



Private George Percival Simms (Regimental Number 1217) lies in Ancre British Cemetery – Grave reference II. F. 12.

His occupation previous to his military service recorded as that of a fisherman, George Percival Simms presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on March 6, 1915. He then enlisted two days later – engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem - on



March 8, before attesting some seventeen days later again, on March 25.

Private Simms of 'E' Company embarked in St. John's on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* (right above – from the *Provincial Archives*) some four weeks later again, on April 22, 1915.

The ship sailed to Halifax where his contingent took ship on His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right) – likely with Canadian troops - for the crossing to Liverpool – the ship departed Halifax on April 25. From Liverpool the Newfoundlanders travelled by train to Edinburgh where they arrived on May 2. 'E' Company was to have but a few days to savor the charms of the Scottish capital.



Only nine days later, on May 11, the entire Battalion was posted for training from Edinburgh to a tented Stobs Camp near the Scottish town of Hawick.

(Right: *the Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp on June 10, the day it received its Colours* – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)



From Stobs, some thirteen weeks later again, in early August, *A, B, C and D*, the senior Companies now become 1st Battalion, the Newfoundland Regiment, were transferred to Aldershot in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before departing on active service to the Middle East and to the fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

'E' and 'F' Companies – the latter having arrived at Stobs Camp on July 10 - were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were to form the nucleus of the newly-formed 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

When he was apprised of his transfer seems not to be recorded, but Private Simms was one of the few from 'E' Company who were to swell the ranks of the units posted to Aldershot - thus he became a soldier of 'B' Company. It was during the period while he was at Aldershot, and as was the case with the great majority of the Newfoundland troops, that Private Simms was prevailed upon to re-enlist *for the duration of the war*. This he did on August 16*.

**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.*

On August 20, 1915, Private Simms took ship on board the requisitioned passenger liner *Megantic* (right above) for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting in Gallipoli



where, a month later – of which two weeks had been spent billeted at the British barracks at Abbassia, near the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, 1st Battalion landed on the beach at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

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(Previous page black & white: 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: ‘Kangaroo Beach’, where 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 visible in the foreground on ‘A’ Beach. – photograph from 2011)

(Right: almost a century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where Private Simms served during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

On October 23, Private Simms was evacuated from Suvla – perhaps via the Greek island of Lemnos – on board His Majesty’s Hospital Ship *Devonah* (right). He had been diagnosed as suffering from dysentery.

He was admitted into St. Patrick’s Military Hospital on the British-held Mediterranean island of Malta on October 30. On December 3 Private Simms was released from there to move to the St. Barnabas Camp, Ghain Tuffeiha, also on Malta, for a period of convalescence.

(Right: *Disused and abandoned medical facilities from the era of British sovereignty today stand idle on now-independent – since 1964 - Malta. – photograph from 2011)*

It was not until January 26 of the New Year, 1916, that Private Simms disembarked from His Majesty’s Transport *Bornu to duty* in Egypt, almost certainly at the Sidi Bishr Base Depot in Alexandria. He did not re-join 1st Battalion until March 1.

(Right: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The Newfoundlanders, employed as the rear-guard, were among the last to leave on two occasions. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)*



Meanwhile, when the British had evacuated the entire Gallipoli Peninsula in January of 1916, 1st Battalion were sent to Alexandria, arriving there on the 15th of that month. From there the Newfoundlanders had been transferred, almost immediately, south to Suez. To that point it seems that the theatre of the future posting of 29th Division was still uncertain. It was at Suez that Private Simms reported *to duty* with 1st Battalion on March 1.

On March 14, a decision having been taken, the officers and men of 1st Battalion embarked through Port Tewfiq at the southern end of the Suez Canal onto His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* (right) for passage to the French Mediterranean port of Marseilles, en route to the *Western Front*.



(Right below: *Port Tewfiq just before 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)



Some three days after the unit's disembarkation in France on March 22, 1st Battalion's train arrived at the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy.

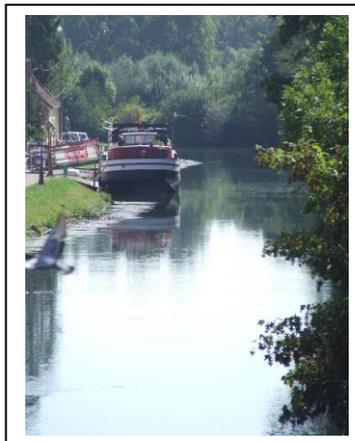
It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for them travelling unused in a separate wagon. De-training at the station at two in the morning the Newfoundlanders still had a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.



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

It is doubtful that any of those tired soldiers paid much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge that they passed on their way from the station. Some three months later *the Somme* would be a part of their history.

On April 13, 1st Battalion marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy – where it was billeted, welcomed re-enforcements from Rouen on the 15th and, on the evening of that same day, was ordered forward into the British line to make improvements to some communication trenches.



The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for that same meandering river, *the Somme*.



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

(continued)

On July 1, 1916, while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*, Private Simms was at first reported as *missing in action* at Beaumont-Hamel. Some six months later, on December 31, he was officially *presumed dead*.

The son of Ezriah Simms (Azariah, St Anthony Harbour?) and Lucy Simms (deceased January, 1907?), he was also brother to young Herbert - to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of forty cents - of St. Anthony. Private Simms had been a member of the *Legion of Frontiersmen*.



(Right: *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*)

However, he was later confirmed as *killed in action or died of wounds received in action on or shortly after 1/7/1916*. This was subsequent to a report of December 12, 1917 – some eighteen months after the action at Beaumont-Hamel - submitted by the Burial Officer of VI Corps; the dossier of Private Simms was amended so as to read as above.



George Percival Simms was twenty years of age at the time of his enlistment. (The stone in the St. Anthony United Church Cemetery seems to cite him as being twenty-eight years old at his death. *Vital Statistics* say twenty-one at his death.)*

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

**His signed - he made a mark as he was unable to write - enlistment paper says twenty-six years at the time; other official papers say twenty and twenty-one years,*

Private George Percival Simms was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

