



Private Peter Francis Bennett (Regimental Number 770), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

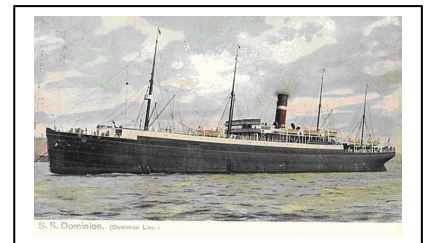


His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a labourer working with *Baine Johnson and Co. Ltd.* of Water Street for a weekly wage of eight dollars, Peter Francis Bennett presented himself for medical examination on December 10, 1914, at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*. He was a recruit of the Second Draft.

Just six days after having undergone this medical appraisal, Peter Francis Bennett was to return to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, there to enlist – engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar a day plus a ten-cent *Field Allowance*. It appears that he was also to attest on that same December 16.

Now for Private Bennett, Number 770, there was to be a seven-week waiting period. How he occupied himself during that period is not recorded among his papers; he may, of course, have temporarily returned to work but this is only speculation.

On the fourth day of February of 1915, the first reinforcements – this was 'C' Company - for the Newfoundland contingent – it was not yet at battalion strength - which by this time was serving in Scotland (see further below), were to embark via the sealing tender *Neptune* onto the *SS Dominion* – the vessel having anchored to the south of St. John's, off Bay Bulls, because of ice conditions.



The vessel was then to sail - and Private Bennett thus departed Newfoundland for *overseas service* - a day later again, on February 5, for trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom.

(Right above: *The image of the steamer 'Dominion' - launched in 1894 as the 'Prussia' - is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. An older vessel, she was to be requisitioned during the latter part of the Great War as a store and supply ship. She survived the conflict to be scrapped in 1922.*)



**There appears to be some confusion in some sources as to whether these troops were 'C' or 'D' Company. However, 'D' Company was to go overseas some time later on 'Stephano' to Halifax and then on 'Orduña' to Liverpool.*

(Preceding page: The photograph of personnel of 'C' Company on board the 'Neptune' on the way to the harbour at Bay Bulls is from the Provincial Archives.)

Having disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool, the Newfoundlanders entrained for Edinburgh, the first Newfoundland Regiment contingent having by this time been posted to the historic Castle in Scotland's capital city. There they were to provide the garrison, thus being the first unit from overseas ever to do so.



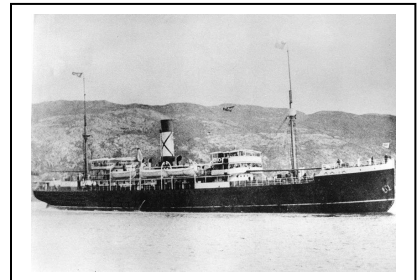
Private Bennett and the other new-comers reported to duty at Edinburgh Castle on February 16.

(Right above: Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from its position on the summit of Castle Hill. – photograph from 2011)

* * * * *

Five to six months before that time, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 there had been a period of training of some five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's for the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits - to become 'A' and 'B' Companies - during which time the authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after enlistment and/ or attestation. To become known to history as the *First Five Hundred* and also as the *Blue Puttees*, on that day they had boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.



The ship would sail for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

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

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



(continued)

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, as recorded beforehand, it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles – and where ‘C’ Company and Private Bennett, as also cited beforehand, would arrive from Newfoundland on February 16 of 1915.

* * * * *

Some three months later, on May 11, and three weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit was ordered moved to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent received the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength*. The now-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was thus rendered eligible to be sent on ‘active service’.

(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 Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

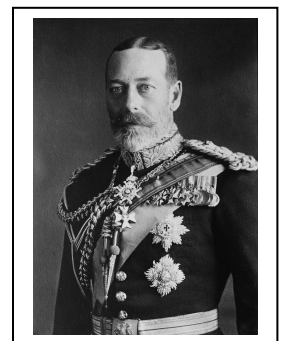


**This was approximately fifteen hundred, sufficient to furnish two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot. This force, now the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

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

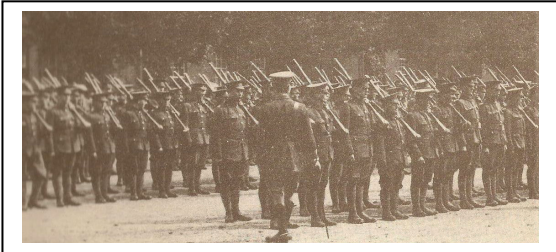
(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – the photograph is from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.*)



It was during this period at Aldershot, on August 15, that Private Bennett was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion for the *duration of the war**.

