



**Corporal Herbert John Belbin (Regimental Number 1765) is buried in Nine Elms British Cemetery: Grave reference X. B. 18.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *Post-Office* clerk, Herbert John Belbin was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on August 6 of 1915 for the mandatory medical examination prior to service. It was a procedure which would pronounce him as being...*Fit for Foreign Service*.**

**On the same day as that medical assessment, August 6, and at the same venue, the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, Herbert John Belbin was then to enlist. He was thereupon engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar, this to be supplemented by a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.**

**(continued)**

And it must have been only hours afterwards again that there then came the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On yet the same day he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, at which moment Herbert John Belbin thus became...*a soldier of the King.*

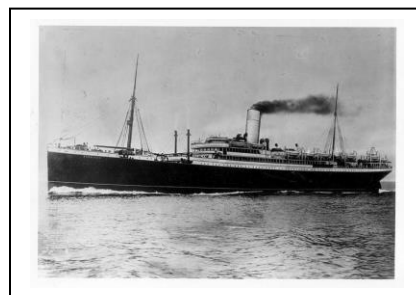
A further and more lengthy waiting-period was now in store for the recruits of this draft, designated as 'G' Company, before it was to depart from Newfoundland for...*overseas service.*

Private Belbin, Regimental Number 1765, was not to be again called upon until October 26, after a period of twelve weeks less three days. On that date, just the day before he was to depart for the United Kingdom, Private Belbin received a first promotion, elevated to the rank of lance corporal.

In the mean-time, where he was to spend the aforesaid intervening weeks appears not to have been recorded although he possibly returned temporarily to his job and almost certainly was to spend at least some of that time at his declared places of residence: either in the capital city or in the not-distant Conception Bay community of St. Philips – but, of course, this is only speculation.

On the day following Private Belbin's promotion, October 27, 'G' Company left St. John's by train to cross the island to Port aux Basques, the other passengers on board reportedly having included several naval reservists and also some German prisoners-of-war. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry – the ship documented as having been the *Kyle* - and afterwards proceeded again by train from North Sydney as far as Québec City.

There the Newfoundlanders joined His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* for the trans-Atlantic voyage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9. The vessel had departed Montreal on October 30 with Canadian troops on board before stopping at Québec: the 55<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion and the Second Draft of the (1<sup>st</sup>?) Divisional Signals Company.



(Right adjacent: *The image of Corsican is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Launched in 1907 for the Allan Line, one of the largest private shipping companies of the time, she spent much of her early career chartered to the Canadian Pacific Line which in 1917 was to purchase the entire Allan Line business. She was employed as a troop-ship during much of the Great War which she survived – only to be wrecked near Cape Race on May 21, 1923.*)

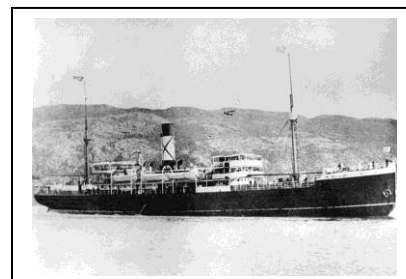


(Right: *The once-busy Royal Navy facility and harbour of Devonport almost a century after the Great War – photograph from 2012(?)*)

By the morning of November 10, Lance Corporal Belbin's 'G' Company had again travelled by train, to Scotland where it had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gailles, not far removed from the evolving Newfoundland Regimental Depot at Ayr where accommodation for the new arrivals was as yet not available.

\* \* \* \* \*

More than a year prior to that November 10 of 1915, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914, the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and were formed into 'A' and 'B' Companies.



During that same period the various authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

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

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after a recruit's 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 had sailed for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

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

Once having disembarked\* 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 it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.



*\*It was to do so at Devonport through which 'G' Company would pass eleven months later.*

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of 'D' Company to arrive – they via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty...*at Edinburgh, and then 'E' Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4\*.

(continued)



***\*These five Companies, while a contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.***

***(Right: The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011)***



Seven days after the arrival of 'E' Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent had been ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit had been dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.



