



**Second Lieutenant Robert Wallace Ross (Regimental Number 1182\*) is interred in Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery No. 2, Auchonvillers – Grave reference A. 51.**

***\*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.***

**(continued)**

*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.*

His occupation prior to enlistment recorded as that of an employee with the *Reid Newfoundland Company*, Robert Wallace Ross enlisted – engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem, this including a daily ten-cent Field Allowance - at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. He also attested on that same March 8, 1915.

*\*There appears to be no record among his papers pertaining to the regular medical examination undergone by recruits.*

Private Ross was then promoted some five weeks afterwards to the rank of lance corporal, on April 13.

Nine days after his promotion, on April 22, Lance Corporal Ross embarked for *overseas service* with the two-hundred fifty officers and *other ranks* of 'E' Company onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* en route for Halifax. Days later, on April 24 at eleven-thirty in the evening, the detachment began the trans-Atlantic passage on board His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* from Nova Scotia to Liverpool, arriving in that English west-coast port-city on May 2 or 3 – the two dates are recorded – the second may well be 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.

*(Right above: 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 on 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)*



(continued)

Only one week later, on May 11, the entire Newfoundland contingent was posted to *Stobs Camp* near the Scottish town of Hawick where it was now to remain under canvas to undergo further training until the end of July.



It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that Lance Corporal Ross was further promoted to be Corporal Ross on July 2.

(Right above: *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, the later-arrived ‘E’ – that of Corporal Ross - and then ‘F’\*, were ordered stationed to Scotland’s west coast, to Ayr, where they were to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 permitting it to be ordered to active service.

‘E’ Company - with a few exceptions of personnel who were drafted into the first four Companies which were to travel to the Middle East – and Corporal Ross thus remained in Scotland to be ordered posted to the newly-established Regimental Depot at the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland. This was to be the overseas base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion from where – as of November of that 1915 up until January of 1918 - re-enforcement drafts were to be despatched to bolster the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion’s numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.



(Right above: *An aerial view of Ayr – probably 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 above: *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)

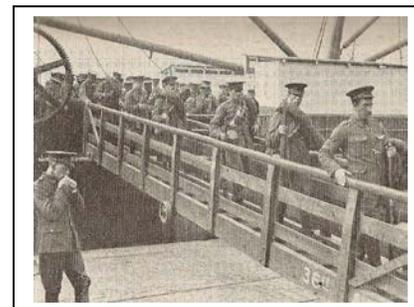
Some five months after his posting to the Regimental Depot, Corporal Ross was to be granted an Imperial Commission and the accompanying appointment, to be Second Lieutenant Ross, on November 27, 1915 – and possibly being attached to 'F' Company. He was thereupon to remain in Scotland until the following March.

On March 28 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Re-enforcement Company – Second Lieutenant Ross one of its officers - took ship on board His Majesty's Transport *Archangel* in the English south-coast port-city of Southampton for the crossing to Rouen, France, disembarking there two days later, on March 30. From the ship the draft made its way to the nearby British Expeditionary Force Base Depot for final training and organization\* before leaving to seek out the parent unit which had already arrived in France from Egypt on March 22.



(Right above: *The image of a troop-laden 'Archangel' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

(Right: *British troops disembarking for the British Expeditionary Force Depot at Rouen en route to the Western Front – from Illustration*)



*\*Apparently the standard length of time for this final training was 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 to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

According to the Regimental War Diarist, Second Lieutenant Ross reported *to duty* with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 25 while it was still serving its first tour of duty in trenches in the area forward of the community of Englebelmer.

\* \* \* \* \*

By the time that Second Lieutenant Ross was to join the Newfoundland Battalion *in the field*, the contingent from the Dominion\* had been on *overseas service* for some nineteen months, and on *active service* since August of the previous year. As a private soldier then non-commissioned officer of 'E' Company, of course, he had trained briefly alongside the senior Companies at Edinburgh Castle and at *Stobs Camp* in Scotland before they were to leave for service at *Gallipoli*.

*\*The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, it will be remembered, had not officially come into being until the summer of 1915, after the arrival of 'F' Company.*

Almost a year before that time, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of some five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's, during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.



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

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



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



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



Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion was to serve but, even since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, would 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 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 the 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 Bay, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.*

November 26 had seen the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes during the *Gallipoli Campaign*. A freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm had struck the *Suvla Bay* area on that day and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival from the wrath of nature rather than from that of the enemy was to be the priority.



There were to be many casualties in both camps, 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 had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite but the end of the *Gallipoli Campaign* had already been in sight. After the storm, the Newfoundlanders were to remain stationed at *Suvla Bay* for only a further twenty-five days.

By that time they were to have served there for exactly three months to the day.

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



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

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

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



(Right: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation in January of 1916 – 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: *The same '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*)

When the British had evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, to arrive there on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month.

The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to Suez, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division had yet to be decided\*.

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

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



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and other ranks of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had boarded His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq on March 14 to sail up 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 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 Marseilles. – from a vintage post-card)*

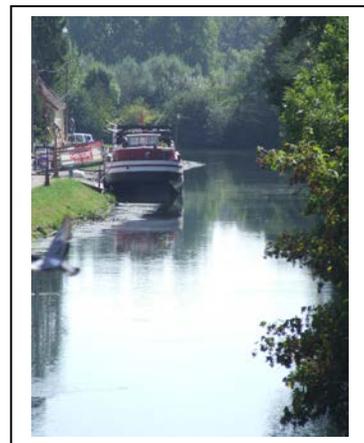


Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train had found its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having travelled unused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



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

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



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

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

And, as seen on an earlier page, it had been only three days into this first tour of duty in the front-line positions that Second Lieutenant Ross had reported *to duty*, on April 25, with the Newfoundland Battalion.

\* \* \* \* \*

It had then been only four days later again, on April 29, that he was admitted into the Number 1 Red Cross Hospital (*Duchess of Westminster's*) in the coastal resort of Le Touquet, for treatment for a mild case of influenza. From there he was to be discharged to Base Details at the Divisional Depot at Rouen on May 4 before then returning to the Battalion eleven days following, on May 15.

The Newfoundland unit had been withdrawn from the forward area and at the time was billeted in and about the community of Louvencourt. In fact, Second Lieutenant Ross reported back just in time to participate in an eleven-mile route march in the area on the morrow.

The Newfoundlanders were now soon to be preparing for the 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\*.



(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 further view of Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel wherein lies Second Lieutenant Ross – photograph from 2009(?)*)



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

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

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



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

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



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

The son of Hector Ross, employee of the *Reid Newfoundland Company (Heap and Co. is also recorded)*, and of Elizabeth Ross\* – to both of whom, on June 30, 1916, the day before his death, he had bequeathed his all - of 14, Victoria Street, St. John's – later of Toronto, Ontario, in the Dominion of Canada - his *own* place of residence was recorded as the same 14, Victoria Street. He was also brother to Hector H. Ross.

*\*Hector Ross was born in Richmond, Québec, his wife Elizabeth in Fort Hope, Ontario.*

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Second Lieutenant Ross was reported as having been *killed in action* on July 1, 1916, during the fighting on the first day of *the Somme*, on the field at Beaumont-Hamel.



Robert Wallace Ross had enlisted at twenty years of age.

Second Lieutenant Ross shares his last resting-place with Private Frank Reynolds of the Royal Fusiliers.

*(The photograph of Private(?) Ross is from the Provincial Archives.)*

Second Lieutenant Robert Wallace Ross was entitled to the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



