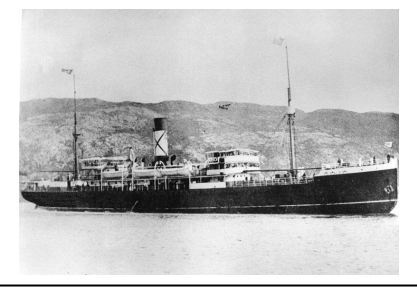




Private Bernard Ryan (Regimental Number 123) lies in Cagnicourt British Cemetery – Grave reference III. A. 19.

His previous employment recorded as that of a tailor with *Mark Chaplin Merchant Tailor* of Water Street, St. John's, Newfoundland, earning a weekly \$3.50, Bernard Ryan officially enlisted in the capital city on September 2, - at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 1914 (including a daily ten-cent field allowance) - a recruit of the First Draft.



Having attested on October 1, he subsequently embarked onto the Bowring Brothers' ship *Florizel* on October 3, the vessel having then sailed on the morrow to its rendezvous off the south coast of the Island to join the convoy transporting the troops of the 1st Canadian Division across the Atlantic.

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

In the United Kingdom Private Ryan trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England, then in Scotland at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness -, at Edinburgh Castle – where the unit provided the first garrison from outside the British Isles -, and later again at *Stobs Camp* near to the town of Hawick.

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



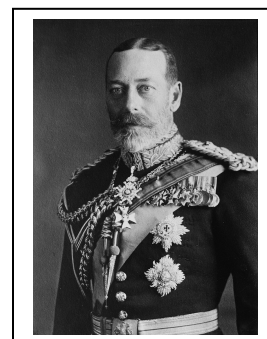
(Right below: *The Newfoundland Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp, Scotland, to be presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915 – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies*, 'A' – Private Ryan among its numbers - 'B', 'C' and 'D', were then sent south to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot; meanwhile the two junior Companies, 'E' and 'F', were sent to Scotland's west coast, to Ayr, where they were to form the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

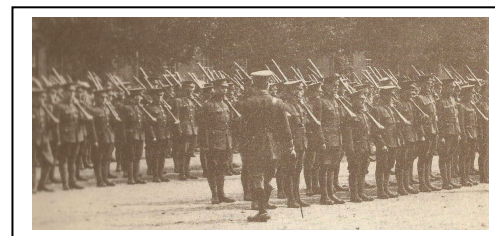
(Right below: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – photograph from Bain News Services via Wikipedia*)

**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. The 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, comprising the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.*



It was apparently to be during that final period of training spent at Aldershot that Private Ryan – and not only he - had been prevailed upon, he on August 14, to re-enlist in the Newfoundland unit...for the duration of the war*.

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



(Right above: *Some of the men of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment on parade at Aldershot in August of 1915 – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)*



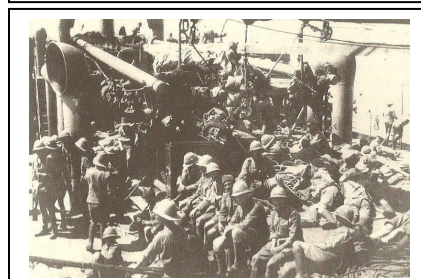
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(Preceding page: *The image of Megantic, in peace-time a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Private Ryan was to serve as a soldier in the British Mediterranean Expeditionary Force during the *Gallipoli Campaign*. On August 20, 1915, he embarked onto the requisitioned passenger liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and the fighting against the Turks where, a month later, on September 20 – having spent two weeks in British barracks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo - he disembarked with the 1st Battalion at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *Kangaroo Beach, where the men of the 1st Battalion landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still 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 Private Ryan was to serve for but a month of the early fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011*)

* * * * *

On October 21, 1915, Private Ryan was admitted to the 17th General Hospital in Alexandria (Egypt) having been evacuated from Suvla on October 17, four days earlier, to be placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Galeka* He was suffering – and deemed to be *seriously ill* - from diarrhoea and dysentery.



