



Second Lieutenant Horatio John (Jack) Read Rowsell (Regimental Number 619*) lies in Abbéville Communal Cemetery – Grave reference IV. C. 17.

****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.***

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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.

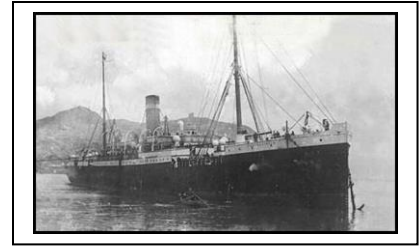
A theological student, studying since 1913 at St. Augustine’s College in Canterbury* to become a missionary, Jack (this name preferred on his enlistment papers) Rowsell presented himself for medical examination in that city on February 18 and was declared as being...*Unfit...*by the RAMC officer there because of his defective eyesight.

That notwithstanding – his vision...*improved with glasses to 6/9...* - he eventually both enlisted and attested at Edinburgh Castle on March 3, 1915, where ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ Companies of the Newfoundland Regiment – as yet there was no battalion - had been posted as garrison, the first troops from outside the British Isles to perform this duty.

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



****Jack Rowsell, an eighteen-year old student, had sailed from St. John’s, Newfoundland, during the first days of the New Year of 1914 – likely after a Christmas break spent at home - on board the elderly Allan Line vessel SS ‘Carthaginian’. On January 9 he had disembarked in Glasgow from where he was to make his way southward to the cathedral city of Canterbury in the English county of Kent.***

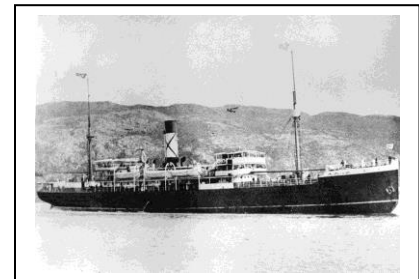


(Right above: *The image of ‘Carthagian’ in the harbour at St. John’s, Newfoundland, is from the British Home Child Group International web-site(?). The photograph is post-1897.*)

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Five to six months before Jack Rowsell’s enlistment, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 after the *Declaration of War*, there had been a period of training of some five weeks undertaken on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the *East End* of St. John’s for the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment’s first recruits – these to become ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment’s transfer overseas.

This first Newfoundland contingent – as seen above, not yet a battalion - was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after 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 would sail 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.

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

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 Jack Rowsell was to enlist on March 3, 1915.



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

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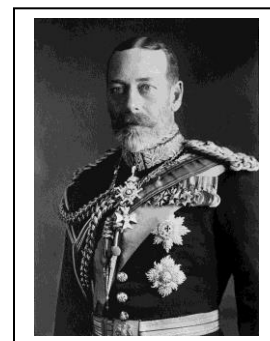
On May 11, now bolstered by the arrival of both 'D' and 'E' Companies, the Newfoundland Regiment was transferred to the tented site of *Stobs Camp* near to the town of Hawick where the personnel was to receive more training and anticipate welcoming 'F' Company. These further reinforcements would bring the contingent's numbers up to establishment battalion strength and enable it to be called to *active service*.



(Right above: *By the time of 'F' Company's arrival on July 10, the Regiment had already received its Colours at Stobs Camp in a ceremonial parade on June 10. – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

During the final days of the Newfoundland Regiment's posting to Stobs Camp, on July 29, Private Rowsell apparently received promotion to the rank of lance corporal on the same day that he was granted an Imperial Commission and an accompanying appointment to the rank of second lieutenant.

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. This force, now designated the 1st Battalion, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.



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

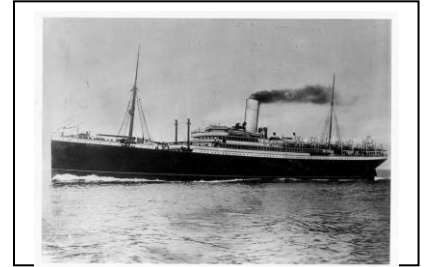
(Right above: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – the photograph is from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.*)

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It would appear, however, that although Second Lieutenant Rowsell was to report to the Army establishment at Aldershot, it was a posting that was to last no longer than a few days. His services were to be required at home.

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A letter dated August 5, written by Second Lieutenant Rowsell from Aldershot, and addressed to the *Pay & Record Office* in London, reveals that he was scheduled to travel back to Newfoundland on board HMT *Corsican** from Liverpool on Saturday, August 7. He most likely arrived in St. John's on or about September 22, as this is the date on which he began to claim for an allowance.



**The ship, His Majesty's Transport 'Corsican', a requisitioned Allan Line vessel arrived directly from Liverpool at Québec on August 17. The journey to St. John's was therefore almost certainly made by a combination of trains and ferry.*

It would appear that in the spring of 1915 the Newfoundland government had been apprised of a German plan – fact or fiction? - to use certain coves of northern Newfoundland, particularly in White Bay and the area of Harbour Deep, as shelters and bases for submarine activity in the North Atlantic. To forestall this, two small vessels – others to be added later – with, at the outset, some eighty members of the Newfoundland Regiment , were prepared to venture into these places to take any necessary action.

In command of the first of these forces were to be two junior officers, Second Lieutenants Norris and O'Grady*.

