



**Private Hugh Pierson Bowden, MM (Regimental Number 526) lies in Marcoing British Cemetery – Grave reference II. G. 1.**

**His occupation previous to his military service recorded as that of a *scholar* having... *but recently left school...* as his documents show, Hugh Pierson Bowden presented himself in the community of Wesleyville on September 3 of 1914 – four weeks and two days after the *Declaration of War* on August 4 – for a medical examination. It was an exercise which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.***

**(continued)**

Twelve days later, on September 15, having by that time travelled from Wesleyville to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, Hugh Pierson Bowden found his way to the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road, there to enlist, whereupon he was engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of a single dollar plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance*.

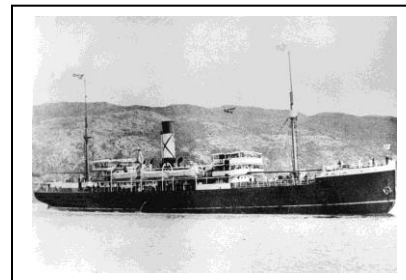
A recruit of the First Draft, he was likely now ordered to the tented area by that time established on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the East End of St. John's where a four-five week course of training was already under way.

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 October a large number of the new recruits underwent attestation; Private Bowden was one of that number, taking his oath of allegiance on the first day of October.

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 Bowden 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.*)

(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.

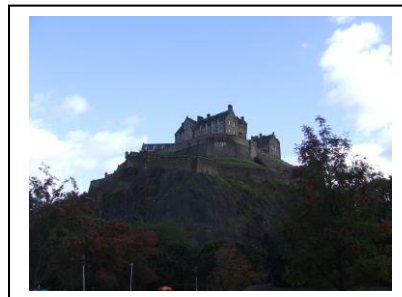


Some three months later, on May 11, and some seven weeks into spring - although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit - by now 'A' and 'B' Companies re-enforced by 'C', 'D', and 'E' - was ordered moved from the Scottish capital to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

(continued)

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

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 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)

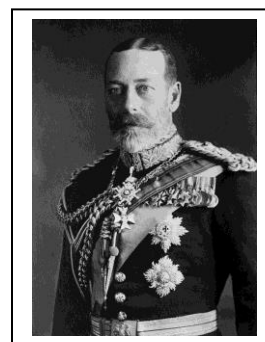


At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ – Private Bowden among their ranks - were then sent south from *Stobs Camp* to undergo a final two weeks of training, as well as an inspection by the King, at Aldershot.

This force, now designated as the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was thereupon attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 August 13 Private Bowden was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion for the *duration of the war*\*.

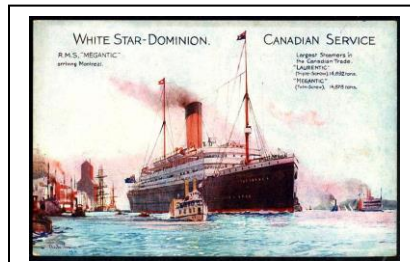
*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was likely to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

(continued)

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



While 'E' and 'F' Companies were beginning their posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr, on August 20 of 1915 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion embarked 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.

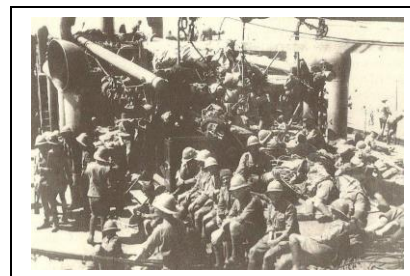


(Right above: The image of *Megantic*, here in her peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *Kangaroo Beach*, where the officers and men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 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 relaxing on board a troop-ship anchored at *Mudros*: *Megantic* on August 29, *Ausonia* on September 18, or *Prince Abbas* on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on *Gallipoli* – *Dardanelles* to the French, *Çanakkale* to the Turks. – from Provincial Archives)

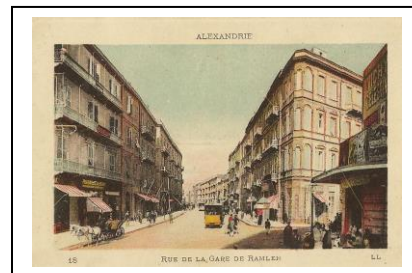


(Right: A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at *Suvla*, and where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

\* \* \* \* \*

On November 12 Private Bowden was brought to the 26<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at *Suvla Bay* exhibiting pyrexia – high fever. He was evacuated from there – perhaps ferried at first to the Greek island of *Lemnos* - on the 16<sup>th</sup>, on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Dover Castle*, to the 15<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in *Alexandria* where he was admitted, four days later, on the November 20.

