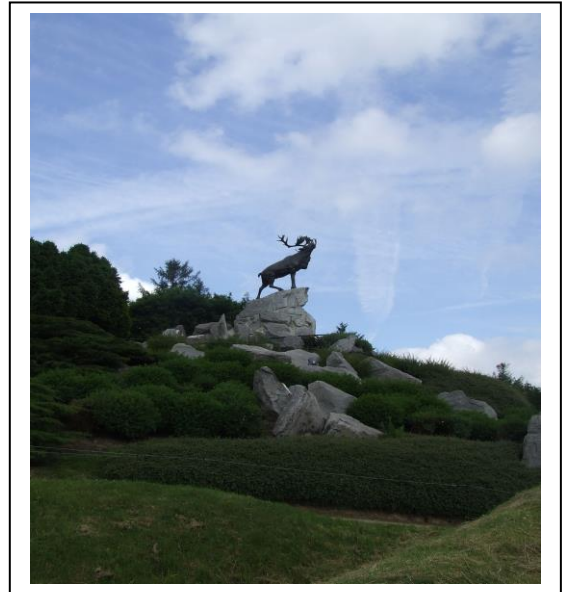




Private George Ricketts (Regimental Number 1703), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman*, George Ricketts was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. Having presented himself on July 14 of 1915 at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, for enlistment, he was thereupon to be engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar, to which was to be added a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.



Two days later, on July 16, he returned to the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, on this second occasion to undergo the medical examination necessary prior to service in the Newfoundland Regiment. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being... *Fit for Foreign Service*.

An interim of a further three days was now to follow before there would come the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On July 19 he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, and thereupon, at that moment, George Ricketts was to become... *a soldier of the King*.

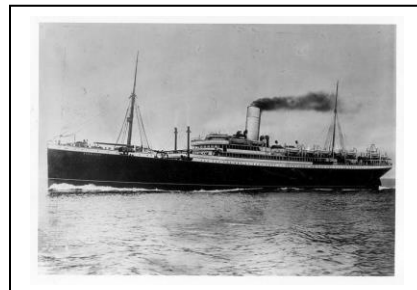
A further, and lengthier, waiting-period was now in store for the recruits of this draft, designated as 'G' Company, before they were to depart from Newfoundland for... *overseas service*.

Private Ricketts, Regimental Number 1703, was not to be again called upon until October 27, after a period of fourteen weeks plus a day. Where he was to spend this intervening time appears not to have been recorded although he possibly returned temporarily to his work and just perhaps also was to travel to spend some time at his home in the area of Middle Arm, Seal Cove, White Bay, his recorded residence – but, of course, this is only speculation.

On that October 27, Private Ricketts with his 'G' Company left St. John's by train to cross the island to Port aux Basques, the other passengers on board reportedly having included several naval reservists and also some German prisoners-of-war. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry – documented as having been the *Kyle* - and afterwards proceeded again by train from North Sydney as far as Québec City.

(continued)

There the Newfoundlanders joined His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* for the trans-Atlantic voyage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9. The vessel had departed Montreal on October 30 with Canadian troops on board before stopping at Québec: the 55th Canadian Infantry Battalion and the Second Draft of the (1st?) Divisional Signals Company.



(Right adjacent: *The image of Corsican is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Launched in 1907 for the Allan Line, one of the largest private shipping companies of the time, she spent much of her early career chartered to the Canadian Pacific Line which in 1917 was to purchase the entire Allan Line business. She was employed as a troop-ship during much of the Great War which she survived – only to be wrecked near Cape Race on May 21, 1923.*)



(Right: *The once-busy Royal Navy facility and harbour of Devonport almost a century after the Great War – photograph from 2012(?)*)

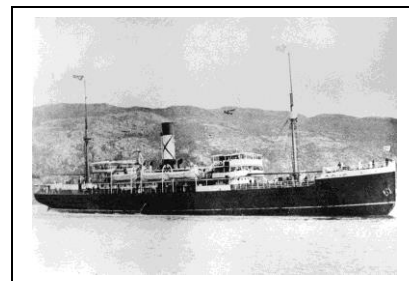
By the morning of November 10, Private Ricketts' 'G' Company had again travelled by train, to Scotland where it had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gales, not far removed from the evolving Newfoundland Regimental Depot at Ayr where accommodation for the new arrivals was as yet not available.

* * * * *

More than a year prior to that November 10 of 1915, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914, the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and were formed into 'A' and 'B' Companies.