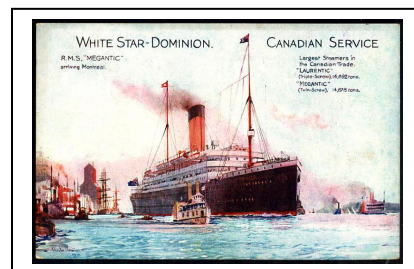
(continued)

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



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

On August 20, 1915, Private Bennett and the Newfoundland unit embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks. There, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, the 1st Battalion landed at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

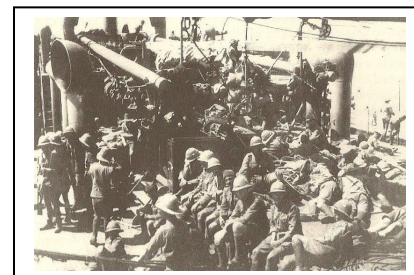


(Right above: The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a ‘White Star Line’ vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

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



(Right: Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros: either Megantic on August 29, Ausonia on September 18, or Prince Abbas on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on Gallipoli. – from Provincial Archives)



(Right below: A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to serve during the autumn of 1915 – photograph from 2011)



When the Newfoundlanders landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* on that September night of 1915 they were to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

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

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

(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.*



During the short period of three months which now followed, things were to worsen at *Gallipoli** for the British in general and the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in particular.

**The French know the place as 'Les Dardanelles' while the Turks call it 'Çanakkale'.*

November 26 of 1915 would see perhaps the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; there was to be a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be the priority.

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

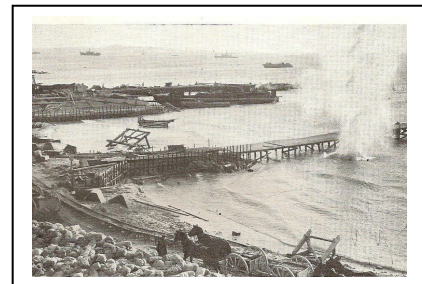
As the days, weeks and months passed at *Suvla Bay*, the British position there was to become more and more untenable and thus on the night of December 19-20, they abandoned the area – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.



(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*)

(continued)

Some of the Battalion personnel were to be evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away; but in neither case would the respite be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



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

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

This final operation took 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 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 evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria, to arrive there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders would then immediately be transferred southward to the vicinity of Suez, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.



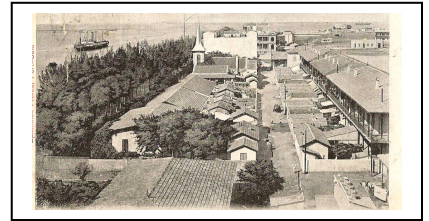
**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.*

(Right above: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration*)

It was during this period that Private Bennett was admitted into the 17th Stationary Hospital at Port Tewfiq – on February 12 – suffering from eczema. He was released from there to duty on March 14.

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

After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1st Battalion boarded His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage through the *Suez Canal* en route to France. The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseilles, on March 22.



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

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

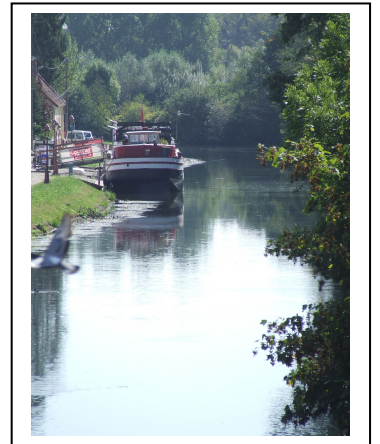


Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge over which they then marched 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 1st Battalion subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive reinforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

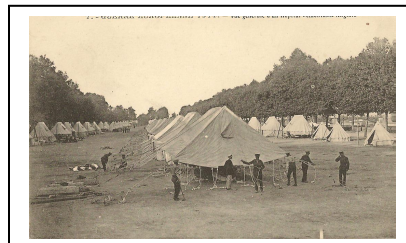


* * * * *

Familiarity with the trenches, however, was to come later for Private Bennett. On April 8, with 1st Battalion still in transit in the area of Louvencourt, he had been sent to the 29th Casualty Clearing Station at Gezaincourt for treatment to a sprained ankle. One week later, on the 15th, he was to be forwarded to the 2nd Canadian General Hospital in Le Tréport from where he was discharged *to duty* on April 22 – likely posted to the Base Depot at Rouen before re-joining the 1st Battalion in a re-enforcement draft at some unspecified later date*.

**Unfortunately, the Battalion War Diary appears not to record the arrival of many of the re-enforcement drafts...to duty...with the unit. In fact, the amount of information to be gleaned from the journal on the majority of dates is all-too-often minimal.*

(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)



* * * * *

Just days following the Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front* on April 13, now without Private Bennett, 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 then ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.