On December 6, he began the return voyage to the United Kingdom on HM Hospital Ship *Glengorm Castle*. Upon arrival, Private Bowden was admitted to the Voluntary Aid Detachment Hospital at Perth, Scotland, on December 19, suffering from debility. Some misdated documents have him then forwarded for convalescence to the VAD (*Voluntary Aid Detachment*) Auxiliary Hospital at Pitlochry on the last day of 1915 - just in time for *Hogmanay*, the Scottish New Year.



(Right above: *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*)

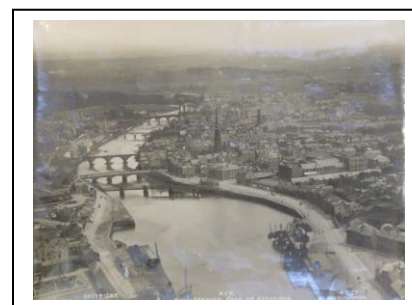
(Right below: *The photograph of a peace-time ‘Glengorm Castle’ is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Launched as the ‘German’ in 1898, at the outbreak of war in 1914 she was re-named Glengorm Castle and in September of that year, having been requisitioned, she was commissioned as a hospital ship. The vessel survived the war; in fact in 1921 she was one of the last hospital ships to be taken out of service, then to be used for a year as a troop-transport.*)

On January 14 of 1916, Private Bowden was granted the customary ten-day leave accorded to those military personnel released from hospital. Upon its completion – he had spent this period of leave at Hawick - he was thereupon ordered posted to the Regimental Depot, where he reported *to duty* on January 24.



Upon his release on January 14 he had been deemed as...*fit for light duty...and...likely to be fit for service overseas within three months.* It was not to be *that long.*

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 2<sup>nd</sup> (*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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion’s numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the *Western Front.*



(Right above: *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.*



On March 28, two months after his arrival at Ayr, Private Bowden was on his way to the *Western Front* as a soldier of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Re-enforcement Draft, embarking onto His Majesty's Transport *Archangel* through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the large British Expeditionary Base at Rouen, the capital city of Normandy. His unit disembarked there on the 30<sup>th</sup>, making its way to the nearby large British Base Depot for organizing and for final training\* before moving on to a rendezvous with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right above: *The image of a troop-laden 'Archangel' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

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

A draft of two officers and two-hundred eleven *other ranks* – Private Bowden documented as having been among that number - from Rouen is recorded as having reported *to duty* with the Newfoundland Battalion on April 15 in the village of Englebelmer, some three kilometres behind the front lines in the *Département de la Somme*.

Private Bowden had re-joined his unit.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some six months before this time, when the Newfoundlanders had 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*)

(continued)

**(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 had seen 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 had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy had been the priority.**

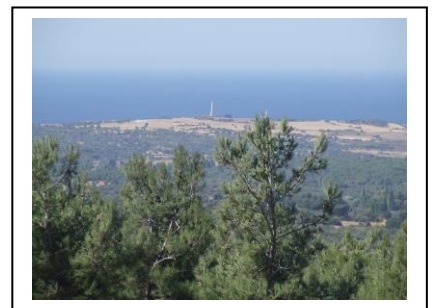


**There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.**

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

**(Right: *Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed Achi Baba, positions which were never breached: The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011*)**

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



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

**This final operation had taken 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.***



**(continued)**

(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 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. The Newfoundlanders had then been 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 29<sup>th</sup> Division had yet to be decided\*.