***(Right: The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915. – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and of Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)***

Two months less a day later, on July 10, 'F' Company would march into *Stobs Camp*.

This had been an important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength\* of a battalion which could be posted on...*active service*.

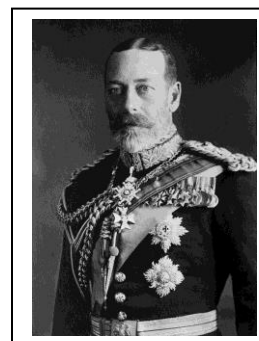
***\*A number sufficient to furnish four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.***

***(Right: The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles. – original photograph from the Provincial Archives)***



From *Stobs Camp*, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the four senior Companies, having now become the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, had been transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before the Battalion's departure to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

***(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 – the photograph is from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.)***



(continued)

The later arrivals to the United Kingdom, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were eventually to form the nucleus of the soon to be formed 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

(Right below: *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)

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer and the early autumn of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 – that the new-comers were sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion\*.



*\*The first such draft was to depart from Ayr for service on the Gallipoli Peninsula, only days after the arrival in Scotland of Lance Corporal Belbin's Company, on November 15.*

(Right below: *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.)

This then had been the situation facing the new-comers: the new Regimental Depot had still been in the throes of its establishment when Lance Corporal Belbin and his comrades-in-arms of 'G' Company were to arrive in Scotland on November 10 of 1915; thus, as related in a preceding paragraph, the new-comers were required to be quartered at Gailes, some sixteen kilometres further up the coast – but apparently more than sixty kilometres distant by road.



It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that in June – the exact date undocumented - while billeted at the *Racecourse* (see further below), and a month before his departure to France on...*active service*..., Lance Corporal Belbin was prevailed upon to re-enlist...*for the duration of the War*\*.

It had also been while at Ayr that he was to be admitted into hospital at Paisley from March 22 until April 12, diagnosed as with diphtheria.

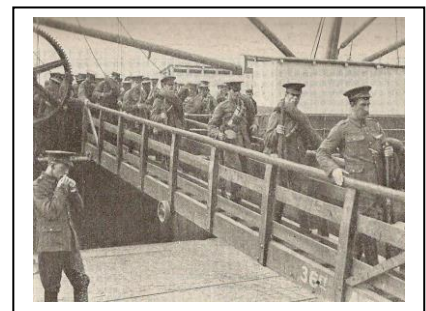
*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits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

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By the time of his eventual departure on...*active service*...Lance Corporal Belbin had witnessed the departure of the first nine re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: the first in mid-November of 1915 which had joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on December 1 at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*; the second which had sailed for Egypt only to be ordered back to the French port of Marseille; and the third to ninth which had subsequently left Scotland to go directly to the Continent, to France.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent on August 24, 1916, with Lance Corporal Belbin one of its non-commissioned officers. On the next day, the 25<sup>th</sup>, the detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot. There the draft was to spend a number of days in final training and organizing\* before being sub-divided and then being sent to a rendezvous with the parent Newfoundland Battalion.

(Right: *British troops disembark at Rouen at an earlier time during the War en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)



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

It was to be a small draft of thirty-nine *other ranks*, among them Lance Corporal Belbin, which reported from Rouen...*to duty*...with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on September 3, at a time when the Newfoundland unit was in a sector to the right of *Railway Wood, Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Whether the new-comers were thrown immediately into the fray has not been recorded; had it been, it would have been on one of the two quiet days of the tour that Battalion had been currently undertaking: a rude awakening, perhaps.

\* \* \* \* \*

A year prior to this juncture, in the early summer of 1915, the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both 'E' and 'F' Companies had only then been beginning their time of training at Ayr; as for Herbert John Belbin, he was as yet only at the point of enlistment and attestation at home, and he still had some three months to wait before the call was to come to sail overseas to the United Kingdom.