(Right above: *The image of Galeka is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. On October 28, 1916, she struck a mine; subsequently beached, the vessel was nonetheless to be a total loss. Nineteen personnel of the RAMC died in the incident.*)

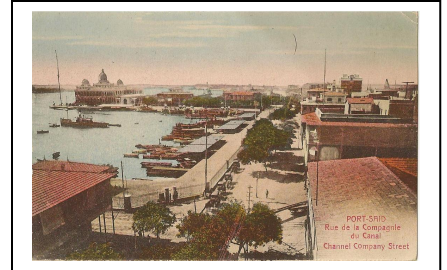
After some forty-five days of treatment, he was sent to a convalescent hospital at Luxor, further south up the *River Nile* – from dysenteric debility. Admitted there on December 6, Private Ryan was discharged some ten weeks later again, in mid-February, on the 14th, to the Base Depot in Alexandria.

(continued)

Private Ryan sailed from Port Saïd at the northern end of the *Suez Canal* on His Majesty's Transport *Lake Manitoba* on March 18 - only four days after the others of 1st Battalion had embarked at the other end of the Canal, on March 14, at Port Tewfiq – for passage to Marseilles to join the British Expeditionary Force in France.

He arrived there on the 26th of the same month, almost inevitably being sent to the large British Expeditionary force Base Depot in the area of Rouen on the French Atlantic coast.

(Right: *Port Saïd at or about the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)



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

Private Ryan then re-joined the Newfoundland Battalion on the *Western Front*, in the French *Département de la Somme*.

On April 15, a detachment from Rouen of two-hundred eleven *other ranks* – accompanied by two officers – reported to *duty* with the 1st Battalion already billeted in the village of Englebelmer some three kilometres behind the lines of the *Western Front*. Private Ryan is not documented as being among that number, but it was a contingent which included not only personnel from Ayr, but others from the Middle East, such as Private Ryan, whose departure from there had been delayed.



He was likely one of that contingent.

* * * * *

In the meantime, during Private Ryan's absence, the Newfoundland Battalion had continued to serve at *Suvla Bay*. It was to be a miserable existence in the trenches and had been no more successful from a military point of view.

Flies, dust, disease, frost-bite, floods – and the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command* had ever anticipated – had overwhelmed the British-led forces. It had been decided to abandon the venture.

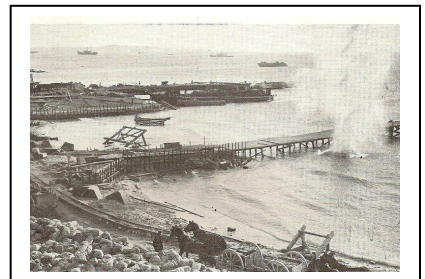
**Many of the commanders were second-rate, had been brought out of retirement, and had little idea of how to fight – let alone how to win. One of the generals at Suvla, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.*

On the night of December 19-20, the British were to abandon *Suvla* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, having formed a part of the rear-guard. Some of the Battalion personnel was to be evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, and some to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case would the respite be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion had been 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 in the picture. – photograph from 2011)



The British and the Anzac forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps were also to serve at Gallipoli – had now been only marking time until a complete withdrawal of the Peninsula would be undertaken. The operation had taken place on the night of January 8-9, and the Newfoundland Battalion was to provide some of the rear-guard for this second withdrawal as well*.



(Right: 'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was 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.**

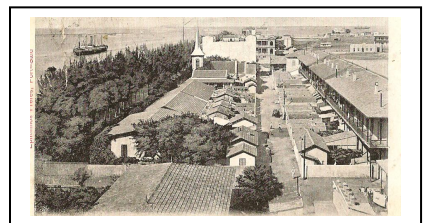


(Right: The same 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces and by the Newfoundlanders who were the last soldiers off the beach: vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011)

(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 the British evacuation of the entire Gallipoli Peninsula in January of 1916, the 1st Battalion had been sent to Alexandria, having arrived there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders were to be immediately transferred southward to Suez, one of the ports at the southern end of the canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders as, at the time, the subsequent destination of the Battalion's 29th Division had not yet been 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: 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 Marseille. – from a vintage postcard*)

