

Second Lieutenant Robert Bruce Reid (Regimental Number 593*), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

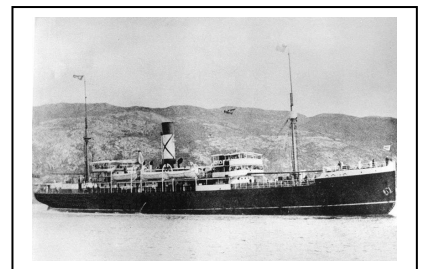


****Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were not considered as enlisted. These officers thus had no Regimental Number allotted to them.***

And since officers did not enlist, they were not then required to re-enlist 'for the duration', even though, at the beginning, as a private, they had volunteered their services for only a limited time – twelve months.

A member of the Reid family whose business ventures form a major part of Newfoundland's history, Robert Bruce Reid presented himself for medical examination on September 3 of 1914 at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

Five days later, on September 8, he enlisted, also at the C.L.B. Armoury – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar plus a daily ten-cent per diem Field Allowance - and was attested on that same day. He was a recruit of the First Draft.



There was now to follow a period of training on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the East End of St. John's, exercises which terminated at the end of that same month in view of the imminent departure for *overseas service.*

October 3, 1914, two days later again, was the day on which Private Reid and the Newfoundland contingent, known to history as both the *First Five Hundred* and the *Blue Puttees* – the unit was not yet a battalion - embarked onto 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 sailed from St. John's for the United Kingdom on the following day, October 4, via the south coast of the Island where it was to rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas.



In the United Kingdom Private Tobin trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to the city of Inverness; then at Edinburgh Castle where the unit was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.



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

(Right: *Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from its position on the summit of Castle Hill. – photograph from 2011*)

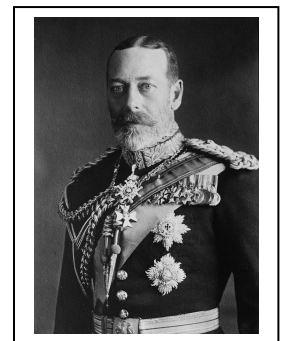
On May 11 the Newfoundlanders, by this time numbering five companies, were transferred from the Scottish capital to a tented *Stobs Camp*, in the vicinity of the Scottish town of Hawick, where they were to undergo further training and exercises for some three months.



(Right: *The Newfoundland Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp and about to be presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915 – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

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.

Meanwhile, the two junior Companies, 'E' and the last-arrived 'F', were ordered posted to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, where they were to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.



(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 – photograph from Bain News Services via Wikipedia*)

**On July 10, 1915, 'F' Company had arrived at 'Stobs Camp' from Newfoundland, its personnel raising the numbers of the unit to battalion establishment strength, and thus enabling it to be ordered on active service.*

Having by the month of July, and with the arrival of 'F' Company (see * above), the personnel necessary to comprise a battalion – plus a reserve - the four senior companies of the Newfoundland Regiment, were to become its first such force.

When the Newfoundlanders landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* they disembarked into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

(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*)



Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would 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 to prove 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 which 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 had been second-rate, 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 to strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods 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, would be those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

On the night of December 19-20, the British abandoned the area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.



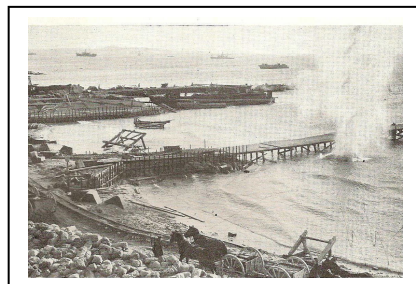
Some of the Battalion personnel would be evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli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

(continued)

(Preceding page: 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 the Anzac forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at Gallipoli – were now to be only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the Peninsula could be undertaken.

The final operation – the evacuation of Cape Helles - of the Gallipoli Campaign took 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 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 15th 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 29th Division had yet to be decided*.



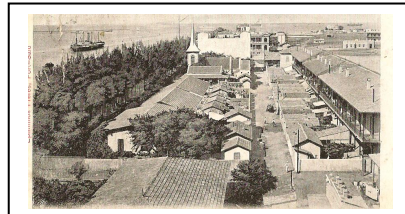
***Bulgaria had by this time entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.**

(Right above: 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)

(continued)

(Right below: *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 1st 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.