The aforementioned four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', of the Newfoundland Regiment, having now become the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had at this same time been attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been dispatched to...*active service*.



(continued)



(Preceding page: *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, prior to its departure to active service on the Gallipoli Peninsula – from The Fighting Newfoundlander by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.*)

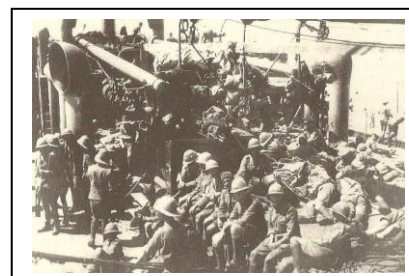


(Right: *The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

On August 20 of 1915, the 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *'Kangaroo Beach', where the officers and men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 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 adjacent: *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*)

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

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would now 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 been proving 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 their allies, 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 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.***

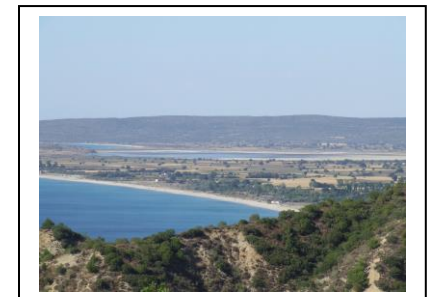
**(Right below: *No-Man's-Land at Suvla Bay as seen from the Newfoundland positions – from Provincial Archives*)**

November 26 would see what perhaps was to be 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, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

**(Right: *This is Anzac Bay in the fore-ground with the Salt Lake in the centre further away. The bottom of Suvla Bay is just to be seen on the left and adjacent to the Salt Lake, and further away again. The hills in the distance and the ones from which this photograph was taken were held by the Turks and formed a horse-shoe around the plain surrounding the Salt Lake - which was where the British and Newfoundlanders were stationed. – photograph from 2011*)**



By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire 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 Newfoundland Battalion personnel had thereupon 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 would 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 by now simply been marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.

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



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.

*\*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 evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria and beyond.

On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived there with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16<sup>th</sup>, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she had docked early on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders had landed and marched to their encampment.

There they were 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 already becoming a theatre of war.

(Right: *The image of the Blue Funnel Line vessel ‘Nestor’ is from the Shipspotting.com web-site. The vessel was launched and fitted in 1912-1913 and was to serve much of her commercial life until 1950 plying the routes between Britain and Australia. During the Great War she served mainly in the transport of Australian troops and was requisitioned once again in 1940 for government service in the Second World War. In 1950 she was broken up.*)



(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 were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.



(Right adjacent: *Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal just prior to the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.

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

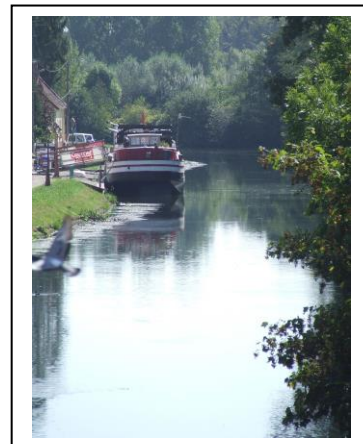


Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having travelled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

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



On April 13, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> 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 re-enforcements 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 below: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph 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.



It had been, of course, during the last part of Lance Corporal Belbin's posting to Ayr that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been involved in the fighting of the...*First Battle of the Somme*. Most notorious had been the attack of the first day, July 1 – although June 30 had initially been the planned date – at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

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(?)*)



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 greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage of *the Somme* was to continue for four and a half months.

