



Corporal Francis (known as *Frank*) Gordon Best, MM, (Regimental Number 42), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a hardware *clerk* – and also *expressman* for Bowring Brothers – and working for \$8.00 a week, Francis (*Frank*) Gordon Best presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on August 28 of 1914 – just three weeks and three days after the *Declaration of War* – for a medical examination. It was an exercise which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

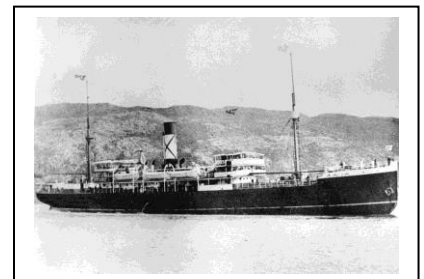
Five days later, on September 2, Frank Gordon Best returned to the *C.L.B. Armoury*, on this second occasion for enlistment, whereupon he was engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar a day plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*. A recruit of the First Draft, he was likely now ordered to the tented area by that time established on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the East End of St. John's where a four-five week course of training was already under way.

The regimental authorities were *also* busy by now, preparing for the transport of this, the first body of volunteers, to *overseas* - and later to *active* – service.

At the beginning of the month of that October a large number of the new recruits underwent attestation; Private Best was one of that number, taking his oath of allegiance on October 1.

Two days later, after the Newfoundland contingent – it was not as yet a battalion – of 'A' and 'B' Companies had paraded through the city, it embarked onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* which was awaiting in St. John's Harbour.

Private Best and his comrades-in-arms of the *First Five Hundred* – also to be known to history as the *Blue Puttees* – were now to sit on board ship for the best part of a day as it was not to be until the morrow that *Florizel* would sail to the south coast of the Island and to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the Canadian Division to the United Kingdom.



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

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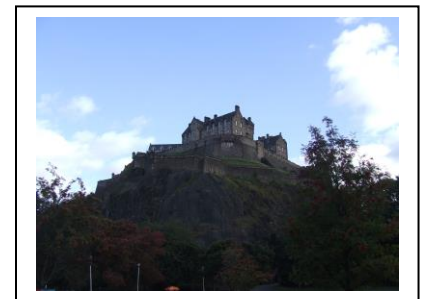
(Right below: *Fort George, constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, still serves the British Army to this day. – photograph from 2011)*

In the United Kingdom 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 the unit was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.



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

Some three months later, on May 11, and some seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit – by now, ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies re-enforced by ‘C’, ‘D’, and ‘E’ - was ordered moved from the Scottish capital 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 ready to be ordered on ‘active service’.

****The number was about fifteen hundred, sufficient to provide four ‘fighting’ companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.***

(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)*

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ – Private Best among their ranks - 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.

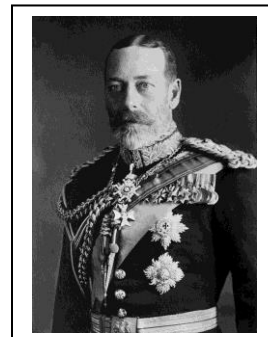


This force, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon to be one of the four battalions of the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

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Meanwhile the two junior Companies, the later-arrived 'E' and the aforementioned last-arrived '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.)



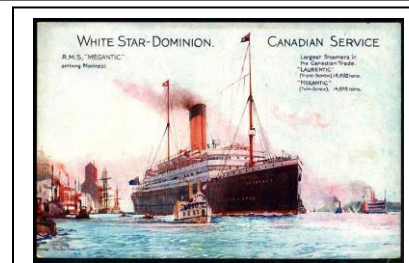
It was also during this period while at Aldershot that on or about August 13 Private Best re-enlisted, on this occasion for the *duration of the war*.*

**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 a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was likely to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

(Right: *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.)



While 'E' and 'F' Companies were beginning their posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr, on August 20 of 1915 the 1st Battalion was to embark in the Royal Navy Harbour of Plymouth-Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks.



