



**Lieutenant Richard Aloysius Shortall (Regimental Number 395\*) lies in Y Ravine Cemetery – Grave reference Special Memorial C. 44.**

***\*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.*

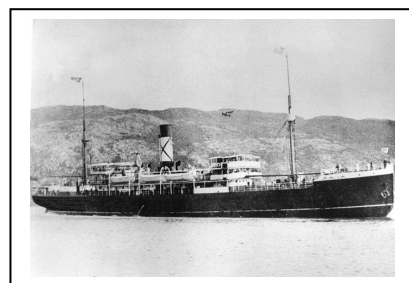
His occupation previous to enlistment recorded as that of an *electrician* earning an annual eight-hundred dollars with the *Reid Newfoundland Company*, Richard Shortall was a recruit of the First Draft. On August 29 of 1914, little more than three weeks after the *Declaration of War* on August 4, he presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of Newfoundland. It was a procedure which would pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

It was then to be a week before he enlisted – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10, this including a daily ten-cent field allowance - on September 5. On September 21, eighteen days later again, in the middle of what was a month of training on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's, he received a first promotion, to the rank of lance corporal. Having subsequently attested, most likely on October 1 or 2, Lance Corporal Shortall was almost immediately to proceed to *overseas service.*

He embarked on October 3 onto the *Bowring Brothers* vessel *Florizel* awaiting the first Newfoundland contingent – to become known to history as the *First Five Hundred* and also as the *Blue Puttees* - in St. John's Harbour.

The ship would not sail for the United Kingdom until the following day, October 4, as, off the southern coast of the Island, it was to rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division overseas.

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



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

In the United Kingdom the Newfoundland contingent was to train in several venues: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland firstly at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; at Edinburgh where it was to garrison the Castle, the first troops from outside the British Isles to do so; and later again at the tented *Stobs Camp* near to the town of Hawick to the south-east of Edinburgh.



It was while serving at Edinburgh Castle that Lance Corporal Shortall, on March 3 of 1915, received further promotion, on this occasion to the rank of corporal, and put up his second stripe. He was to retain that rank for just the following fifty days.

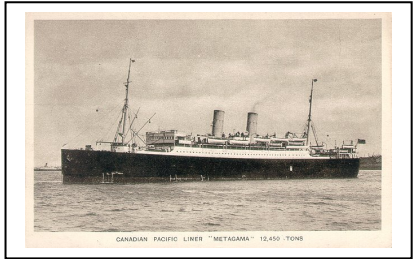
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On April 22, Corporal Shortall was to receive an Imperial Commission accompanied by an appointment to the rank of second lieutenant and would now not again serve with the Newfoundland unit in Scotland until the month of July. In fact he was to temporarily leave the contingent on the morrow of his promotion.

Second Lieutenant Shortall would take ship in Liverpool on the following day, April 23 – at this time onto His Majesty’s Transport *Metagama* - for the return journey to Newfoundland, although he was to disembark at Quebec City. The journey appears to have taken him some thirteen days altogether – Quebec, Truro and Sydney documented as stops on his way home - before his arrival back in St. John’s on May 5 or 6.



The reason for the voyage in the case of some of the other officers travelling with him at the same time appears to be undocumented. However, in the case of Second Lieutenant Shortall it was to escort further drafts from Newfoundland to the United Kingdom.

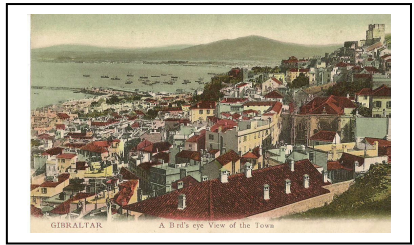
*(Right above: The image of ‘Metagama’ is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. She was a new ship of the Canadian Pacific Line, her maiden voyage having taken place only a month before that of Second Lieutenant Shortall. She would not be requisitioned during the Great War although she was often to carry Canadian military personnel on her scheduled services. Unlike her sister-ship ‘Missanabie’ – sunk in 1918 - ‘Metagama’ survived the conflict, only to become a victim of the Great Depression some ten years later. She was broken up in 1934.)*

Two months then passed before the two-hundred forty-two other ranks of ‘F’ Company - plus eighty-five naval recruits – with Second Lieutenant Shortall as an officer of Number 5 Platoon, boarded His Majesty’s Ship *Calgarian* in St. John’s Harbour, to sail for overseas service on June 19-20, 1915, directly (almost!) to Liverpool.



*(Right above: The image of ‘Calgarian’ is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. A modern vessel recently built for service with the Allan Line, she had been requisitioned in September of 1914 to serve with the Royal Navy as an armed merchant cruiser. Having survived most of the conflict, including the Halifax explosion of December, 1917, she was torpedoed and sunk off the Irish coast on March 1, 1918.)*

Apparently the ship took nineteen days to make what was usually the Atlantic crossing of about a week. Not only was *Calgarian* escorting three submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then the British possession of Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders even having had the time to cross the straits of the same name to spend a few hours in North Africa.