(Right above: *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.***

***\*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.***

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



**After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that any German counter-assault might well annihilate what had managed to survive of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*.**

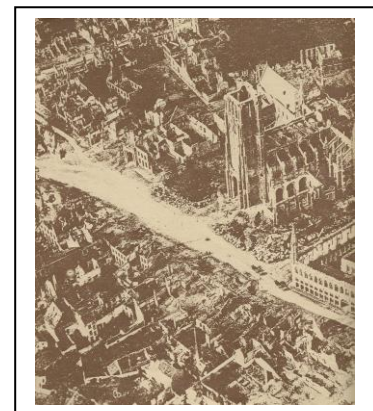
**The few remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion – and of the other depleted British units - had thus remained in the trenches perhaps fearing the worst, and at night searching for the wounded and burying the dead. It was to be July 6 before the Newfoundlanders were to be relieved from the forward area and to be ordered withdrawn to Englebelmer.**

**It had then been a further two days before the unit had marched further again to the rear area and to billets in the village of 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 reinforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported *to duty*. They had been the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional manpower having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was still to number only... *11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.**



**On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – maybe even fewer - even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.**

**(continued)**

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.

(Preceding page: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916: it is described as the 'Ville morte'. – from Illustration*)

(Right: *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*)



*The Salient* – close to the front lines for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict - was to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there; yet they nonetheless had incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

The trenches of the *Ypres Salient* was where the Battalion had of course been serving when Lance Corporal Belbin with the thirty-eight other re-enforcements from Rouen arrived on September 3.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Newfoundlanders were on that day in trenches in a sector to the right of the railway line from Ypres to Roeselare – of course, not in use at the time. While the War Diary is mute on the subject, those newcomers not likely to have been immediately posted to the front. They were probably subjected to a day of heavy rain while those who were in the trenches were having to put up with eight days of a heavy enemy bombardment as well.



(Right above: *Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 not far removed from Railway Wood and the Newfoundland positions – photograph from 2010*)

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion was ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

Within four days of that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was to be at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.



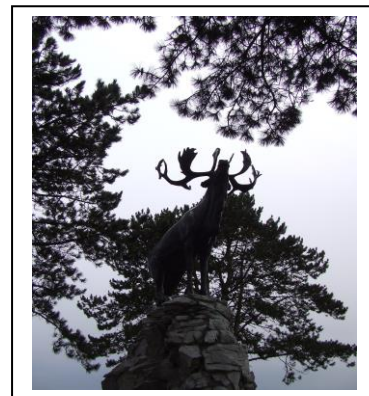
The encounter was to prove to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *This is the ground over which the 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)

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

After October 12, the Newfoundland Battalion was not to be immediately directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it supplied two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires and the Worcestershires, of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.



(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme. – from Illustration*)

On October 30, the Newfoundland unit eventually retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been continuously serving in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, resting, re-enforcing and reorganizing.



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

It was not to be until November 15 that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to wend its way back up to the front lines.

There it 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 another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

At the end of the month of November, the Newfoundland 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was still serving in the *Département de la Somme*, and from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> was holding trenches in the vicinity of the small community of Lesboeuifs. The Regimental War Diary entry of November 28 records one fatality and seventeen wounded during that four-day period.

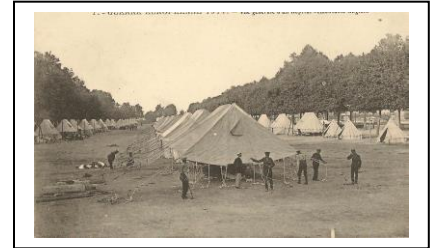
(continued)



\* \* \* \* \*

Lance Corporal Belbin, having been one of those seventeen wounded, was evacuated from...the field... and admitted into the 2/2 London (55<sup>th</sup>) Casualty Clearing Station, situated at Grovetown, Meaulté, on that November 28, suffering from a *slight* gun-shot wound to the hand.

(Right: A *British casualty clearing station* – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War: Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card)



From there he was transferred on December 4 to the 5<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in Rouen for further treatment before subsequently being released to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convalescent Depot at Le Tréport on December 27. He was then discharged...to *duty*...at the 29<sup>th</sup> Division Base Depot on the second day of the New Year: January 2, 1917.



(Right: *The 3<sup>rd</sup> British General Hospital at le Tréport during the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

Lance Corporal Belbin reported back...to *duty*...to his unit on February 5, one of a draft of a dozen *other ranks* to re-unite with the parent company in Carnoy on that date.

