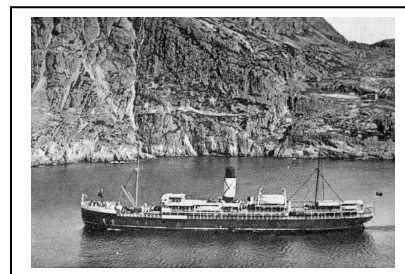


Lance Corporal William Bennett (also *Bennoit*) DCM (Regimental Number 1071), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a carpenter earning an annual \$600.00, William Bennett presented himself for enlistment at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in Newfoundland's capital city, St. John's – engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10* per diem - on January 20 of 1915, before then attesting some four weeks later, on February 18.



**They were paid a daily dollar to which was added a further ten-cent field-allowance.*

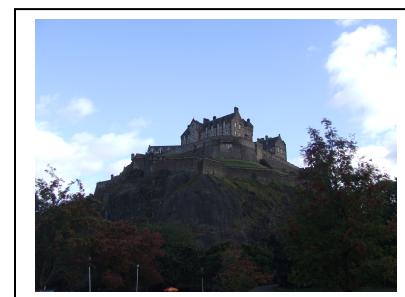
(Right above: *The photograph the SS Stephano – to be sunk in 1916 - is by courtesy of the Provincial Archives.*)

Private Bennett then embarked with Number 8 Platoon of 'D' Company, just over four weeks later again, onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* on March 20, 1915, for passage to Halifax and for overseas service. From Halifax he took ship on His Majesty's Transport *Orduna* for the trans-Atlantic crossing to Liverpool.



(Right above: *The photograph of the SS Orduna is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Having sailed from Nova Scotia on March 22 for Liverpool, the draft landed there eight days later, on the 30th, and immediately entrained to Edinburgh, arriving at the historic Castle on the same day. For the next six weeks, having been united with 'A', 'B' and 'C' Companies already stationed there, the Newfoundlanders formed the garrison – the first troops from outside the British Isles to do so - of the guardian of Scotland's capital city.



(Right above: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the skyline of the Scottish capital city from the summit of Castle Hill. – photograph from 2011*)

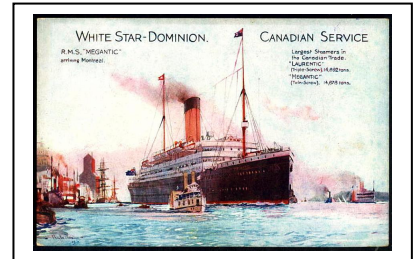
(continued)

On May 11 the Newfoundlanders were transferred to *Stobs Camp*, near Hawick, to the south-east of Edinburgh. There they remained for some three months until the beginning of August when the senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C', and 'D' – now to collectively become the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment - were sent to *Camp Aldershot* in the south of England. There they received final training – and a royal inspection - to prepare for *active service* in Gallipoli.



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

The later arrivals, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were sent to the new Regimental Depot at that time being established at Ayr, on the west coast of Scotland. There they were to become the nucleus of the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.



(Right above: *The image of His Majesty's Transport Megantic is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

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



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

(Above 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)

On August 20, 1915, Private Bennett took ship on board the requisitioned passenger liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting in Gallipoli where, a month later – of which two weeks had been spent billeted at the British barracks at Abbassia, near the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, the 1st Battalion landed on the beach at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.



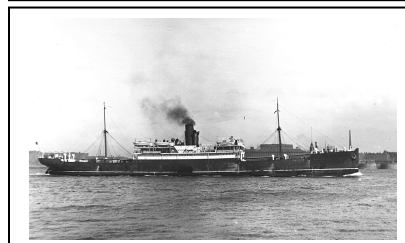
(Right above: *'Kangaroo Beach', where the soldiers of the 1st Battalion landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on 'A' Beach.* – photograph from 2011)

(continued)

(Right: *Almost a century afterwards - little changed from those far-off days – the area of the 1st Battalion’s positions at Suvla, and where Private Bennett was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011*)



On December 12, Private Bennett was admitted into the 26th Casualty Clearing Station at Suvla. Soon afterwards he was placed on board His Majesty’s Hospital Ship *Massilia* and was en route to the British Crown Colony of Gibraltar. There he was admitted into Government Hospital on an undetermined date for medical attention for trench ‘flu and for frost-bite.

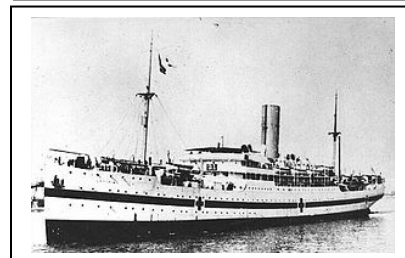


(Right: *The photograph of Massilia is from the Allen Collection web-site.*)

(Right below: *The British possession of Gibraltar in pre-War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background. – from a vintage postcard*)

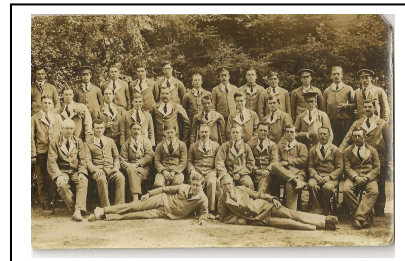


On January 28 of the New Year, 1916, he was placed on board another of His Majesty’s hospital ships once more, on this occasion it was HMHS *Letitia* and Private Bennett was on his way back to the United Kingdom. Upon arrival in England he was transported to the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth, where he was admitted for further treatment on February 2.



