



Private Alexander Reader (Regimental Number 1135), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation previous to his military service recorded as that of a letter-carrier working for an annual \$300.00, Alexander Reader officially enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem - on February 17, 1915. He then attested ten days later, on February 27.



Private Reader then embarked with Number 6 Platoon of 'D' Company, just more than four weeks later again, onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* (right above – from *Provincial Archives*) on March 20, 1915, for passage to Halifax and for overseas service. From Halifax he took ship on His Majesty's Transport *Orduna* (right) for the trans-Atlantic crossing to Liverpool.



Sailing from Nova Scotia on March 22 for Liverpool, the draft landed there eight days later, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, and entrained to Edinburgh, arriving at the historic Castle on the same day. For the next six weeks, having been united with 'A', 'B' and 'C' Companies already stationed there, the Newfoundlanders formed the garrison – the first troops from outside the British Isles to do so - of the guardian of Scotland's capital city.



(Right: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the skyline of the Scottish capital city from the summit of Castle Hill. – photograph from 2011*)

On May 11 the Newfoundlanders were transferred to Stobs Camp, near Hawick, to the south-east of Edinburgh. There they remained for some three months until the beginning of August when the senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C', and 'D' – now to become 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, the Newfoundland Regiment - were sent south to Aldershot in the south of England. There they received final training – and a royal inspection - to prepare for *active service* in Gallipoli.



(Right above: *the Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp on June 10, the day it received its Colours – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

The later arrivals, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were sent to the new Regimental Depot recently being established at Ayr, on the west coast of Scotland. There they were to become the nucleus of the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion.

It was during this period at Aldershot, on August 15, that Private Reader was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion for the *duration of the war*\*.

*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

On August 20, 1915, Private Reader took ship on board the requisitioned passenger liner *Megantic* (right top) for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting in Gallipoli where, a month later – of which two weeks had been spent billeted at the British barracks at Abbassia, near the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion landed on the beach at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

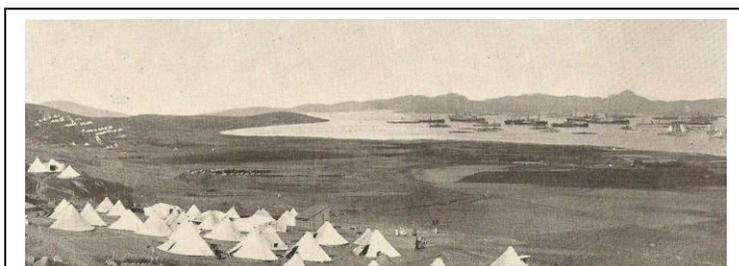
(Right above black & white: *Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros, either Megantic on August 29, Ausonia on September 18, or Prince Abbas on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on Gallipoli. – from Provincial Archives)*

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

(Right above: *almost a century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where Private Reader served during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)*

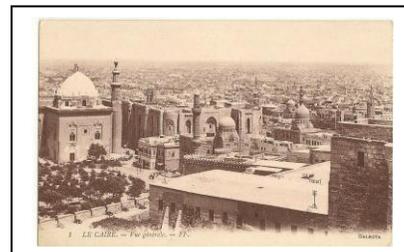
On December 8, Private Reader was evacuated to the 54<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Suvla, suffering from pyrexia (high fever) and bronchitis. From there he was shipped to the 27<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at West Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos, the date unrecorded.

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(Preceding page: *Towards the end of the year 1915 Mudros Bay and its minuscule harbour on the island of Lemnos were almost entirely surrounded by Allied medical establishments – a great number of them under canvas. – from Illustration*)

Private Reader next was taken on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Dilton* – although there seem to be no records of any such vessel - on December 23, for transport to Alexandria where, upon disembarkation, he was immediately admitted into the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Stationary Hospital, Cairo, on the 27<sup>th</sup>. From the Canadian hospital he was discharged to the Rest Camp, Abbassia, on January 4 of the New Year, 1916.



Ten days later again, Private Reader was reporting *to duty* at the Base Depot at Sidi Bishr, Alexandria, on the 14<sup>th</sup>\*. From there he re-joined 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of January 26 of the New Year, 1916.