\* \* \* \* \*

The perhaps long-awaited Christmas period had arrived for the personnel on the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment on December 11-12 when it withdrew into the rear area near Amiens and into *Corps Reserve* where it was to no longer be on...*active service*. If they had not been tired *before* the withdrawal the Newfoundlanders *were* to be by the time they reached their quarters on December 15 after successive marches of ten, three and sixteen kilometres, the more-than occasional work party, guard duty and a train ride.

But then again...nobody had been shooting at them.

After those Christmas festivities – turkey dinner washed down with...*real ale*...apparently – it was not now to be until January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* to make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it had entrained for the small town of Corbie where it had thereupon taken over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

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

Those casualties, however, were to be only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig somewhat cavalierly referred to as *wastage* since the Newfoundland unit did not venture from its trenches during those several days.

However, that winter period – as had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the Great War – would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable for most of the combatants of both sides. It was to be a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were kept busy, particularly, so it seems - from at least Canadian medical documentation - with thousands of cases of dental work.

And as has been related in an earlier paragraph, this period had also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion this had been at least partially undertaken in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.

And it had been at Carnoy on that February 5 of 1917, as recounted in an earlier paragraph, that Lance Corporal Belbin in his small draft of twelve *other ranks* would report back to the Newfoundland Battalion...just in time: on the morrow the unit...*was relieved by a Battalion of the 59<sup>th</sup> Brigade and proceeded by Bus to Coisy for rest* \*(excerpt from 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for February 6, 1917).

*\*The rest comprised...daily training. Running and rapid marching in early morning...*

\* \* \* \* \*

On February 18 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began a five-day trek back from Coisy to the forward area where it went back into the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers. It was at a place called Sailly-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans was lively: after only two days the Battalion had incurred four dead, nine wounded and three gassed without there having been any infantry action. The Newfoundlanders were withdrawn on February 25 to return three days later.

They carried with them orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Sailly-Saillisel...to be carried out on March 1.



(Right above: *A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, his unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold of the trenches at Sailly-Saillisel during the winter of 1916-1917. – from Illustration*)

In fact, the sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during that entire period – from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917 – was to be that sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action which would bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.



(Preceding page: *The fighting during the period 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 would be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events. They even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band come from Ayr, 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from The War Illustrated*)

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders began to make their way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, the march to finish amid the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right: *The remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War, in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

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

On April 9 the British Army was to launch an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a major French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties – just over four thousand - this attack 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.



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

(Right: *The re-built 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)



(continued)



The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the 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 all told 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 personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux for but a few days. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, be amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming re-enforcements would allow the two units' strengths to once more resemble those of bona fide battalions.

When the thirty-nine *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen reported to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 18, they were just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers. They were only two hundred twenty – plus twelve officers in number - now serving with some two hundred of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. Those of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion spent the 19<sup>th</sup> salvaging equipment and burying the dead. They remained there until the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

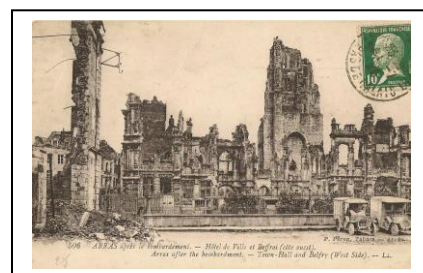


*(Right above: Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras.– photograph from 2007)*

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This was in fact an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies.

It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

And the Newfoundlanders had sustained further losses: ten...*killed in action*, three ...*missing in action*, and forty-eight...*wounded*.



Late, on that same evening of April 23, the Newfoundlanders retired the dozen or so kilometres to the relative calm of Arras.

**(Preceding page: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card*)**

\* \* \* \* \*

It was at the aforementioned *Les Fosses Farm*, on April 23, that Lance Corporal Belbin was once more wounded by gunfire. On this occasion he incurred injuries to both legs and was evacuated to the 87<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance before then being transferred almost immediately to the 18<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers.