(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.*)



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 was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(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)



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(Preceding page: 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 1st Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

When the Newfoundlanders landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* on that September night of 1915, they would 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 below: 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.***



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

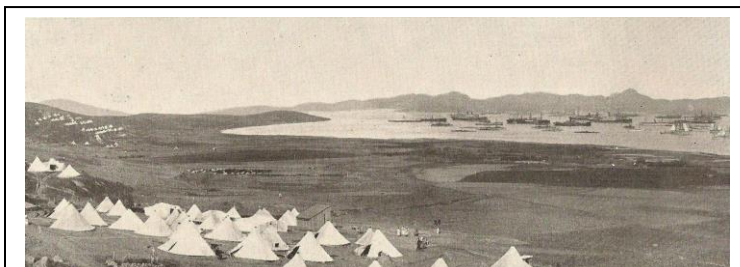
There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, were those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

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Whether the events of the that day as related immediately above were responsible in part for Private Best's subsequent condition is not known, but on November 26 of 1915, some two months after having set foot on the sand and rock of *Kangaroo Beach*, Private Best was evacuated to the 54th Casualty Clearance Station established at *Suvla Bay*.

He was subsequently ferried from there to the 15th Stationary Hospital sited at East Mudros on the island of Lemnos some seventy kilometres distant. Having already been diagnosed as suffering from pyrexia - a high fever - and afflicted with diarrhoea, he was admitted there on November 30.

(Right: *In the latter part of the year 1915, Allied medical facilities – a great number of them under canvas - almost entirely surrounded the ever-busy Mudros Bay and its tiny harbour on the Greek island of Lemnos. – from Illustration*)



On December 17 Private Best was discharged by the 15th Stationary Hospital to be transferred to a convalescent depot. Whether this was one of the several on the island or whether it was the larger Mustapha Convalescent Depot at the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria is not clear.

However, at some before January 16 of 1916, he *must* have been dispatched from Mudros to Alexandria - to the Sidi Bishr Base Depot there - because that was where and when Private Best is recorded as having reported back *to duty* with the Newfoundland Battalion.



(Right: *one of the major thoroughfares in the Egyptian naval-base city of Alexandria, at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

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On the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard. Some of the Battalion personnel had been evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion was to 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 now only been marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.

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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.

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

**Lieutenant Owen Steele of St. John's, Newfoundland, is cited as having been the last soldier of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force to step into the final small boat to sail from the Gallipoli Peninsula.*

(Right: *'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 had 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 and to welcome Private Best back into its ranks on the morrow.

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The Newfoundlanders were then to be almost immediately 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*)



(Preceding page: *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 were to board 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.



(Preceding page: *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.

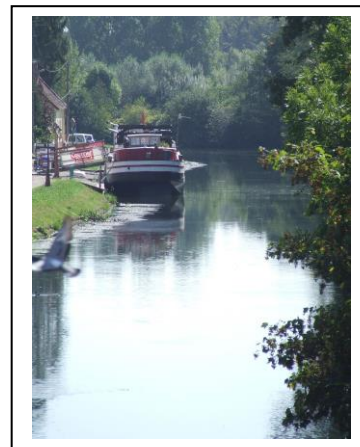
Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

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 had then marched on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to become a part of their history.

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

On April 13, the 1st 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 reinforcements 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 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.*

(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 Maily-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.



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The records show that on May 12 of 1916, while on the *Western Front* in training for the *July Drive* and while the Newfoundland Battalion was in billets in the village of Louvencourt behind the lines, Private Best was unfortunate enough to lose his cap and was obliged to pay for it. It was to be about the only blemish on his military service record.

On June 11, Private Best received a first promotion, to the rank of lance corporal. Two days afterwards, on the 16th, while the majority of the Newfoundland Battalion was undertaking a tour in the trenches, Lance Corporal Best was busy working with the Army Service Corps, having been seconded on that date for an undisclosed period of time. It appears, however, to have been an attachment of a temporary nature, not to have lasted for longer than two weeks, as the subsequent record proves.

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(?)*)



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

There are other numbers of course: the fifty-seven thousand British casualties incurred in four hours on that same morning of which nineteen-thousand were recorded as having been *killed in action or died of wounds*.

It was to be the largest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for the next four and a half months.



(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village. – photographs 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, on July 1, 1916, during the fighting of that first day of *the Somme*, Lance Corporal Best was to be one of the many wounded, having incurred gun-shot wounds. Shrapnel from a nearby shell-burst had penetrated into the right thigh.

He was evacuated from the field on the following day, July 2, at first to the 87th Field Ambulance – likely an Advanced Dressing Station - and from there forwarded on the same day to an un-identified casualty clearing station.