*\*Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles.* – photograph taken from the battleship *Cornwallis* from *Illustration*)



(Right above: *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 that two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had 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 above: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles.* – from a vintage post-card)

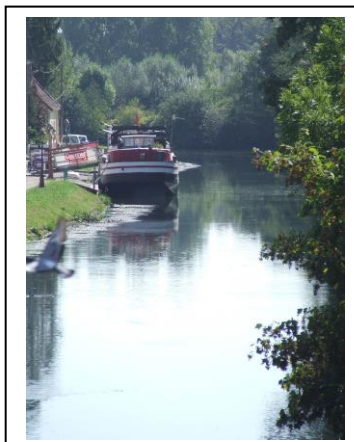
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train had found its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseilles. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably 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 had 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive reinforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

Those aforementioned...*re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen*...had been the draft of which Private Bowden was a soldier.

\* \* \* \* \*

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 then ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.

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

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



Having then been withdrawn at the end of that April to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where they would be based for the next two months, the Newfoundlanders were soon to be preparing for the upcoming British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, meandering river, *the Somme*, that flowed – and still does so today – through the region.

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\*.



(Preceding page: *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, just as depressing, the carnage of *the Somme* would continue for the next four and a half months.

(Right: *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...?*)

While on the nominal roll of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on July 1, 1916, the first day of *the Somme*, Private Bowden was not to figure in the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel. It may well be that he was a soldier of the ten per cent reserve of fourteen officers and eighty-three other ranks held back at Louvencourt, and which was not recalled to the field until late in the day when the fighting had for the most part subsided\*.

*\*These men answered a roll call of the following day as did those who had fought the battle and survived it unscathed. Where the documentation shows 'with Battalion on July 4', this is the date on which the roll calls of July 2 were eventually officially recorded.*

(continued)

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that 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.

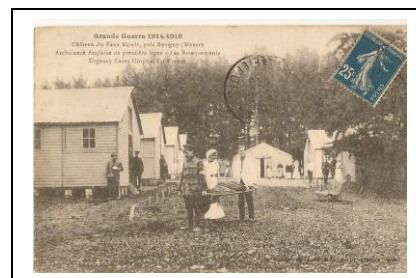
(Right above: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John's East. – photograph from 2009*)

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 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion still numbered only... *11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

This figure did not by then, however, include Private Bowden.

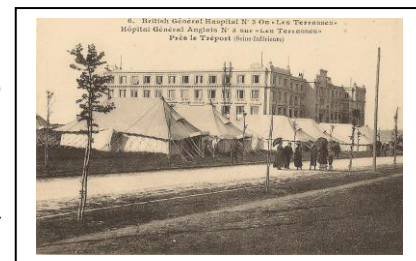
\* \* \* \* \*

He had been admitted into the 89<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance on that same July 14, suffering from the 'flu and from there was transferred immediately to the 3<sup>rd</sup> General Hospital at the coastal town of le Tréport before being forwarded on to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Convalescent Depot on August 1.



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

Private Bowden was discharged from there *to duty* at the *Base Depot*, Rouen, on August 4.



(Right: *the 3<sup>rd</sup> British General Hospital, many of its facilities under canvas, at Le Tréport at some time during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Private Bowden once again re-joined his comrades of 'B' Company, likely on the last day of August, as one of a small detachment of ten other ranks arriving from the Base Depot.

\* \* \* \* \*

On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

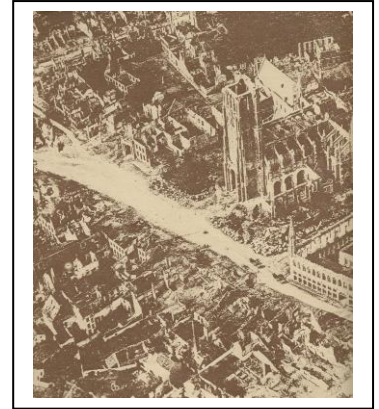
(Right: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



*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 incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

On the day following Private Bowden's likely return to his unit, the first day of September, the Newfoundland Battalion was already in the lines near *Railway Wood*, busy releasing gas toward the German positions.