**(Right above: *the railway station at Dannes-Camiers through which many thousands of sick, wounded and convalescent military personnel passed during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)**

Two days later again he crossed the English Channel on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Cambrai* to the United Kingdom where, upon arrival, he was transported to and admitted into the 1<sup>st</sup> London General Hospital in Camberwell.



**(Right above: *The image of 'Cambria' in her peace-time livery is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The ship had been built in 1897 for the 'London and North Western Railway' to serve on the crossing of the Irish Sea from Wales to Ireland. In 1914 she was requisitioned at first as an Armed Boarding Steamer, then a year later to be converted for the role of hospital ship. She survived the Great War to be later employed as a troopship by the Irish Free State. The vessel was scrapped in 1925.*)**

The customary ten-day furlough for military personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom was then granted; in the case of Lance Corporal Belbin it was towards the end of May, a period of leave that was followed by the almost-inevitable posting, on June 8, to the Regimental Depot at Ayr and later at Barry\*.

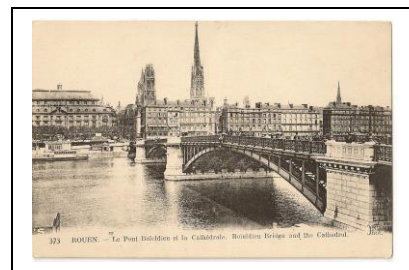


**(Right: *The new race-course at Ayr – opened in 1907 – where men of the Regiment were billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photo from 2012*)**

**\*During the summer months of 1917, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.**

**(continue)**

But his posting to Scotland was to be of only short duration as on July 22 and, as a non-commissioned officer of the 27<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Barry, Lance Corporal Belbin again was to embark through Southampton before then landing in Rouen on his way – via those several days of last-minute training and preparation - to an eventual reunion with his Newfoundland Battalion.



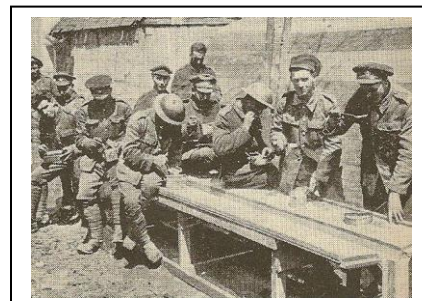
(Right above: *The River Seine flows through the centre of the French city of Rouen – and under the steeples and towers of the venerable gothic cathedral - at or about the time of the Great War. – from a vintage post-card*)

Lance Corporal Belbin was then one of the draft of one-hundred eight *other ranks* which arrived at *Penton Camp*, to the north-west of Poperinghe, on August 28. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had quit the line on the 24<sup>th</sup> and was not to return to the front for an entire month. This period, a planned lull in the fighting, was to allow the entire British Army time to reorganize and re-enforce before re-taking the offensive in the fighting which up until this time had been much less successful than had been originally – and optimistically - anticipated.

\* \* \* \* \*

(Right below: *Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from *The War Illustrated**)

After the Newfoundland Battalion’s confrontation at Les Fosses Farm when Lance Corporal Belbin had been wounded on a second occasion, the *Battle of Arras* was to proceed to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-May, but the Newfoundland unit would not be further involved in any further co-ordinated offensive action – it had been too exhausted; this now would be a period when the Battalion was to move in a circular fashion on the *Arras Front*, in and out of the trenches.



On May 7 the unit had been on the move once again and marching to different billets in Berneville where it would be the subject of a war journalist and photographer.

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville – not Bonneville - in early May, perhaps the 7<sup>th</sup>, of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)



At the outset of June, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

The Newfoundlanders had then soon again been ordered north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just north of the city.