During that same period the various authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

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



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

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

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

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



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

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of 'D' Company to arrive – they via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty...*at Edinburgh, and then 'E' Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4*.

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

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

Seven days after the arrival of 'E' Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent had been ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit had been dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.



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



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

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

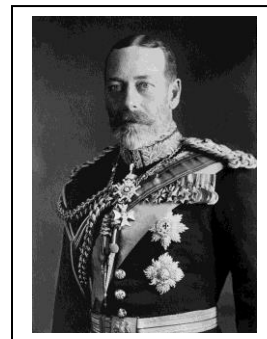


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****A number sufficient to furnish four ‘fighting’ companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.***

(Preceding page: The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles. – original photograph from the Provincial Archives)

From Stobs Camp, some three weeks after the arrival of ‘F’ Company, in early August ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, the four senior Companies, having now become the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, had been transferred to Aldershot Camp in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before the Battalion’s departure to the Middle East and to the fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula.



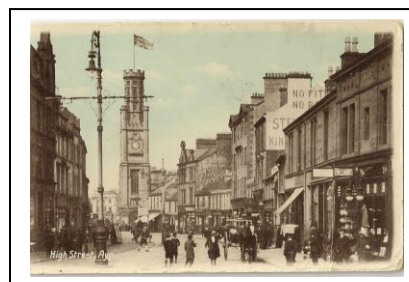
(Right above: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – the photograph is from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.)

The later arrivals to the United Kingdom, ‘E’ and ‘F’ Companies, were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were eventually to form the nucleus of the soon to be formed 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.



(Right above: 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.



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

****The first such draft was, in fact, to depart from Ayr for service on the Gallipoli Peninsula just days after the arrival in Scotland of Private Ricketts’ ‘G’ Company, on November 15.***

This then had been the situation facing the new-comers: the new Regimental Depot had still been in the throes of its establishment when Private Ricketts and the others of ‘G’ Company were to arrive in Scotland on November 10 of 1915; thus, as related in a

preceding paragraph, the new-comers were required to be quartered at Gales, some sixteen kilometres further up the coast – but apparently more than sixty kilometres distant by road.

It was during this posting to Ayr that Private Ricketts re-enlisted *for the duration of the war*, signing the form to that effect on June 19*, a mere six days before his departure across the English Channel. By that time he had already seen the departure of the first six re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: the First directly to Gallipoli; the Second which had sailed to Egypt before being turned back to land in France; and the Third which had sailed straight to France at the end of the month of March. Those which had sailed since – and those which were to do so later on – also had gone or would also go directly to the Continent.

**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. Later recruits signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.*

It was also to be during this period in Scotland – in this case some four months before leaving with his draft - that he was hospitalized in the *Bladda Infirmary for Infectious Diseases*, Paisley, and then in *St. Mary's Convalescent Home*, in all from February 4 until March 4, because of measles.

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

On June 25 the 7th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent, Private Ricketts among its ranks. On the morrow, the 26th, the detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot. There the draft was to spend several days undergoing final training and organization* before proceeding to its rendezvous with the Newfoundland Battalion, it just having experienced the maelstrom of battle at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at an earlier time of the Great War 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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Private Ricketts would join the Newfoundland unit...*in the field*...on July 11.

* * * * *

While both 'E' and 'F' Company had been beginning their time of training at Ayr in the summer of 1915, the aforementioned four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', of the Newfoundland Regiment, having now become the 1st Battalion, had thereupon been attached to the 88th Infantry Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been dispatched to...active service.



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

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



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



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



(Right above: *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, and where the 1st Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)*

(continued)

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

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would now serve but, even ever since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, had been proving to be little more than a debacle:

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



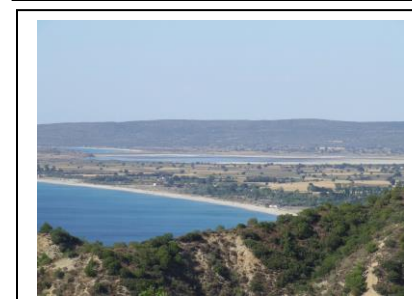
(Right: *An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at Suvla Bay – from Provincial Archives*)

**Many of the commanders chosen were second-rate, had been brought out of retirement, and had little idea of how to fight – let alone of how to win. One of the generals at Suvla, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.*



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

(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*)



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

There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number.

Numerous, however, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.

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



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

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



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

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

Immediately after the British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria and beyond.