(Right: A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?))

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

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.

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)

(continued)

(Right: A view of Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?))



**Perhaps ironically, the majority of the Battalion's casualties was to be incurred during the advance from the third line of British trenches to the first line from where the attack proper was to be made, and while struggling through British wire laid to protect the British positions from any German attack.*

(Right below: Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from *Le Miroir*)

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

(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel, a commune not a village.* – photos from 2010 and 2015)

In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists today – at the time comprising two communities: Beaumont, a village on the German side of the lines, and Hamel which was behind those of the British. No-Man's-Land, on which the Newfoundland Memorial Park lies partially today, was on land that separated Beaumont from Hamel.



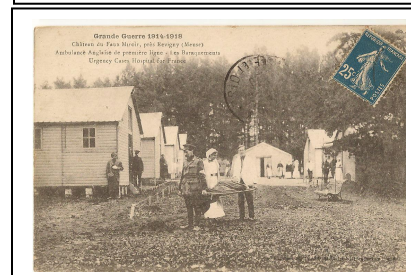
(Right: A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland - dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?)

* * * * *

At Beaumont-Hamel Private Bennett was one of those wounded, having incurred gun-shot injuries to the left knee and thigh during the fighting of July 1, 1916, the first day of *First Somme*. He was evacuated to the 87th Field Ambulance – likely an advanced dressing station for which the field ambulances were normally responsible - from where, on the following day, he was forwarded to an unidentified casualty clearing station.



(continued)



(Preceding page: *A British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)

On the next day yet again, Private Bennett was on the move once more, on this occasion passing through the attentions of the 2nd General Hospital in Le Havre before being embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Asturias* for the short cross-Channel passage en route back to the United Kingdom.



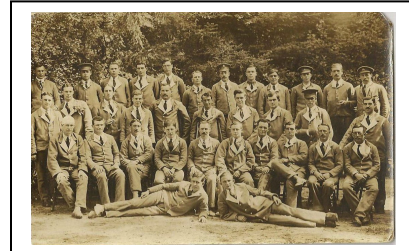
(Right above: *The photograph of HMHS 'Asturias' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The Royal Mail Steam Packet Company vessel, built in 1908, was to be requisitioned as a hospital ship just prior to the onset of the Great War and was to serve as such until March of 1917 when she was torpedoed with some thirty-five lives lost. Her crew managed to beach her but, badly damaged, she was only to then be used for ammunition storage. In 1922 she was repaired to be used as a cruise ship in which capacity she served until 1930 when she was laid up and subsequently scrapped.*

Upon his arrival in England, Private Bennett was admitted on July 5 into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth where he was to remain for a week.



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

(Right: *A party of Newfoundland patients dressed in hospital uniform here seen convalescing in the grounds of the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



On July 12, Private Bennett was discharged from Wandsworth, having been granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded to military personnel upon release from hospital. Immediately after this period of leave, he was posted to the Regimental Depot where he reported to duty on July 21.

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



(continued)

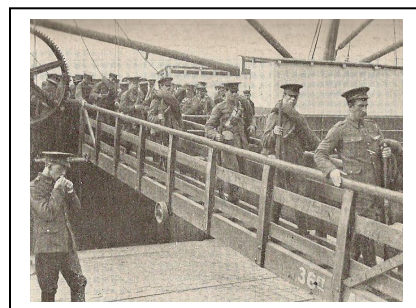
(Preceding page: *An aerial view of Ayr, likely from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr, where were quartered the 'other ranks', is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

(Right 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.*

It was while he was at Ayr that Private Bennett's spotted past caught up with him and he was ordered to pay the price for four full charge sheets against him: he was thus awarded one-hundred sixty-eight days of detention plus the loss of twenty-seven days pay. Some of the time was apparently eventually remitted in order to allow him to return to *active service* on the Continent, but despite the imposed penalties, his later records do not show much marked improvement in his conduct.



On December 30 of 1916, the 16th Re-enforcement Draft, Private Bennett among that number, embarked in the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the large British Expeditionary Base at Rouen, the capital city of Normandy. The contingent disembarked there on the following day, New Year's Eve, making its way to the Base for organizing and for final training* before being ordered on to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen 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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

During this short period spent at Rouen, Private Bennett was sent to the 2nd Convalescent Depot there on January 11, suffering from his old complaint, eczema. Discharged *to duty* to the 29th Divisional Base Depot on January 25, Private Bennett is recorded – in his own papers but not elsewhere - as having reported *to duty* with the 1st Battalion a month later, on February 27, on a day when the Regimental War Diary reports the Newfoundlanders as being out of the line with everyone having a *bath and trench-foot treatment*.

