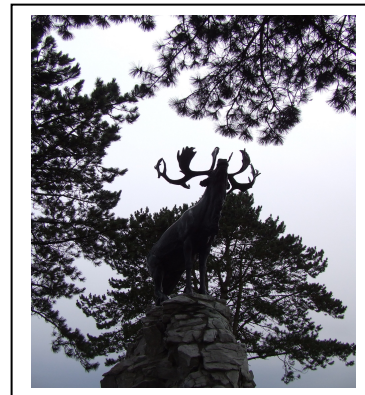
Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was to be at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.

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

(Right above: *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*)



(continued)



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

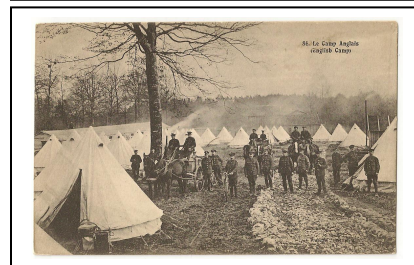
The Newfoundland Battalion was not to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it would supply two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires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

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



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

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1st Battalion had begun 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 had been on January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion was 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.

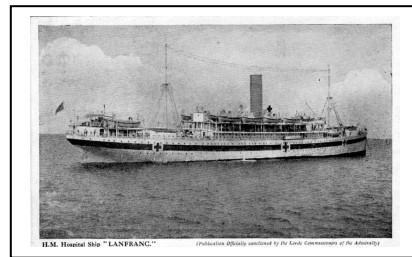
And as related in a previous paragraph, it had been during the above-cited return towards the forward area that during the short halt of January 17 at the Army encampment in the vicinity of the community of Carnoy, Private Randell had reported from Rouen back to the Newfoundland Regiment.

* * * * *

Only two days later the Regimental War Diarist reported that the Newfoundlanders had relieved the 1st Battalion of the British Border Regiment, in the front-line trenches – during which period, likely on January 21, they, the Newfoundlanders, had incurred dead and wounded due to enemy artillery fire - even though *officially* they were not reported as back on...*active service*...until January 23.

* * * * *

Private Randell would not serve very long at the front on this occasion: on January 31 he was admitted for treatment for a case of laryngitis into the 34th Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown, Meaulté. From there, on February 8, he was forwarded to the 11th Stationary Hospital in Rouen before then being shipped to the United Kingdom – on the 14th – on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Lanfranc*.

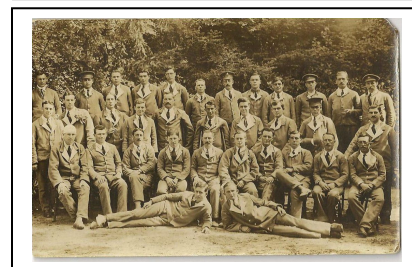


(Right above: *The image of HMHS 'Lanfranc', seen here clad in her war-time hospital-ship garb, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. A vessel of the Booth Steamship Company, prior to the War she had been employed mainly on a route from Great Britain to Manaus, a Brazilian city some one-thousand six-hundred kilometres up the Amazon River. Requisitioned at the outset of hostilities, she served as a hospital ship until April 17, 1917, when she was torpedoed while ferrying patients between Le Havre and Southampton. Forty soldiers died of whom twenty-two were wounded British and eighteen were injured German prisoners.*)

Upon arrival in England on the morrow, he found himself once more hospitalized in the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth. There his laryngitis seemingly became bronchitis and then bronchitis evolved into pneumonia – before eventually pleurisy was added to the mix. Private Randell was to remain in hospital until May 2, a period of two-and-a-half months. (A second source says he left hospital on April 21, but May 2 is the date in his hospital records.)



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



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

On the date of his discharge, on or about May 2, Private Randell was granted a further ten-day furlough before he received a second posting to Ayr commencing on or about May 11. Apparently during this time in Scotland there was another interval – May 31 to June 12 - spent in hospital, his complaint being diagnosed as *soft chancre*. Private Randell was to spend *that* period in the 3rd Scottish General Hospital in Glasgow.

(continued)

Once again, on this second occasion on July 22, 1917, he passed through Southampton with the 27th Re-enforcement Draft – on this occasion dispatched from *Barry Camp** - and, two days later, disembarked at Rouen where there began the inevitable training at one of the aforementioned *Bull Rings*. After that it was to be yet several weeks before Private Randell would be on his way to re-join the Newfoundland Battalion which by then was in Belgium, engaged in the British battle being fought in Flanders.

**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (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.*

He is documented as reporting to the Newfoundland unit, a soldier of one of the two drafts totalling one-hundred sixty-four *other ranks* which reported to *Penton Camp*, north-west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe, on that day.