On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived there with the 1st Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16th, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she had docked early on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders had landed and marched to their encampment.



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

(continued)

(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)



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and other ranks of the 1st Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.



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

The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.

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

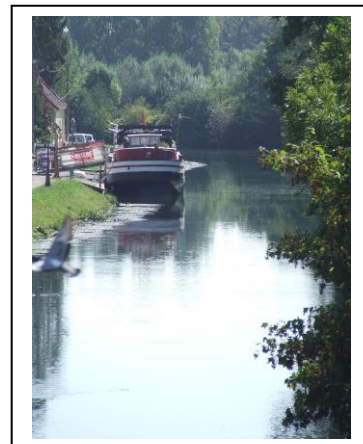


Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille.

It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.

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

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



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

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

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



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

**It 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.*

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 had soon been preparing for the upcoming British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, that flowed – and still does so today – through the region.



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

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



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

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

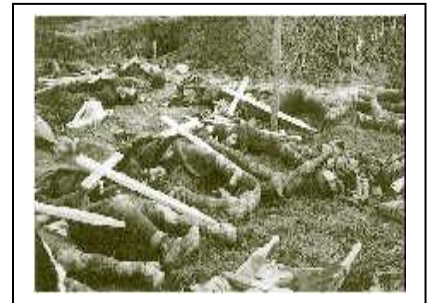
There are other numbers of course: the fifty-seven thousand British casualties incurred in four hours on that same morning of which nineteen-thousand were recorded as having been...*killed in action...or...died of wounds.*

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

And, as seen in an earlier paragraph, Private Ricketts had been one of that draft arriving from Rouen.

* * * * *

On July 27-28 of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – maybe even fewer - even after still further re-enforcement – would move northwards and enter into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

(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*)

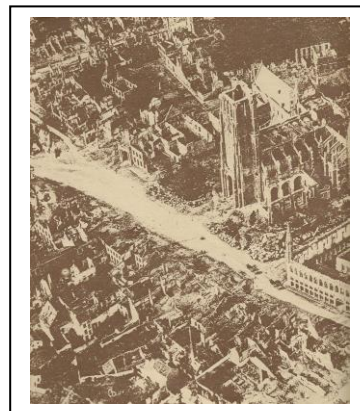


The unit had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.

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

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered to return south and was transported 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 was again then 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 was to prove to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

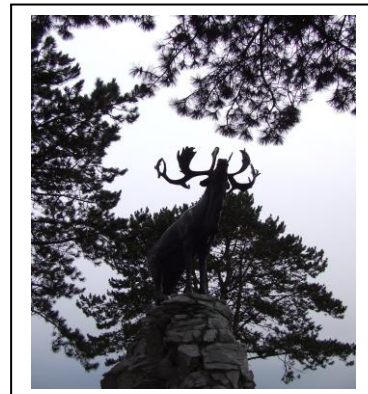


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(Preceding page: *This is the ground over which the 1st Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right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

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



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

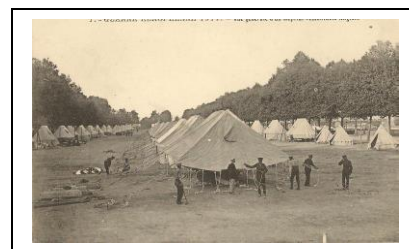


(Right above: *A typical British Army Camp during rather inclement winter conditions somewhere on the Continent – from a vintage post-card*)

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But for Private Ricketts any Christmas respite was not to be: the records show him as having been wounded on or about December 5. The Regimental War Diary cites the Newfoundland Battalion as returning to the front line near LesBœufs only on December 6, so his injury most likely occurred either then or even on the 7th when... *The enemy put up a barrage and continued a heavy bombardment ¾ hour.* During this tour, the Newfoundlanders were to incur one officer and nine *other ranks* wounded.

Whatever the date may have been, Private Ricketts was reported as having been immediately evacuated to the 14th Corps Midlands Dressing Station for treatment for severe gunshot wounds to the face and from there forwarded on the same day to the 55th (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown.



(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*)

Transported from the 55th CCS by ambulance train on December 13 to the 6th General Hospital at Rouen, he returned to England on the 20th, transported on board His Majesty's Australian Hospital Ship *Warilda*.