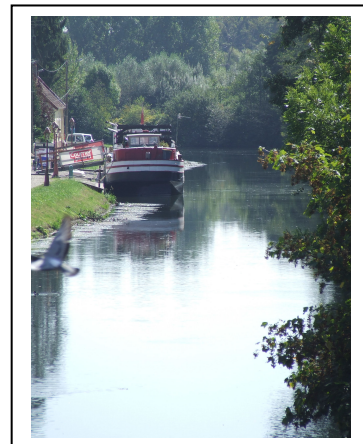
(Right: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles.* – from a vintage post-card)

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

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 below: 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.



By this time the Newfoundland *Pay & Record Office* in London had been regularly receiving a number of bills from *Willis & Son, Coach Builders and Motor Car Engineers*, in the town of Devizes. Devizes is in the county of Wiltshire which is not all that far from Aldershot.

The dates of these bills suggest that in those weeks of August of 1915 spent at Aldershot and during which time Lance Corporal Reid had received his Imperial Commission, he may well have taken advantage of a car provided by his mother. However, numerous though they are, these documents provide no further information *a propos* the affair.

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



(Right 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.***

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(Right below: *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...?)*



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.



The son of Sir William Duff Reid and Lady Reid (Minnie, née *Cormack*)* of *Bartra*, Circular Road, St. John's, he was also brother to Howard Vincent Reid** as well as two other brothers and a sister.

**The couple married in Ottawa in 1893.*

*** Appointed provisional Second Lieutenant in the Newfoundland Regiment a lieutenant in the Royal Naval Air Service in order to later join the Royal Flying Corps. He was later attached to the 2nd Wing of the Royal Naval Air Service in the eastern Mediterranean and based in Alexandria, Egypt, and later again became a captain in the Royal Air Force.*

Second Lieutenant Robert Bruce Reid was at first reported* as *missing in action* on July 1, 1916, during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*. His record was later amended – on or about July 19 - so as to read *killed in action*, the changes likely due to eye-witness reports.

Robert Bruce Reid had enlisted at a *declared* twenty years of age: date of birth in Montréal, Québec, February 22, 1895 (from St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church Records, Montréal).



**An early report had Lieutenant Reid as wounded and likely in enemy hands. Another version of events records the hour of his death as eight-thirty in the morning, before the Newfoundlanders were ordered to attack – not impossible, however, if he were to have been killed by artillery fire.*

(The photograph of Second Lieutenant Robert Bruce Reid on the preceding page is from the Provincial Archives.)

Second Lieutenant Bruce Reid 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) (right).



A letter written to Sir William Duff Reid by the Governor of Newfoundland, Sir Walter Davidson:

7th July, 1916

**Sir William Reid,
Montreal**

It is with the deepest regret that I have to announce that Lieutenant Bruce Reid is reported as missing after the heroic action which the Newfoundland Regiment fought at Beaumont on July first. Four Officers were reported missing but one is since reported wounded and in a British Hospital in France. I am satisfied that Bruce at the front of the advance fell on ground which remained in enemy hands. I believe that he is wounded is in enemy hands and will be well tended.

The casualties all resulted from machine gun fire at close range and not from shells so there is little doubt that ninety five per cent of the wounded will make a speedy and complete recovery.

Walter Davidson

(continued)

Extract from *Casualty* received from the Newfoundland *Pay & Record Office*, London, dated August 18, 1916.

1st Newfoundland Regiment

**Mellor, Lt. Fred. L.
Signalling Officer**

Informant states that on the First July (Saturday) at Ocean Villas the Regiment went over the trenches at 9 a.m., to attack 3rd Line system of German trenches. The Germans instantly opened a violent machine-gun fire and our men began to fall. Informant states that practically the whole Regiment was mown down and that Lieuts Mellor, Reid and Taylor were most possibly killed. The informant was wounded in the left leg and was left at 9:20 on Saturday until 11:30 a.m. on Sunday. Only those who were wounded and killed quite close to our own firing line were brought in. (Above information also applies to Lieuts Taylor and Reid.)

**Reference: 2nd Lieut. William Valence Warren,
1st Newfoundland Regiment,
3rd London General Hospital,
Wandsworth**

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 11, 2023.