* * * * *

Private Randell had left the Newfoundland Battalion at a time of very little concerted infantry action; all four of the winters of the *Great War* were of a relatively passive nature, thus the seemingly endless patrolling and the occasional raid – felt by the High Command to be good for the offensive spirit – were the only activities undertaken by the 1st Battalion while in the forward trenches.



Nonetheless, there were casualties incurred, some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig was cavalierly to refer to as...*wastage*.

(Right above: A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, their unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold 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 the sharp engagement, a raid, 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(?))

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.

(continued)

They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band having travelled from Ayr, 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 1st 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, in early 1916 – from Illustration)



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

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.



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



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

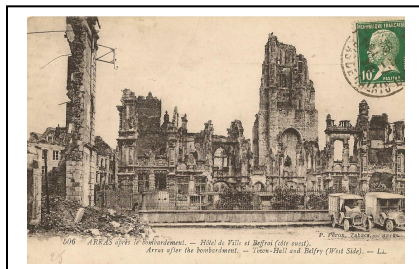
**It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

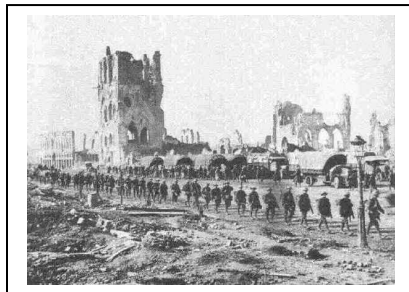
The Newfoundlanders had then soon once again been moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.

(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 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.

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



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

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



Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9.

At the former it had incurred nine...*killed in action*..., ninety-three/...*wounded*..., and one...*missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost had been higher: forty-eight...*killed*...or...*died of wounds*..., one-hundred thirty-two...*wounded*...and fifteen...*missing in action*.



(Right above: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream close to the line of trees and therefore near to where the Newfoundland unit fought the engagement of August 16. It is some eight kilometres 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*)

Private Randell arrived at a time when the British had called a three to four-week halt to the fray in order to re-enforce and to re-organize; the battle had not been proceeding particularly well.

As the tired soldiery had withdrawn into camp at the end of August - the Newfoundlanders on the 26th - the rains which have come to symbolize Passchendaele retired as well and the month of September was to be fine – until the fourth week. As the troops then returned to the battlefield, so did the bad weather.

While it is certain, since he was not there, that Private Randell played no part at the former confrontation of August 16, it is sure that he was present at the latter action of October 9.

The son of William Randell (also found as *Randall*), former fisherman deceased January 29, 1911(?), and of Lucy Randell (née *Barnes**, deceased March 3, 1914) he was also brother of Bessie Randell, she later Mrs. Norman Elliott, of Twillingate (*Bluffy Cove*) to whom, before her marriage, he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay (see below); of Elsie, she of Twillingate as well; of Dulcie; and of Stanley.

On February 4, 1916, he had willed that his possessions be divided equally between sisters Bessie and Elsie.

**The couple had married on November 9, 1899.*

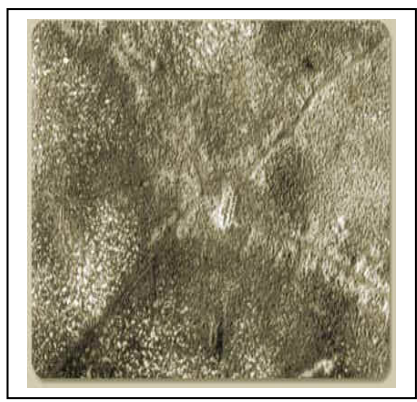
(Right above: *The Broembeek, normally a placid, innocuous stream, had overflowed its banks in the autumn of 1917, rendering its surrounds into little more than a swamp. - photograph from 2010*)

His own place of residence was recorded likewise as being the Southside, Twillingate.

Private Randell was reported as having been...*killed in action*...on October 9, 1917, while serving with 'D' Company during the fighting at the *Broembeek*.

Peter Randell had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-one years: date of birth in Twillingate, Newfoundland, March 11, 1895 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

(Right: *A plaque affixed to the North Side United Church in Twillingate commemorates the sacrifice of Private Randell. – photograph from 2013*)



Private Peter Randell 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).



The Paymaster
1st Newfoundland Regiment

3rd London General Hospital
Ward B9
Wandsworth, London SW
15/3/17

Dear Sir,

I am asking you would you please stop my allotment which I leave home. I suppose you would like the reason I am stopping it. Well, I leave 60 cents a day home to my sister, but she is married and I don't see the reason why another man should spend my money, so I would be very pleased if you would oblige me.

If you can't do it will you write and let me know

I remain

P. Randell

1276 Pte. Peter Randell

Noted on letter:- **OK Allotment cancelled from March 31st**

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – February 6, 2023.