Some twenty-four hours later, having in the meantime been transferred once more, now to the 2nd General Hospital in the vicinity of the French industrial port-city of Le Havre, Lance Corporal Best was taken on board His Majesty’s Hospital Ship *Asturias* to be invalided from France across the English Channel back to the United Kingdom.



(Right: A view of the French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

(Right below: The image of HMHS Asturias is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries. A Royal Mail Steam Packet Company liner before the Great War, but was then immediately requisitioned for service as a hospital ship. The vessel was torpedoed in March of 1917 and was so damaged that she was not to be repaired until after the conflict when she was transformed into a cruise ship.)

Having arrived in England, Lance Corporal Best was admitted on July 5 into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. There he remained – and had a piece of shrapnel removed from a hand - until his discharge on August 5 at which time he was granted the customary ten-day leave accorded military personnel upon release from hospital. He was then immediately ordered to Scotland, *to duty* on or about August 14, at the Regimental Depot.



(Right: The main building of what was to become the 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War had originally been opened, on July 1st, 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, unfortunately unidentified, here convalescing in the grounds at 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)



At the end of the 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 would be despatched to bolster the 1st Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front*.



(Right: 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)



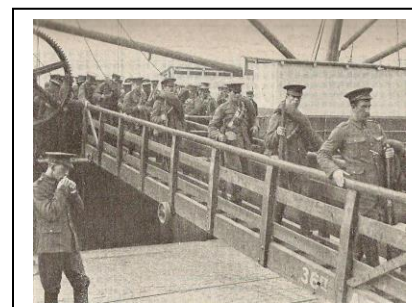
(Right: The High Street in Ayr as shown on a postcard of the time, the imposing Wallace Tower – it stands to this day (2017) - dominating the scene – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo.



(Right: The Newfoundland Plot in Ayr Cemetery wherein lie fourteen Newfoundlanders whom the Commonwealth War Graves Commission persist in referring to as Canadians – here and elsewhere – photograph from 2014(?))

Lance Corporal Best while at Ayr was to be a non-commissioned officer of 'H' Company. However it was an assignment which would last only some seven weeks. In early October he was on his way back to the Continent.

On October 3, the 11th Re-enforcement Draft – Lance Corporal Best one of its non-commissioned officers - passed through the English south-coast port-city of Southampton to take ship to Rouen, capital of Normandy, from there to make its way to the nearby British Expeditionary Force Base Depot for final training and organization* before joining the parent unit, the 1st Battalion, *in the field*.



(Right: 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.

Lance Corporal Best, however, was not to spend the usual period of time at the Base Depot, a period which allowed newcomers to the Continent to prepare for things to come. There being no other arrivals reported as having joined the 1st Battalion during this period, he must surely have been one of the small draft of twelve *other ranks* recorded in the Regimental War Diary as having reported *to duty with Battalion* in the vicinity of the community of Corbie, in the rear area of *the Somme*, on October 8.

The Newfoundland Battalion had only just returned from the so-called *Ypres Salient* in Belgium at seven o'clock on that same evening and was to attack four days hence.

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After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, and the wounding and subsequent evacuation of Lance Corporal Best, 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 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.

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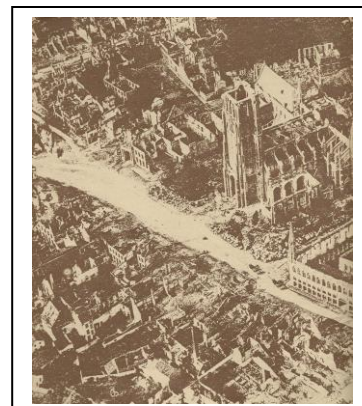
It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of *Beaumont-Hamel*.

(Preceding page: *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 incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

Then on October 8, this the date on which, as seen in a previous paragraph, Lance Corporal Best had re-joined his unit, 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*.

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



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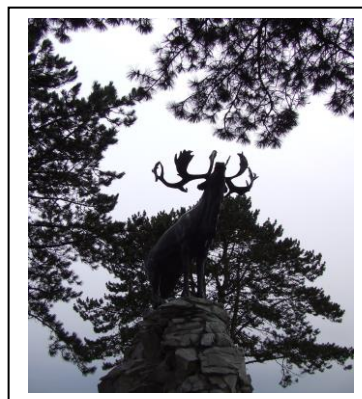
Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1st Battalion of the *Newfoundland Regiment* was to be again ordered to the offensive; it would be at a place called *Gueudecourt*, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of *Beaumont-Hamel*.