(Right: *The image of 'Warilda' clad in her war-time hospital-ship garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Designed and built in Scotland for the Australian east-west coastal service, she spent the first two years of the Great War as a troop transport before having been converted to a hospital ship. On August 3, 1918 while conveying sick and wounded from Le Havre to Southampton, she was torpedoed and sunk by a U-boat. Of eight-hundred one persons on board, one-hundred twenty-three were lost.*)



December 23 saw Private Ricketts admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth for further treatment. He remained in hospital - or convalescing – until February 21 of the following year, 1917, when he began the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel upon release from hospital.



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

(Right: *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 at Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



Following those days of leave Private Ricketts was inevitably posted to the Regimental Depot at Ayr for the next three-and-a-half months. He reported...*to duty*...there on March 2.

(continued)

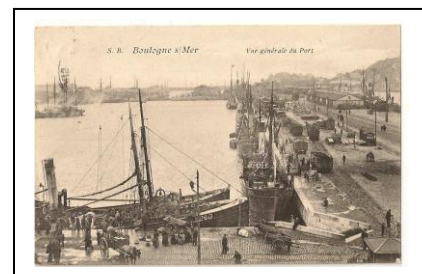
(Right below: *The Newfoundland Plot in Ayr Cemetery wherein lie fourteen Newfoundlanders whom the Commonwealth War Graves Commission refer to as Canadians – here and elsewhere – photograph from 2014*)

On June 1 of 1917, the 24th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Ricketts among its ranks - left Ayr for the Continent. On the 3rd day of that month the contingent took ship in the English Channel port of Folkestone and made the two-hour crossing to Boulogne. From there the detachment was then almost inevitably transferred to Rouen and to the Divisional Base Depot there.



(Right adjacent: *The French port of Boulogne on or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Some two weeks later, one-hundred eighteen...*other ranks*...of a re-enforcement detachment dispatched from Rouen reported to the Newfoundland Battalion in the community of Bonneville on June 19. Private Ricketts was now to join his unit there in training.



* * * * *

Only days after Private Ricketts' evacuation from the forward area for medical attention on December 5 more than five months before, on December 11-12, the Newfoundland unit had been withdrawn from the *First Battle of the Somme*, to retire westward for the festive period to an encampment in the area of the city of Amiens.

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

From the railway station there it had entrained for the small town of Corbie where it thereupon took over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

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.

Those casualties, however, were to be only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig somewhat cavalierly referred to as *wastage* since the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches during those several days.

That winter period – as had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the Great War – would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable for most of the combatants of both sides. It had also been a time of sickness, and the medical facilities

were kept busy, particularly, so it seems - from at least Canadian medical documentation - with thousands of cases of dental work.

This period had also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion this had been at least partially undertaken in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.

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

On February 18 the 1st Battalion had begun a five-day trek from Coisy to the forward area where it would return into the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. It was at a place called Sailly-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans had been lively: after only two days the Battalion had incurred four dead, nine wounded and three gassed without there having been any infantry action. The Newfoundlanders were to be withdrawn on February 25 - to return three days later.



They had carried with them orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Sailly-Saillisel...to be acted upon on March 1.

In fact, the sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during that entire period – from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917 – was to be that sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action which would bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.



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

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was now to withdraw to the rear once more, late in the night of March 3-4, where it would now spend almost an entire month. On the morning of March 4, after baths and anti-trench-foot treatment, the personnel – except for the transport which had moved by road – had enjoyed the relative luxury of a train to carry them – at least temporarily - away from the war.

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

(continued)

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



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

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

(Right: *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 had begun at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which had finished 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 .*

(Preceding page: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the remains of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed community.* – photograph from 2009(?))

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

Thirty-eight *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen reported to the 1st Battalion on April 18; they were just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers. But they were still only two hundred twenty – plus twelve officers in number - now serving with some two hundred of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. The personnel of the 1st Battalion spent the 19th salvaging equipment and burying the dead. They remained there until the 23rd.

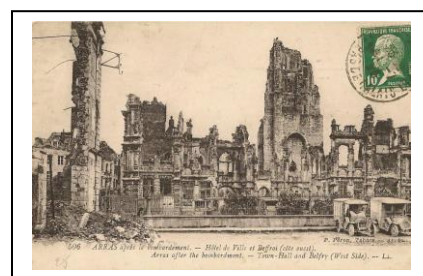


(Right above: *Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras.*– photograph from 2007)

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This 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.

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



Late, on that same evening of April 23, the Newfoundlanders had retired the dozen or so kilometres to the relative calm of Arras.