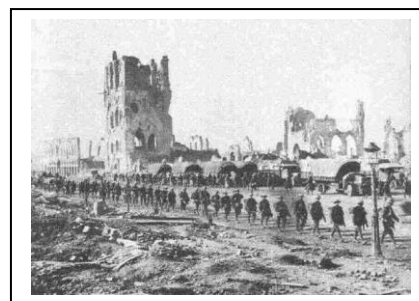


(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right* – photograph from 2014)



This small, low-lying area, Belgian *Flanders*, which had been since 1914 the only part of the country unoccupied by the invading German forces, had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the upcoming British summer offensive of 1917.

(Right: *Troops arriving from the railway station in single file, march past the vestiges of the historic Cloth Hall and through the rubble of the medieval city centre of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer or early autumn of 1917.* – from *Illustration*)



(Right adjacent: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917* – from *Illustration*)



Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, this campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives. Since that time it has become, perhaps rightly so, one of the symbols of the wretchedness of war.

(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war* – from *Illustration*)



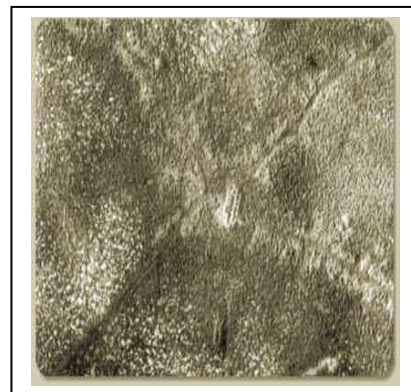
The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army. This had been or was also to be the case with the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians, all of whose troops had floundered or would soon flounder their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Belgian Flanders.

Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembek* (see both immediately below) on October 9.



At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembek* the cost was to be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

And as seen in an earlier paragraph, it had been at the end of the month of that August of 1917 – after the action at the *Steenbeek* but before that at the *Broembeek* – that Lance Corporal Belbin's draft had reported to the Newfoundland Battalion at *Penton Camp*



(Preceding page: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right above: *The once-village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

\* \* \* \* \*

After those four weeks of relative calm which had begun at the time of the arrival of Lance Corporal Belbin at *Penton Camp* on August 28, and which had continued while the British forces re-enforced and re-organized, the Newfoundland Battalion went back to war during the last days of a fine September – and as the fighting started once more...so did the rain.



The offensive recommenced for the Newfoundland Battalion on September 25, although the unit had incurred four wounded two days prior to that date due to long-range artillery fire. Back in their trenches they prepared for their next concerted attack on German positions. It came some two weeks later and, as seen above, it came at the *Broembeek*.

(Right above: *An innocuous, placid stream shown here, in 1917 the Broembeek was a torrent which would flood the surrounding terrain, transforming it into a quagmire. – photograph from 2009*)

Only two days after that aforesaid confrontation of October 9, the Newfoundland Battalion marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe, whence it was to be transported to *Swindon Camp*. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit once more boarded a train.

By ten-thirty that same evening, the Battalion had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and would now march the final few kilometres to its billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.

There at the Newfoundland Battalion's encampment, it was during this period that, on November 1, a second promotion was awarded to him, and Lance Corporal Belbin was to put up a second stripe, signifying the rank of corporal.

(continued)

The Newfoundlanders was still there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and two days later when, on November 17, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had again been ordered once again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it began to move further eastward, now on foot, and towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while still on the move, the unit was issued as it went with... *war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of that night it then marched up to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the Newfoundland unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, was to move forward into its forming-up area. From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten, bugles blowing, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced to the fray.



(Right above: *The Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

This new offensive – apparently initially conceived to be no more than a large-scale raid - the so-called *Battle of Cambrai*, was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders having been directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle was to begin well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time, but the opportunities offered would be squandered. -There were to be no troops available in reserve to exploit what had been a hoped-for - although admittedly unexpected - success, and by the conclusion of the battle, the Germans had counter-attacked and the British had relinquished certainly as much – more in places - territory as they had initially fought for and gained.

The Newfoundland Battalion had once again been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing, Masnières - where a Caribou stands today - and in the area of the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who had advanced into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day\*.