*\*There is a single report of Private Reader being back at Abbassia on February 27 diagnosed as with tuberculosis, but nothing further appears to be documented.*

(Right: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The Newfoundlanders, employed as the rear-guard, were among the last to leave on two occasions. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration*)



When the British evacuated the entire Gallipoli Peninsula in January of 1916, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been sent to Alexandria, arriving there on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. From there the Newfoundlanders were transferred, almost immediately, south to Suez. To that point it seems that the theatre of the future posting of 29<sup>th</sup> Division was still uncertain. It was at Suez that Private Reader reported *to duty* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



On March 14, the decision having been taken, the officers and men of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion embarked through Port Tewfiq at the southern end of the Suez Canal onto His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* (right above) for passage to the French Mediterranean port of Marseilles, en route to the *Western Front*.



(Right above: *Port Tewfiq at some time before the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

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

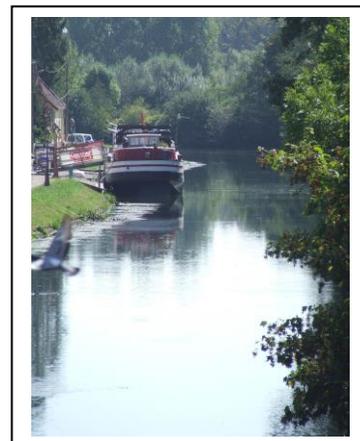


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Some three days after the unit's disembarkation in France on March 22, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's train arrived at the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy in north-west France. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for them travelling unused in a separate wagon.

De-training at the station at two in the morning the Newfoundlanders still had a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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



It is doubtful that any of those tired soldiers paid much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge that they passed on their way from the station. Some three months later *the Somme* would be a part of their history.

On April 13, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy – where it was billeted, welcomed re-enforcements from Rouen on the 15<sup>th</sup> and, on the evening of that same day, was sent to the British front lines, there to improve the communication trenches.

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for that same meandering river, *the Somme*.



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

Although on the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's nominal roll on July 1, 1916, Private Reader *apparently* took no part in the action of that day at Beaumont-Hamel, likely being one of those held in reserve. Somewhat confusingly, he was recorded as *with Battalion* on July 4.

This particular roll call is of those who had been seconded to other units, or who had been part of the ten per cent reserve of fourteen officers and eighty-three other ranks held at Lovencourt and not sent forward on July 1 until late in the day when the fighting had for the most part abated. This register – and likewise the one of the survivors of the day who, emerging unscathed from the events on the battlefield, answered muster on the morning of July 2 – were apparently officially recorded only on July 4, days after they were compiled.



(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*)

On July 27-28 of August 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved north and into 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. *The Salient* proved to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there; nevertheless they still incurred casualties, a number of them fatal. On October 8, after some ten weeks in Belgium, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved south, back to France and back to the area of – *and the battle of – the Somme*.



(Right above: *the entrance to 'A' Company's quarters in the ramparts of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *the city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – and eight months before the Newfoundlanders were posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)



Four days after its return to France, on October 12, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion went again to the attack at a place called Gueudecourt, another costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right: *This is the ground over which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. A few managed to advance as far as the copse of tree on the far right horizon before being forced to retire. The trees today are the site of the Gueudecourt Caribou. – photograph from 2007(?)*)



After Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 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 the several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines in the area of Amiens at Camps-en-Amienois.



(Right above: *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 that welcome six-week Christmas respite, the Newfoundlanders *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, 1917, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date, and had incurred their first casualties of 1917.

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The Regimental War Diary for February 25 reads partially as follows: *Trenches (in front of Saily-Saillisel) - Batt. in same position all day. Heavy bombardment on both sides. Casualties: 3 killed, 6 wounded, 2 gassed.*



(Right: *The front-line trenches at Saily-saillisel where Private Reader was serving on February 25 were on the far side of the reconstructed village seen in the picture. – photograph from 2010*)

The son of William S. Reader, agent(?) – to whom he willed his all - and Jessie Reader – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Bonavista, he was also brother to James, George and Lindsay.

Private Reader was reported as having been *killed in action* on February 25, 1917, while serving with 'D' Company in the course of a heavy enemy bombardment at Saily-Saillisel in the French *Département de la Somme*.

Alexander Reader had enlisted at twenty years of age.



(Right above: *Private Reader's sacrifice is honoured on the Bonavista War Memorial. – photograph from 2010*)

Private Alexander A. Reader 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).