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*)



And Lance Corporal Best had been wounded for a second time.

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He had incurred gun-shot – again shrapnel - wounds in the right buttock. His records document him having been taken to the 15th Corps Rest Station – likely to be a dressing station run by that unit – for preliminary treatment and from where he was sent onward to an unidentified casualty clearing station. From there, perhaps on October 18, he was sent to the 11th Stationary Hospital – the records say *General* – at Rouen.



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

At Rouen it was decided to once more evacuate Lance Corporal Best across the English Channel for further treatment in the United Kingdom. Thus on October 23, once more he was placed on board a hospital ship, this one HMHS *Gloucester Castle*, the vessel to arrive in England later on the same day and he to be once more admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth.



(Right above: *The image of HMHS Gloucester Castle is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. She was used as a hospital ship until March of 1917 when she was torpedoed but not sunk, nevertheless remaining unserviceable until after the conflict. In civilian service during the war of 1939-1945, she was sunk by a German auxiliary cruiser in July of 1942 off the coast of Angola with a loss of ninety-three lives.*)



(Right above: *The Newfoundland Plot in (Earlsfield) Magdalen Road Cemetery in which place are buried those soldiers from the Dominion who died in the 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War – photograph from 2010(?)*)

Lance Corporal Best was discharged from hospital on the penultimate day of the year, December 30, although the records suggest that the last part of his treatment was to be spent in the thirty-five bed Esher Red Cross Hospital for convalescent servicemen.

The normal sequence of events was thereupon followed, and he then enjoyed ten days of furlough – likely spent in London - until January 8, before being posted *to duty*, perhaps to the Regimental Depot at Ayr, but also – perhaps at least temporarily - to the 2nd Command Depot.

On April 25 and 26, with the 23rd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, he once more passed through the ports of Southampton and Rouen. By then he was a corporal (*acting*) – having been promoted on January 17 of the New Year, 1917, and, on this occasion, reporting to the Base Depot after debarkation, he apparently *did* spend time at the *bull ring* as it was not until June 7 that he, as one of the draft of fourteen officers and ninety-two *other ranks* of the day, reported to the 1st Battalion in the community of Bonneville.



(Preceding page: *This is Wellington Square in Ayr, in the centre of the old town, where the majority of the officers of the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were housed.* – photograph from 2015(?))

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After the departure of Lance Corporal Best on or immediately after October 12, 1916, 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.

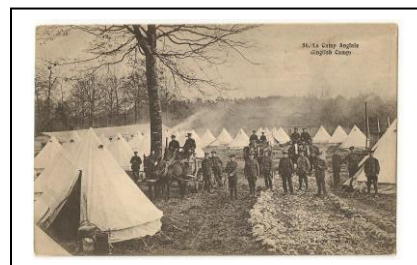
(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme.* – from *Illustration*)



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.

There it had 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.



(Right: *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 now make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it was to entrain 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.

(continued)

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 Sailly-Saillisel at the beginning of March, an action which would bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.



(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 Sailly-Saillisel during the winter of 1916-1917. – from *Illustration*)

(Right: 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 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: 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, early in 1916 – 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 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.

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

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

(Right below: *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*.

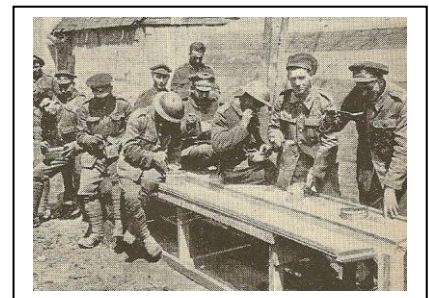
**It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

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

After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux. 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.

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 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies. It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1st Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

Late on that same evening the Newfoundlanders had retired 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*)

That month of May was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders would move hither and thither on the *Arras Front*, marching into and out of the trenches. While there was to be the ever-present artillery-fire, concerted infantry activity, particularly after May 15 – *officially* the last day of the *Battle of Arras* – had been limited, apart from the marching.