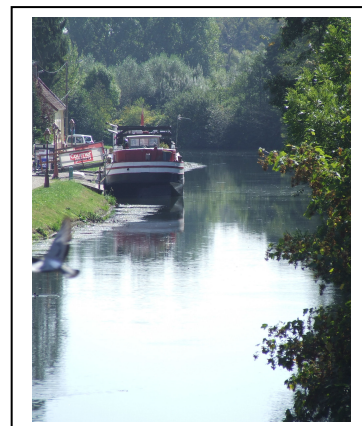
On March 14, the Newfoundlanders had taken ship through Port Tewfiq, also at the southern end of the *Suez Canal*, for the French port of Marseilles, and had disembarked there on March 22, en route to the *Western Front*.



Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train would arrive at 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. De-training at the local station at two in the morning, the Newfoundlanders still were to have a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they had marched on their way from the station. Some three months later, *the Somme* would become a part of their history.



It was there, in the French *Département de la Somme*, on April 15, that Private Ryan and his re-enforcement draft were to arrive to report *to duty* in the village of Englebelmer.

* * * * *

Only two days prior to Private Ryan's return, on April 13 the 1st Battalion had *itself* marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - thus completing a month-long transfer from Egypt. In Englebelmer the unit had been billeted, had then welcomed those re-enforcements of the 15th, and, on that same day, had been ordered – along with the new-comers - to work in the communication trenches not so very far away.

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

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the meandering river that flowed – and today still flows - innocuously through the southern part of the region to which it lends its name, *the Somme*.



(continued)

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*.

**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 killing of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.



(Right above: *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: *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.

On July 1 of 1916, during the fighting of the first day of the Somme, Private Ryan was wounded at Beaumont-Hamel. Having incurred gun-shot wounds to the abdomen he was eventually admitted into the 3rd Canadian General Hospital in Boulogne on July 3. His whereabouts in the interim seem not to be recorded.



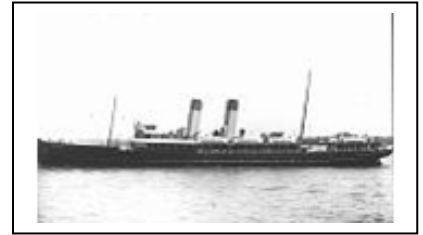
(Right above: *Looking from the British lines at Beaumont-Hamel down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences. The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. - photograph taken 2009*)

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



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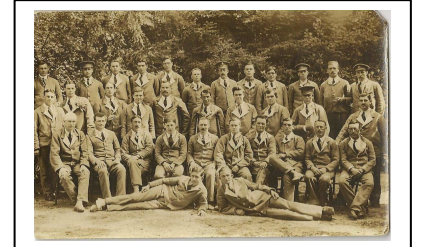
On the following day, July 4, Private Ryan was placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. Denis* (right) for the short Channel crossing back to the United Kingdom. Once back in England, having arrived there on that same day - he was admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the southern Borough of Wandsworth.



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



(Right below: *Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing at 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



On August 16 Private Ryan was discharged from medical care and was posted, after the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel upon release from hospital, to the Regimental Depot where he then reported *to duty* with 'H' Company on August 25.

The Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in and in the vicinity of the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the then-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. It was to be from there – as of November of 1915 until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home would be despatched in drafts, at first to the *Gallipoli Peninsula* and later to the *Western Front*, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1st Battalion.



Private Ryan was to spend that Christmas of 1916 in Scotland, but not Hogmanay; he was now to return to the Continent.

(Right above: *An aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

Some four months after having arrived at Ayr, on December 30, he embarked in the English south-coast port of Southampton and on the next day, New Year's Eve, landed in Rouen, the capital city of Normandy. Private Ryan had returned to the British Expeditionary Force in France. In Rouen his draft spent the customary short period at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot in the vicinity of the city, for final training and organization*.