She was eventually to reach the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on July 9.

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(Preceding page: *Gibraltar in pre-Great War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background.* – from a vintage postcard)



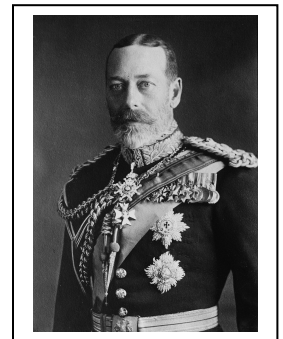
'F' Company and Second Lieutenant Shortall thereupon joined forces with the Newfoundland contingent on July 10. At the time the parent unit was encamped in the vicinity of the Scottish town of Hawick, to the south-east of Edinburgh which it had left on May 11, at *Stobs Camp*.

It would seem from a single source among his papers, that Second Lieutenant Shortall had originally been a soldier of 'B' Company. He apparently was now to return to that same unit as a junior officer.

(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', now with Second Lieutenant Shortall one of its 'B' Company's number, had then been 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' and then 'F', were ordered stationed at 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, the arrival of Second Lieutenant Shortall's 'F' Company at *Stobs Camp* from Newfoundland, had raised the numbers of the Newfoundland contingent to establishment battalion strength, thus permitting it to be ordered to active service.

Having thus trained as aforementioned at Aldershot for that two-week period in early August, the by-now 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment - comprising those four Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', and already attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (*British*) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force – had thereupon been ordered onto active service.



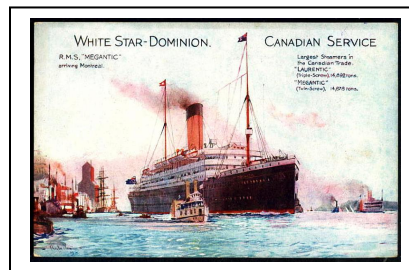
(Right above: *Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915* – from *The Fighting Newfoundlander* by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.)

(continued)



(Right below: *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.)*

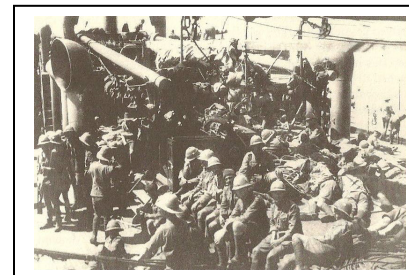
On August 20 of 1915, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks where, a month later – having spent two weeks billeted in British barracks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on the night of September 19-20, the Newfoundland force was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(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 below: *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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to serve during the autumn 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: *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, 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 – the wounding of Second Lieutenant Shortall (see below) appears to have been one of the exceptions to the rule.

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 were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite but the end of the *Gallipoli Campaign* was already in sight.

After the storm, the Newfoundlanders were to remain stationed at *Suvla Bay* for but a further twenty-five days, by which time they were to have served there for exactly three months to the day.

(Right above: *Looking towards the Turkish positions at Suvla from the Newfoundland front lines – photograph from the Provincial Archives*)



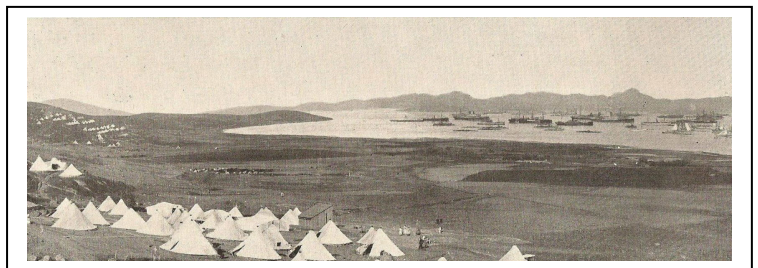
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By that time, however, Second Lieutenant Shortall was no longer to be at *Suvla Bay*. Having been wounded on November 26, he had been evacuated from the *Gallipoli Peninsula* and admitted on November 30 into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Stationary Hospital established at West Mudros\* – from where he apparently wrote home extolling the qualities of a comfortable bed - on the Greek island of Lemnos. He was suffering at the time from a slight – although at first deemed to be...severe - gun-shot wound to the leg.



*\*No Canadian troops were to serve in the Gallipoli Campaign, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stationary Hospital being perhaps the only Canadian presence in the eastern Mediterranean during this period. The hospital's matron and a nursing sister lie in Portianos Cemetery, victims of dysentery.*

(Right: *Allied medical facilities such as those in the foreground and further behind – the majority of them under canvas - almost entirely surround a congested Mudros Bay and its minuscule harbour during the autumn of 1915. – from Illustration*)



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Having received treatment on Lemnos, Second Lieutenant Shortall was eventually transferred as...*sick and wounded*...to the British Mediterranean island possession of Malta on January 21, 1916, on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Grantully Castle*, from there later being discharged on February 13 to *duty* back to the Base Depot at Sidi Bishr, Alexandria, travelling there on His Majesty's Transport *Simla*.