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



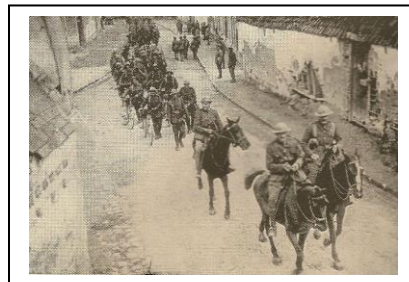
(Right: *Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from *The War Illustrated**)

(continued)

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

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

(Right: Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – not Bonneville - in early May, perhaps the 7th, of 1917 – 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.

And it was, as seen in an earlier paragraph, in the middle of that month of June, 1917, on the 19th, that Private Ricketts had arrived with re-enforcements from Scotland – via the Base Depot at Rouen – to re-join his Battalion in its quarters in Bonneville.

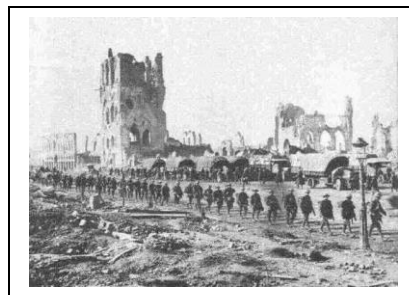
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The Newfoundlanders were then soon again being ordered north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just north of the city.



(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.

(continued)

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



(Right below: *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.

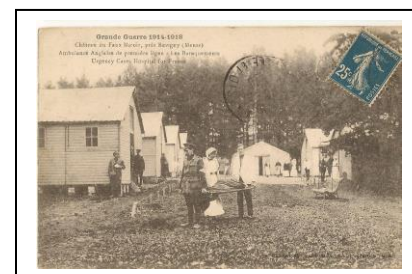


At the former it would incur nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost was to be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

(Right: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010*)

* * * * *

Having retired from the front with his Battalion towards the end of August – and likely having served in the attack at the *Steenbeek* on August 16 - Private Ricketts was in need of medical attention. On September 6 he was admitted into the 89th Field Ambulance for treatment to a PUO – *Pain of Unknown Origin*. From there he was directed to the 14th Corps Rest Station on the same September 6 from where he was forwarded on the 9th, three days later, to the 63rd Casualty Clearing Station.



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

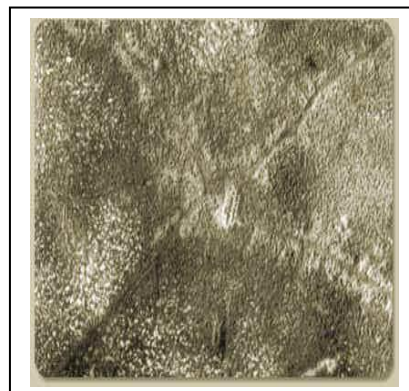
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Discharged...*to duty*...at the Base Depot, Rouen, on September 11, Private Ricketts was not to re-join his unit until some two weeks later again, on either September 26 or 29. The Newfoundlanders were back in the trenches by that time after a respite of more than four weeks while the British Army re-organized and re-enforced for a resumption of the offensive.

* * * * *

(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 the confrontation of October 9 at the Broembek before the 1st Battalion marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe, from there to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of Proven, to the north-east of Poperinghe. 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 had 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 were still there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and two days later when, on November 17, the 1st Battalion would be ordered yet once again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it began to move further eastward, now on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

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



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

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.

(continued)

The battle was to begin well for the British who had used 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.

The Newfoundland 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 were to become casualties by the end of only the second day*.

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



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



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

The son of John Ricketts, fisherman, and of Amelia Ricketts (née *Cassell**, deceased from tuberculosis on August 20, 1905) of Middle Arm – Seal Cove (see below) is also cited - White Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to an only sister, Rachel, to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay – until she married?... and to Thomas**.

**The couple was married on November 6, 1893, at Middle Arm, White Bay.*

Private Ricketts was reported as...*missing in action*...on December 3, 1917, in the fighting near the French villages of Marcoing and Masnières during the *Battle of Cambrai*. On July 1, 1918, some thirty weeks later, he was officially...*presumed dead*...although he is elsewhere mentioned as having been...*killed in action* (a subsequent un-documented eye-witness report?)

(continued)

George Ricketts had enlisted at a *declared* eighteen years and nine months of age: date of birth in Seal Cove, White, Bay, Newfoundland, October 2, 1896 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

*****Private (later Sergeant) Thomas Ricketts, Regimental Number 3102, who was awarded the Victoria Cross.***

Private George Ricketts was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – February 5, 2023.