(Right: *The photograph of HMHS Letitia is from the Wikipedia web-site. In August of 1917 she ran aground in Halifax Harbour where she eventually sunk with the loss of a single crew-member. The vessel’s remains are still there to this day.*)

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



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

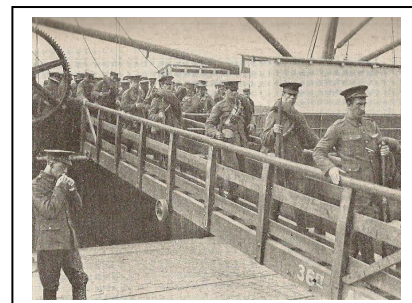
After two weeks of treatment and then convalescence, Private Bennett was granted the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel upon release from hospital - from February 17 to 26 - before thereupon being posted to the Regimental Depot. He was to remain there for some fifteen weeks.

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



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

On July 16 the 9th Re-enforcement Draft for the 1st Battalion from Ayr passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to the Continent. On the next day, the 17th, it disembarked at Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot. There it reported for some final days of training and organization* before moving on to seek out the parent unit.



(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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Private Bennett reported *to duty* with the 1st Battalion in the Belgian town of Poperinghe on July 29, one of the small draft of twelve *other ranks* to do so on that day. As a consequence of the disaster of Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, even after having received several contingents of re-enforcements, the Newfoundland unit's strength was still only six-hundred sixty-six all told, about two-thirds of a full battalion complement.

On July 27-28 of August 1st Battalion had moved north from France and crossed the frontier into Belgium for the first time. It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most lethal theatres of war on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize.

Although *the Salient* proved to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there, they nonetheless incurred casualties, some of them fatal. On October 8, after ten weeks in Belgium, 1st Battalion moved south back to France and back to the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.



(continued)

It was during this period spent in Belgium that Private Bennett earned his first stripe, being promoted to the rank of lance corporal on September 14.

(Preceding page: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters in the ramparts of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

(Right above: *The same re-constructed ramparts as on the previous page, viewed from outside the city and from the far side the moat which partially surrounds it – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *the city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – and eight months before the Newfoundlanders were posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)

Four days after its return to France, on October 12, the 1st Battalion went again to the attack at a place called Gueudecourt, a dozen kilometres or so to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel. It was another costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right: *These are the fields across which 1st Battalion advanced on October 12. Some managed to get as far as the cluster of trees on the right horizon but they were forced to retreat. The Gueudecourt Caribou stands amid those trees today. – photograph from 2010(?)*)

It was for his conduct at Gueudecourt that Lance Corporal Bennett was awarded – some two months later - the Distinguished Conduct Medal: '*Action Date, October 12th, 1916. For conspicuous gallantry in action. Three times he carried most important messages under intense fire. Later, with two men, he captured one officer and thirteen prisoners.*' - London Gazette, December 11th, 1916

The 88th Brigade report of the episode is more detailed: '*On Oct. 12 near Gueudecourt in attack on German Trenches, displayed great gallantry and coolness as a runner, three times carrying messages through a very heavy barrage back to Battalion Headquarters. After night fall on observing a party of the enemy on our left flank, he took two men and after firing one volley, charged with the bayonet and took the whole party, 1 Officer and 13 men prisoners.*'

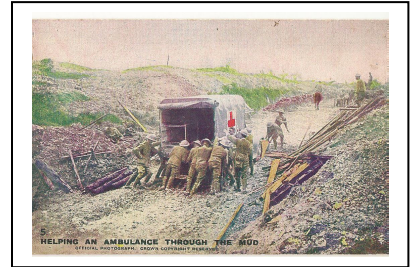
From November 19 to 21, while still in the area of *the Somme*, 1st Battalion was serving in the trenches near Corbie. The unit was heavily shelled during these three days and the Regimental War Diary entry for November 21 partially reads... *Total Casualties while in line 5 killed and 15 wounded.*

(continued)



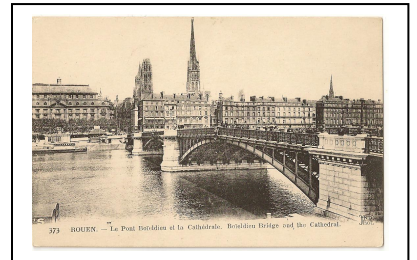
Lance Corporal Bennett was one of the wounded, having incurred injuries to the head. On or about that same date he was evacuated to an un-specified casualty clearing station from where he was transferred on November 27 to the 11th Stationary Hospital in Rouen.