At the outset of June, the 1st Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing – witness the arrival of Corporal Best and his draft - re-organizing and in training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.



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

* * * * *

The Newfoundlanders had then soon once again been moving 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 to the north of the city.



(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: It is close to the area where the Newfoundlanders were deployed on July 17 (see below) - East is to the right – photograph from 2014*)

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

The first attack was not to take place until the last day of July, 1917, but that is not to say that the Newfoundland unit was not busy before then. The Regimental War Diary entry of July 17 records: *Raiding party of 50 OR under 2/Lt Summers & 2/Lt Field move up to HARVEY Trench and raid German Trout Line. One prisoner brought back, enemy killed 5 – Casualties – nil –*

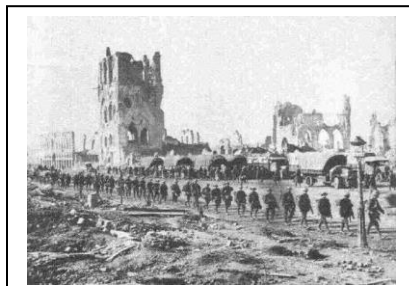
Corporal Best took part in that raid of July 17, and for his role was to be awarded the Military Medal: *'This N.C.O. was one of the Scouts in a raid on the enemy's trenches on the night of 17/18 July, 1917 east of the Yser Canal. On nearing enemy lines the raiding party were bombed, but Cpl. Best, being the nearest man, rushed into the trench and drove the enemy along to the right, thus allowing the rest of the party to get in without opposition.*



(continued)

Under the Corporal's lead the bombing party accounted for several of the enemy and took one prisoner. This N.C.O. showed himself to be absolutely fearless and it was owing to his initiative and courage that the raiding party entered the enemy's lines without casualties. He voluntarily led the rear guard covering the retirement to the British lines. (Strength of the raiding party - 2 officers and 50 other ranks).' - London Gazette, 28th September, 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)



Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the 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.

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



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



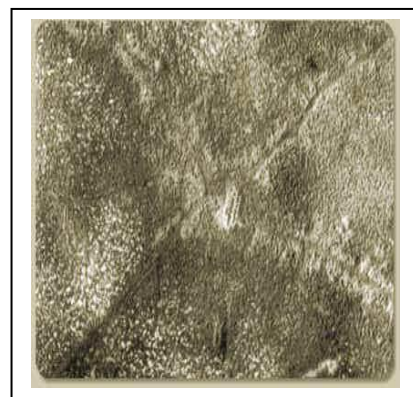
The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army. This had been or was also to be the case with the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians, all of whose troops had floundered or would soon flounder their 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 had been higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.



(Right above: 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: *The once-village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name: this to be compared to the picture of the previous page – from Illustration*)



There being no evidence to the contrary, it may be assumed that Corporal Best played some anonymous role at the former engagement, that of August 16.

He was most surely at the *Broembeek*.

The son of Josiah Hollett Best*, recorded simply as being an agent and trader of 20, Holloway Street – and later of 4, Haggerty Street - in St. John's, his own address recorded as 55, Patrick Street, he was brother to William, Otto-Moril(?), and Earle-Weston - to whom he willed his all. He was also step-brother to Harold, Ralph, Doris, Heber R., Herbert G. and to Reginald**.



**His first wife was Ellen Lockyer (both he and she from Merasheen) whom he married on May 23, 1892 – she died December 31, 1906.*

He then married Ellen Andrews at some time before – or early in – 1910.

***All except deceased first wife Ellen and the as yet unborn Reginald are recorded in the 1921 Census as being residents of Tack's Beach.*

Corporal Best was reported as having been *killed in action* while serving with 'A' Company on October 9, 1917, in heavy fighting at the *Broembeek*. At home, it was the Reverend A. Shorter of Harbour Buffet who was requested to bear the news to his family.

(Right above: *An innocuous, meandering stream on most days as seen here, the Broembeek had burst its banks in the autumn of 1917 and transformed the surrounding fields into a quagmire. – photograph from 2010*)

Frank Gordon Best had enlisted at the age of twenty years: date of birth at Oderin, Newfoundland, March 28, 1895 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).



(The photograph of Private(?) Best is from the Provincial Archives.)

Corporal Francis Gordon Best, MM, 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 10, 2023.