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



The roles were reversed on September 2: while the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was manning trenches to the right of *Railway Wood* the... *enemy shelled this sector more than usual and fired four shells apparently at Railway Farm. At twenty minutes before midnight the... gas alarm sounded on extreme right and two S.O.S. signals fired on our left A heavy bombardment followed from both sides which lasted about an hour. No infantry action took place.* (excerpt from the Regimental War Diary entry for September 2, 1916)

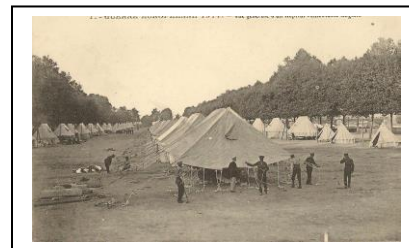


(Right above: *Railway Wood almost a century later – The monument which is barely visible honours the Royal Engineers who were buried alive while working underground. – photograph from 2014*)

Only days later again, Private Bowden had been posted up to the firing-line. The Regimental War Diary continues to report enemy artillery very active during this period, particularly on September 7.

It was perhaps on September 7 – but not documented until the 8<sup>th</sup> as found in his papers, after the Newfoundlanders had been relieved - that Private Bowden was reported as *slightly* wounded in the arm by shell-fire.

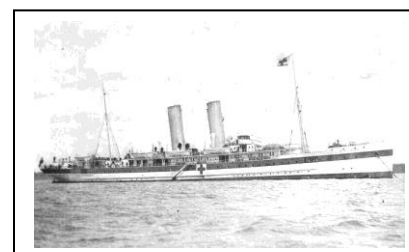
He was then evacuated from the trenches to an unspecified casualty clearance station behind the lines before being forwarded to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Stationary Hospital in the French coastal town of Wimereux on September 9.



(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)



(Right: In peace-time a popular resort on the coast of La Manche (English Channel), the town of Wimereux became a component of a large British medical complex during the years of the Great War. – from a vintage post-card)



From there after three days Private Bowden was invalided on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Saint Patrick* back to the United Kingdom on the 12<sup>th</sup> and admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the south-west Borough of Wandsworth on the morrow.

(Right above: The photograph of HMHS *Saint Patrick* is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Built in 1906 for the Great Western Railway, she was requisitioned and served as a hospital ship for the entire conflict.)

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



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



Treatment was followed, commencing on the day of his discharge, September 25, by the customary ten-day furlough granted to military personnel upon discharge from hospital, a period of leave spent in the town of Hawick.

This leave in turn, after October 4, was succeeded by a second posting to the Regimental Depot at Ayr.

There he reported perhaps as late as October 12, the day that his comrades-in-arms of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were to be engaged at Gueudecourt (see further below). He was to remain in Scotland for the next seven weeks before he was to be sent back to hospital in London.

(Right below: *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(?)*)

Private Bowden to report back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General at Wandsworth on December 4 where he was then to stay until the 30<sup>th</sup> of that month and to *perhaps* undergo some further surgery. He was encountering complications of those gunshot wounds as further X-rays had revealed that a fragment of metal was still in his left elbow. It appears, however, to have been decided to leave the offending object *in situ* as it was not considered to be either a danger or an inconvenience.



When he had returned to the Regimental Depot, Private Bowden, supported - if not encouraged - by his father, decided to submit his candidature for an Imperial Commission. It would seem that he had an ally in none other than the governor of the Dominion whose office sent a letter to Dr. Bowden:

*...Be assured that every communication touching the men in the Regiment will receive from me peculiar care.*

*I shall forward the name of your son Hugh No. 526 to be noted as a candidate for a Commission. The actual selection rests entirely with the Military Authorities based on the qualities requisite for leadership in war.*

*I shall send on your letter in support of the application. Your son has behaved most gallantly and I wish him good fortune...*

As further reading will show, Private Bowden was indeed capable of gallant actions in the field. Unfortunately he was also capable of ill-judged actions elsewhere, as a rather full charge sheet bears witness. The application went no further.