(Right above: *The image of 'Grantully Castle' in her war-time garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. At first used during the Great War as a troopship, in May of 1915 she was commissioned as a hospital ship in which role she served for the duration of the conflict which she survived.*)

It had been during the period on Lemnos and while he was in hospital, that he was to learn of his further appointment as a first lieutenant, effective – with seniority - as of January 1 of the New Year, 1916.

(Right: *One of the many former British military hospitals, today abandoned on the former British possession of Malta – independent since 1964 - that were used during both World Wars – photograph from 2011*)



Lieutenant Shortall was eventually to re-join the Newfoundland Battalion in Suez from the Base Depot on March 7, just a week prior to the Newfoundlanders' transfer to the French Mediterranean port of Marseilles (see further below) and to the *Western Front*.

\* \* \* \* \*

During the absence of Second Lieutenant Shortall's absence, 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.



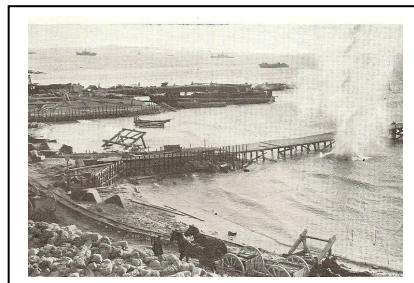
Some of the Battalion personnel had been evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the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

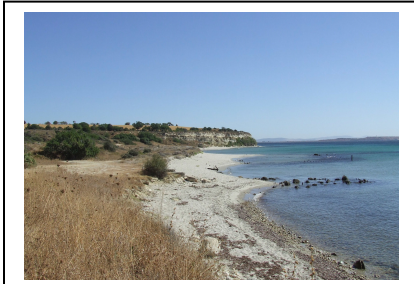
This operation would take place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion to furnish part of the rear-guard on this second occasion also.

(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 Alexandria, having arrived 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.*

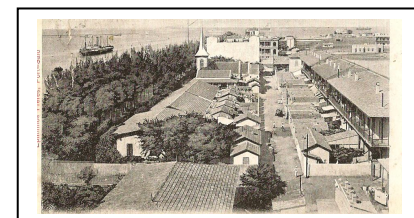
It had been, as reported above, some seven weeks into this period at Suez that Lieutenant Shortall had reported back to the Battalion after his hospitalization and convalescence.

(Right above: *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)*

\* \* \* \* \*

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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 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.

(Preceding page: *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)

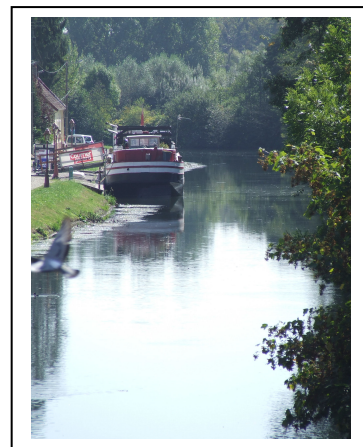
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train found its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having – inexcusably - 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 were then to march on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to become a part of their history.

On April 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where they 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*.



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

Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front*, two of the four Companies – 'A', and Lieutenant Shortall's '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 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel* – photograph from 2007(?))

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



The Newfoundlanders were also 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\*.

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



(continued)

*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.*



(continued)



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

The son of Richard Shortall, farmer, and of Catherine Shortall (née Foran) – to whom he had allotted a daily eighty cents from his pay, later stopped - of *Cross Roads, Waterford Bridge Road, St. John's*, he was also brother to Stanislaus, to John, to Ellen, to Mary and to Annie.

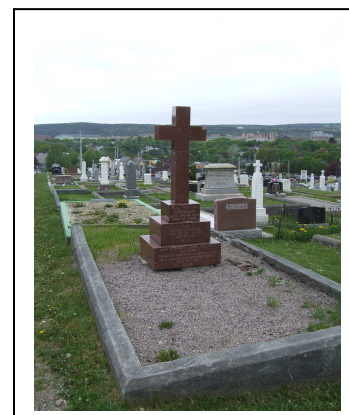


*\*The couple recorded as married on April 11, 1866.*

Lieutenant Shortall was reported as having been *killed in action* on July 1, 1916, during the fighting on the first day of *the Somme*, while serving with 'A' Company on the field at Beaumont-Hamel.

Richard Aloysius Shortall had enlisted at the age of twenty-three years: date of birth at St. John's, Newfoundland, August 22, 1891 (from Roman Catholic Parish Records).

*Had Lieutenant Shortall been allowed to keep the camera that he took with him to France, we might had had a better idea of the Newfoundland Battalion's story. He was obliged to send it to the Pay & Record Office in London for 'safe keeping'.*



*(The photograph of Private Shortall shown above is from the Provincial Archives.)*

*(Right above: A family memorial which stands in Belvedere Roman Catholic Cemetery in St. John's commemorates the sacrifice of Lieutenant Shortall. – photograph from 2015)*

Lieutenant Richard Aloysius Shortall was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 10, 2023.