**Each had been granted his Imperial Commission on July 12, 1915, Norris – at the time at Stobs Camp - to be designated as senior. O'Grady was then still in Newfoundland, undertaking the training and organization of 'G' Company.*

Second Lieutenant Norris had apparently been chosen for the mission because of his knowledge of the area, his family enjoying business dealings and other connections in Green Bay and White Bay. The first detachments, under these officers' command, left St. John's by train on August 29 for Lewisporte from where they were to travel by coastal steamer – the SS *Home* – to their appointed postings.

It may have therefore been that Second Lieutenant Rowsell's familiarity with the coastal area of Bonavista was the reason for *his* presence during the operations. In the meantime lodgings at *Balsom House* in St. John's had been booked for him - and billed for – for a period of two months, most of which time he was apparently serving elsewhere (see below).

Second Lieutenant Rowsell is then recorded as having spent twenty-four days on *patrol duty* on the Labrador Coast between the dates of September 9 and October 26. What exactly those duties* were to be has not been recorded among his papers.

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**As elsewhere, a certain amount of paranoia was at work in Newfoundland, there being suspicions harboured not only about possible German activities, but about all those inhabitants of Labrador, including the Moravian missionaries, who were not of British stock.*

The date of his return to the United Kingdom is not certain. A return letter sent to him at Ayr suggests that he was there by November 12; it also makes mention of the ship *Corsican*. Second Lieutenant Rowsell may therefore have left Newfoundland for Québec (perhaps with the Regimental draft – ‘G’ Company - travelling on that date) on or about October 27, to sail from there to Liverpool on the above-mentioned *Corsican*.

Once back in the United Kingdom he was to be stationed at Ayr as further correspondence proves.

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



(Right 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.



Some six months were now to pass before Second Lieutenant Rowsell is next to be found documented: he was one of a group of officers passing through London on June 5 to report for duties with the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent. However, when *exactly* he reported *for those duties* with the 1st Battalion does not appear to be recorded - but it was certainly within the following three weeks.

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While Second Lieutenant Rowsell was travelling back to Newfoundland in the summer of 1915, those aforementioned four senior companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, of the Newfoundland Regiment which he had abandoned at Aldershot, having now become the 1st Battalion, had thereupon been attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been despatched to *active service*.

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



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: 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.)



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

(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 below: 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)



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

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

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

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

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

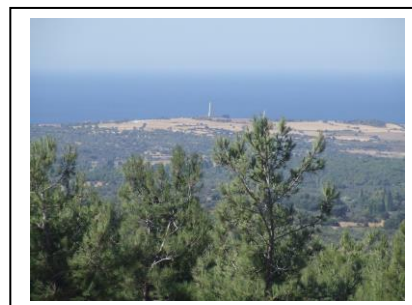
November 26 would see the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; there was to be a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be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



There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

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 1st Battalion was to be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

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



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

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

(Right: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration*)



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****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 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 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 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)



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

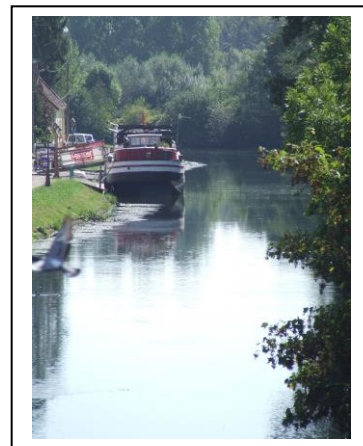
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably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

**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: *Two views of the re-constituted trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photographs 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.



And, of course, this offensive was imminent when, in mid-June, Second Lieutenant Rowsell re-joined the Newfoundland Battalion *in the field*.

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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.*

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...?)*

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The son of John Strathie Rowsell, Magistrate of Bonavista, and of Lydia Charlotte Rowsell (née Skeffington)*, he was also brother to William-James, to James, Samuel, Blanche, Annette-May, Annie-Mildred, Harold and to Reginald-Strathie (see ** below).

**The couple had married in Bonavista on January 9, 1884 (a second source cites February).*

Second Lieutenant Rowsell was reported as having been admitted to 2nd Stationary Hospital in Abbéville on July 5, having incurred *dangerous* gun-shot wounds to the thighs, buttock and abdomen, injuries inflicted at Beaumont-Hamel during the fighting of July, 1, 1916, the first day of *the Somme*.



Three days later he was reported as having *died of wounds* in hospital, on July 8, and as having been buried on that same day by the Reverend R. E. White.

***His brother, Captain Reginald Strathie Rowsell, MC, was also wounded on that July 1, 1916 – later decorated for his actions on that day. He recovered and returned to active service, but was reported as ‘wounded and missing’ on April 14, 1917, after the action at Monchy-le-Preux. Six months afterwards, he was officially presumed dead.*

Horatio John (*Jack*) Read Rowsell had enlisted at the *declared* age of nineteen years and eleven months: date of birth in Bonavista, Newfoundland, March 28, 1895 (from letters held by Canterbury Cathedral).

(Right above: *The War Memorial at Bonavista honours the sacrifice of Lieutenant Rowsell and of Captain Rowsell. – photograph from 2010*)

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



Second Lieutenant Horatio John (*Jack*) Read Rowsell was entitled to the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).

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 10, 2023.



Note: The author would like to thank the Reverend Canon Dawn Barrett of Kippens for informing him that Second Lieutenant Rowsell was named for the Reverend Canon Horatio John Read who, born in Petites, Newfoundland, returned to serve in Newfoundland having also studied at Canterbury. He passed away in Corner Brook in 1936 (information from Ancestry.ca).