Three months perhaps, but it was not to be until the third day of June of that year of 1917 that Private Bowden, as a private of the 24<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the English Channel port of Folkestone and disembarked – only a matter of hours later - at Boulogne on the coast opposite on his way back to the Newfoundland unit via the inevitable days of final preparation at the British Base Depot at Rouen.



(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the top of the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)

(Right: *The French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



He reported *to duty* with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on June 19 at Bonneville, one of a re-enforcement draft of one hundred eighteen *other ranks* to do so on that day.

\* \* \* \* \*

A month after Private Bowden's departure on or about September 8 for medical attention to his arm, and after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks altogether, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return south on October 8, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

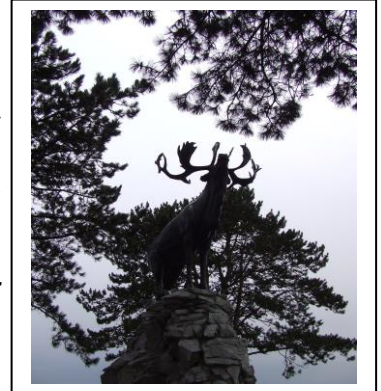
Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was to be at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.



The encounter 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon.* – photograph from 2007)

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



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 had supplied two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires and the Worcestershires, of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

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



On October 30, the Newfoundland unit 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to wend its way back up to the front lines.



There it continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period broken only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

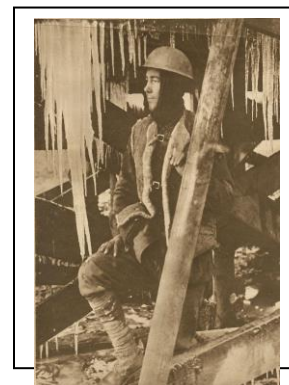
(Right above: *A typical British Army Camp during rather inclement winter conditions somewhere on the Continent – from a vintage post-card*)

It had 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 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.

It was at Corbie on January 12 that four officers from Rouen joined the Battalion: Captains Rendell and Nunns, Lieutenant Byrne and Second Lieutenant Burke.

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

(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.

(continued)





They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band arrived from Ayr, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.

(Preceding page: *The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from The War Illustrated*)

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders 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*)

(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*)



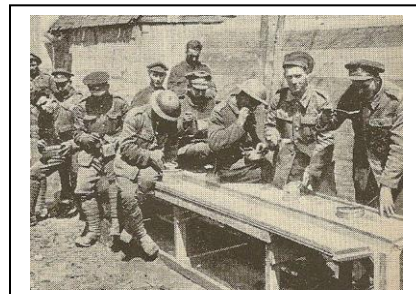
The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After *Beaumont-Hamel*, the ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux would prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone\*.

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

(continued)

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



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

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Late on that same evening the Newfoundlanders had retired to the relative calm of Arras.

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



And it was at Bonneville, as recorded in a previous paragraph, that Private Bowden and his re-enforcement draft reported to *duty* on June 19.

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

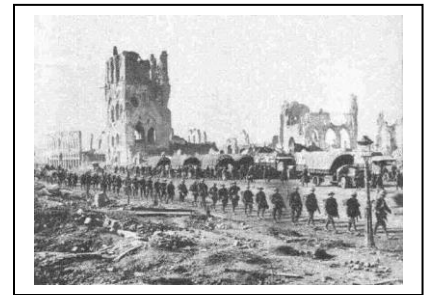
\* \* \* \* \*

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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: 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.



(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*)



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



Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (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 *Broembeek* the cost had been higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

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

(Right: *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*)



Although it is not clear whether Private Bowden was present at the Steenbeek on August 16, he subsequently – although he had been *killed in action* by that time - was awarded the Military Medal for his conduct at the later confrontation at the *Broembeek*, on October 9, 1917, two days before the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was withdrawn from the *Battle of Passchendaele*: ‘As company runner, he always got his messages through under heavy shelling, machine guns and snipers.’ – London Gazette, January 14, 1918\*