On the next day the Newfoundlanders were to move back into forward-area positions in the vicinity of the vestiges of the village of Sailly-Saillisel.

* * * * *

(continued)

In the meantime, after the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, and also after Private Bennett's departure for medical attention, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that a 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 re-enforcements – 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 man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion had still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles...*after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

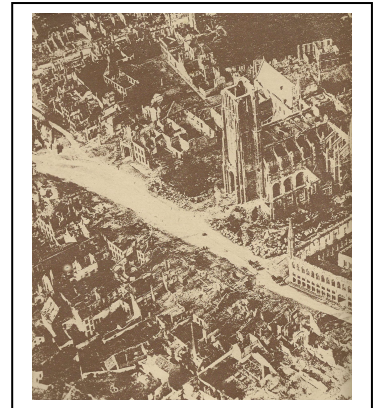
On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1st Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.

(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 would incur casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

(continued)



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

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

Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1st 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.

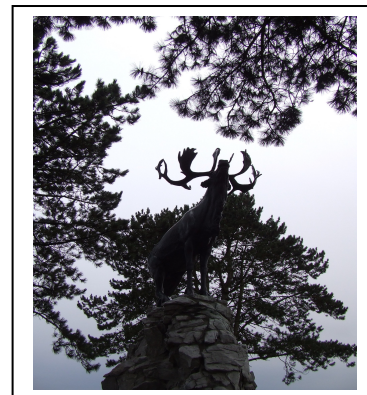


The encounter had proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right above: *This is the ground over which the 1st Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)

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

The Newfoundland Battalion was not to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it would supply 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 88th Brigade.

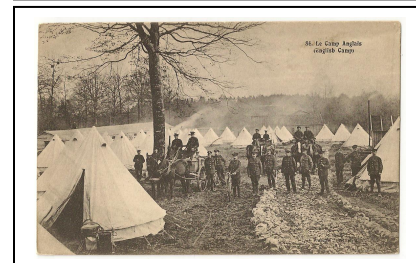


(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme. – from Illustration*)



On October 30, the Newfoundland unit had eventually been retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been 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, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1st Battalion began to wend its way back up to the front lines.



(continued)

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.

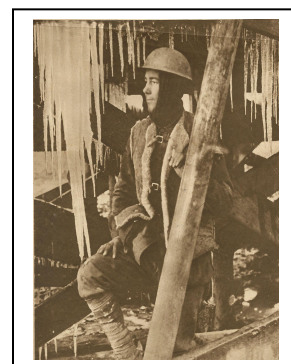
(Preceding page: *A typical British Army Camp during rather inclement winter conditions somewhere on the Continent* – from a vintage post-card)

It had then been on January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois* from where it would make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the local railway station it had then been taken by train to 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 only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig casually referred to as *wastage* as the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches.

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 the sharp engagement at Sully-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.



It was during this winter period, of course, but only some three days before the aforementioned action at Sully-Saillisel, that Private Bennett had reported back to the Newfoundland Battalion.

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

(Right: *The fighting during the period of the Battalion's posting to Sully-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(?)*)



* * * * *

(continued)

After the confrontation at Sailly-Saillisel the month of March had been 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 had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



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

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had begun 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* had been yet a further disaster.

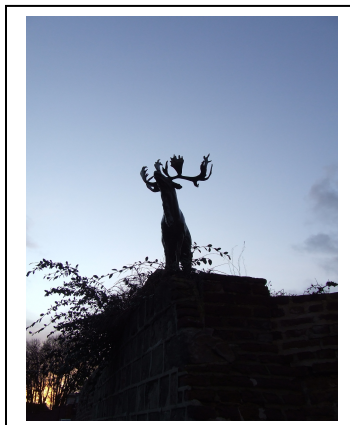
(Right: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community: The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)



The 1st Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at 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 .*

The son of Joseph Bennett – wharfinger with *Baine Johnson Co. Ltd.*, and to whom he had willed his everything - and of Margaret Bennett (née *Olliver*) of 24, Feild Street in St. John's - his own address cited as 35, Wickford Street – he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay to a friend from work, Stan Cullen. He was also brother to Mary Jane and to Janet May one of whom was to pass away in or about 1919.



**The couple married on September 12, 1891.*

Private Bennett was reported as *missing in action* on April 14, 1917, while fighting at Monchy-le-Preux during the *Battle of Arras*. He was officially *presumed dead* on November 17, 1917, some thirty weeks later.

Peter Francis Bennett had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-one years: date of birth in St. John’s, Newfoundland, November 14, 1893 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

(Right above: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands in the centre of the village atop the vestiges of a German strong-point. – photograph from 2012*)

Private Peter Francis Bennett 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) (right).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – February 9, 2023.