(Preceding page: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front.* – from *Illustration*)

**Apparently the standard length of time for this final training 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, as the Bull Rings.*

From the Base Depot Private Ryan re-joined the 1st Battalion, being one of the draft of fifty-eight re-enforcements, mostly returnees previously wounded, coming back to service, which reported *to duty* on January 17 while the Battalion was *overnighting at Carnoy Camp Number 1*, just prior to returning to the Front.

* * * * *

As for the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment during this period of Private Ryan's hospitalization and subsequent posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr...

...After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking forces that it had been feared a German counter-assault might well annihilate what had survived of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*. The remnants of the 1st Battalion had thus remained in the trenches, 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 be ordered withdrawn to the aforementioned Englebelmer - then a further two days before the unit had marched to 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 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 report following the catastrophe at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles...*, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

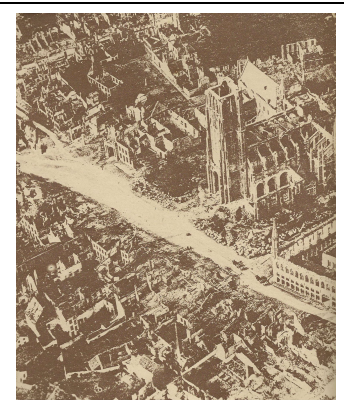
On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1st Battalion - still under battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into Belgium for the first time. It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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*)

(Right: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)



The Salient – close to the front lines for almost the entire conflict - was to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there, yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal. Then on October 8, after having served there for some ten weeks, the 1st Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

Four days after its return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again passed to the offensive at a place called Gueudecourt, some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.

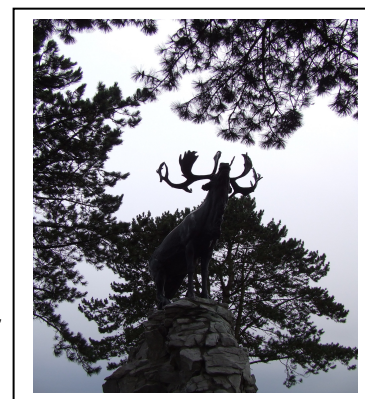
The encounter had proved to be another costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right above: *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*)



After Gueudecourt, the Newfoundland Battalion continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period broken only by the several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, during which the Regimental personnel was to be encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

(Right: *The Caribou at Gueudecourt stands at the furthest point of the 1st Battalion's advance on October 12, 1916. – photograph from 2012*)



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

After that welcome six-week respite spent in *Corps Reserve* well to the rear, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to *active service* on January 23, although they had apparently already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.



(continued)

The only infantry activity directly involving the 1st Battalion during that entire period – from the action at Gueudecourt in mid-October of 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and 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 time 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(?)*)

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



(Right above: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1st Battalion encamped at Meaulté – from The War Illustrated*)

On March 29, the 1st Battalion had begun to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond. The march was to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place of the city of Arras in early 1916 after some eighteen months of bombardment – from Illustration*)

On April 9 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties it 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.



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

(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial which has stood on Vimy Ridge since 1936 – photograph from 2010*)



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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 would begin at a place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish 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 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 men of the Battalion and one from the Essex Regiment .*

The son of Charles Ryan, employee of *F. B. Wood Co. Ltd., Confectionery Manufacturers* - his mother's name seemingly unrecorded but to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay as of October 1, 1914 - of 195, New Gower Street in St. John's – later of 12, John Street - he was reported as *missing in action* while serving with 'A' Company in the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux on April 14, 1917. Some thirty weeks later, on November 17, 1917, he was officially *...presumed dead*.



However, his remains having been identified and buried at some later unspecified date – although there are no details among his papers - his record was thus amended so as to read *killed in action*.



Bernard Ryan had enlisted at the age of nineteen years.

(Right above: *The Caribou in the re-constructed village of Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the vestiges of a German strong-point. – photograph from 2010*)

(*The above photograph of Private Ryan is from Provincial Archives.*)

Private Bernard Ryan was entitled the 1914-1915 Star, as well as the British War Medal (centre) and 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 12, 2023.