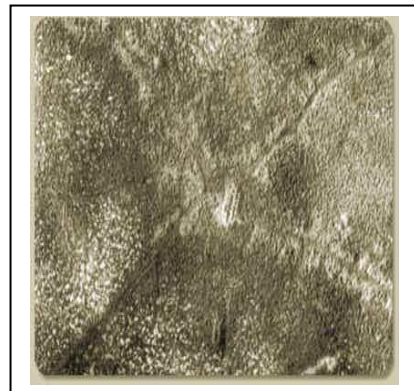
\*Being a runner was not only an important job in those days before reliable wireless (radio), but it was also one of the most dangerous: the life expectancy of a runner was not long. On the other side of the front line a German runner won an Iron Cross for his efforts – his name was Adolph Hitler.

(Right: *In the autumn of 1917, the Broembeek, normally an innocuous, meandering stream, had overflowed its banks, and had transformed its surrounds into a quagmire. – photograph from 2010*)



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

It was to be only two days after this last-mentioned confrontation that the Newfoundland Battalion marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe, from there to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of Proven. Having remained there for five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the unit was once more to board a train.



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

(continued)

It would seem that Private Bowden was now granted some leave in the United Kingdom after the exertions of the *Broembeek*, as there exists a copy of a telegram that he sent to his mother from London, a document dated October 22, 1917. However, there appear to be no further details of that all-too-brief – usually ten days – furlough.



(Right above: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The Newfoundlanders had still been at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and two days after its arrival there when, on November 17, the Newfoundland unit would be ordered once again onto a train, on this occasion to travel in a south-easterly direction to the town of Peronne. From there it began to move further eastward, now on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

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



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

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

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

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had once again been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing, Masnières - where a Caribou stands today - and in the area of the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who had advanced into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day\*.

(continued)

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



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



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

The son of Doctor George Frederick Bowden and of Elizabeth (also known as *Lizzie*) Bowden (née *Mercer*)\* of Wesleyville, he had been brought up in the community of Bay Roberts in the company of a sister, Pearl-Sheelah (sic), there also having been a further brother and two sisters, all of whom had died at a young age, two while the family was living and serving in the area of Pilley's Island.

***\*The couple was married in Bay Roberts on August 15, 1888.***

Hugh Pierson Bowden had enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years: date of birth in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, April 5, 1896 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

**(Right above: *The Masnières Caribou stands on high ground to the north of the village. Some men of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion may have reached this area on November 20<sup>th</sup> before retiring into the ruins of the community itself, but any such claims seem to be controversial. – photograph from 2012)***



Private Bowden was reported as having been *killed in action* on November 20, 1917, while serving with 'B' Company on that first day of the fighting near the French villages of Marcoing and Masnières.

**(Right above: *While the sacrifice of Private Hugh Pierson Bowden appears not to be honoured on the War Memorial in Wesleyville, the name 'Hugh Boland' is inscribed thereon; however, there appear to be no fatalities whatsoever of that name to be found in the records by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. – photograph from 2010)***

At Masnières Private Bowden was buried by the Reverend Thomas Nangle, Chaplain to the Forces for the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, in Marcoing Copse Cemetery\*. At home, it was the Reverend Charles Howse of Wesleyville who was requested to bear the news to his family.

*\*His remains were later transferred to where they repose today.*

**No. 1244, Sgt. P. Kelly reports that when the Battalion was in the village of Masnières he was with L. Cpl. Bowden. They were being fired on from this house by an mg. They tried to rush the house with two other men. L’Cpl\* B. got ahead of the others and was shot through the head and killed instantly by a mg bullet. He was absolutely fearless and died a very gallant death. He was buried a couple of days after in Marcoing.**

**“J. Clift, Capt.,  
“O.C. “B” Co.”**

*\*As may be have been noticed, there is some discrepancy as to his rank at the time of his death although the Newfoundland Pay & Record Office, in London, at the time claimed to have no knowledge of any such promotion. Other sources claim that it had been the intention of the Commanding Officer to promote Private Bowden but that he had been killed before any such appointment was made.*



*(The photograph of Private Bowden is from the Provincial Archives.)*

Private Hugh Pierson Bowden 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 10, 2023.