(Right: *Transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)



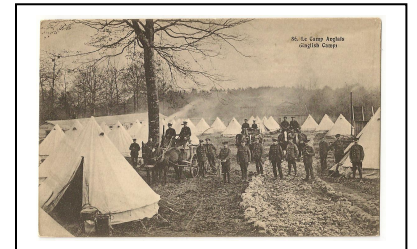
From the hospital he was forwarded to the Number 2 Convalescent Depot on December 1, and two days later again, on the 3rd, was discharged to the Base Depot at Rouen, and to duty.

(Right: *The centre of the city of Rouen, the Seine traversing it: many Newfoundlanders passed through Rouen to the front; others were nursed there; still others remain there, in St. Sever Cemetery, today. – photograph from 2011*)



Lance Corporal Bennett was subsequently one of the draft of one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* which reported to the 1st Battalion on December 13 from Rouen while the unit was at Méricourt l'Abbé. At that point the Newfoundlanders were beginning a six-week posting to *Corps Reserve* – a period which included both Christmas and the New Year – encamped well behind the lines near Amiens.

(Right above: *A British camp, in not particularly clement conditions likely in a winter period, somewhere on the Continent during the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



During that Christmas interim, on Boxing Day of 1916, Lance Corporal Bennett was brought up before a court martial and awarded thirty days of Field Punishment No. 1 for... *Committing an offence against the inhabitants of the Country in which he was serving.* No further information appears to have been documented.

(Right: *The great gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the Newfoundlanders may well have visited during the Christmas period of 1916 – The edifice houses a flag and other commemorations of the sacrifice of the Dominion of Newfoundland – photograph from 2007(?)*)



(continued)

Then, during that same period, on January 16 of the New Year, 1917, Lance Corporal Bennett was admitted to 53rd Field Ambulance with ICT (*Inflammation Connective Tissue*) of the arms. He returned *to duty* with the 1st Battalion on February 5 or 6, only to be admitted for treatment for a PUO (*Pain of Unknown Origin*) into the New Zealand Stationary Hospital at Amiens, on March 28. He returned after convalescence *to duty* with the 1st Battalion on April 7 during its march towards the village of Monchy-le-Preux.

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



(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras at an early period of the Great War – from Illustration*)

On April 9 the British Army was to launch an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties it was the most expensive operation of the War for the British, its only positive episode being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign was to prove an overall disappointment, the French offensive was to be a disaster.

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

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to play its part in the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at a place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish nine days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, Monchy-le-Preux was to prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war: four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 alone.



(Right above: *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*)

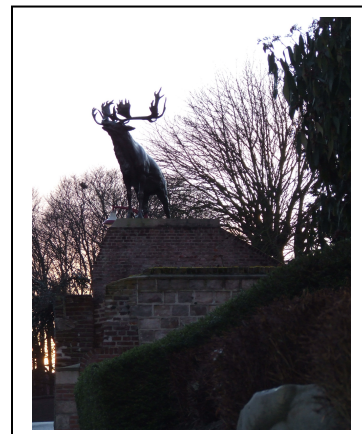
The son of Luke A. Bennett (also *Benoit*), fisherman and lumberman, and Josephine Bennett (*née Gaudet*) – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Stephenville, Newfoundland, then later of Regent Street, North Sydney, Nova Scotia - his own place of residence was recorded as Stephenville where the family had previously lived. He was brother to Margaret, Hilda, Mary, Hector, Octave and Rose.

Lance Corporal Bennett was at first reported as *missing in action* on April 14, 1917, while serving with 'D' Company in the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux.

The identification and then burial of his remains on or about June 6, 1917, was subsequently reported in a memo submitted by the General Officer Commanding the 86th Infantry Brigade. Lance Corporal Bennet's record was thus amended so as to read *killed in action*.

William Bennett had enlisted at the age of twenty-two years.

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



Lance Corporal William Bennett DCM 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).



(continued on following page)

(Received at office on May 1, 1917)

81 South Harbour Street
Ayr

Dear Sir

Please would you be so kind to inform me wher Lcpl Willie Bennet No. 1071, 1st N.F.L.D. Regt, or if anything is happened to him as his sister is vey anxious.

As know and oblige

Mrs Taylor

81 South Harbour St.

Ayr



(Right: These are the few survivors of the row of houses on South Harbour Road in Ayr where Number 81 used to stand. – photograph from 2013(?))

North Sydney
June 27, 1917

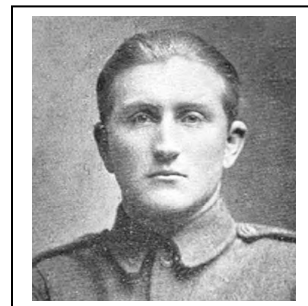
Dear Sir

I was notified to be at the CBL (sic) Armour on June the 4th 1917 for the purpose of Receiving the Medal and Ribbon Won By my son L/Cpl. W. Bennett But my Health Would not Premet me to travel it was a Tettible Shock to me to get the news and if you would be so kind to see about it and send it to me I would Be So Thankful to you Yours Truly

Mrs Josephine Bennett

Box 3 North Sydney

Nova Scotia



(The photograph of Lance Corporal Bennett is from the Royal Canadian Legion publication 'Lest We Forget'.)

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 7, 2023.