(Right above: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on November 20; however, whether its capture was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012*)

*\*At five-hundred fifty-three all ranks – not counting the aforementioned ten per cent reserve - the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment even at the outset of the operation was operating at just over fifty per cent of establishment strength: not that it would have been any consolation had it been known, but a goodly number of battalions in*



***all the British and Dominion forces – with perhaps the exception of the Canadians - were encountering the same problem.***

***(Right below: A number of graves of soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery. Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, has identified them as being Canadian. – photograph from 2010)***

**After the exertions of *Cambrai*, the Newfoundlanders were to be withdrawn from the line, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment by then comprising the strength of only a single company - whereas a full battalion comprises four. The unit then remained in the vicinity of Humbercourt, to the west of Arras, until December 18 when it was to march to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west.**



**At Fressin the unit would spend both Christmas and New Year. The weather obliged and even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow - a bit too much at times apparently – perhaps just like home.**

**At the beginning of January of 1918, after that snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion returned to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time. There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.**



***(Right above: By 1918 Ypres was looking like this; some of these broken buildings had been a school which had served as a shelter for troops in the earlier days of the conflict. – from a vintage post-card)***

**In the meantime, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them. It was expected that they would launch a spring offensive - which they were to do – in fact they were to unleash several of them\*.**



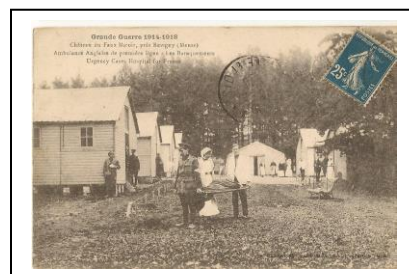
***\*There were also to be several assaults by the Germans on French forces during that spring. They all met with varying degrees of success at the outset, but eventually they would be thwarted by Petain's divisions, aided at times by the newly-arriving Americans.***

**In the sector where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was stationed, the blow was not to fall until April. Thus, while they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders had continued to dig.**

(Right above: *Some of the countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of which the Newfoundlanders were to build a tramline in January and were still stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

From March 7 to 14 the Battalion manned the front line near the village of Mosselmarkt, in the close vicinity, some five-hundred metres to the south, of Passchendaele. During that period, the Regimental War Diarist - in a very brief report of the entire seven days - was to record twelve *killed in action*; one *missing, believed killed*; and thirty-four *wounded* - the majority likely victims of the artillery bombardment of March 11.

Corporal Belbin was one of those wounded, a casualty of that March 11. Almost immediately he was evacuated from the forward area to the 87<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance having incurred gunshot wounds to the back, to the buttocks and to the right arm. Later that same day he was admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Casualty Clearing Station, near the French village of Grevillers where he was deemed to be *dangerously ill*.



(Right above: *A British Field Ambulance, more permanent than some nearer to the front, in north-eastern France at a later date in the War – from a vintage post-card*)

The son of Charles Roberts Belbin, teacher retired by the time of enlistment, and of Sarah Belbin (née *Rideout*) - to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of seventy cents from his pay - of St. Philips in the District of St. John's West (and also of 17, Cook Street in St. John's) he was also brother to Robert-George, Frances-Victoria, Charles-R(oberts?), an un-identified Baby Belbin, and perhaps to Herbert-James Belbin (unless they are one and the same)\*.

*\*Much of this is from 'The Belbins and Matthews' web-site.*

Corporal Belbin of 'D' Company was reported by the *Officer Commanding* the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian CCS as having...*died of wounds*...on March 12, 1918. He was buried on the following day, March 13, by the Reverend E. G. Mushcamp(?), Chaplain to the Forces.

Herbert John Belbin\* had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-three years and six months: this being so, it was surely he recorded as baptized on February 21, 1892 (from Newfoundland Vital Statistics).

*\*Not to be confused with Herbert Belbin (Private, Regimental Number 2486) of Bay Roberts.*

Corporal Herbert John Belbin was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



**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 5, 2023.**