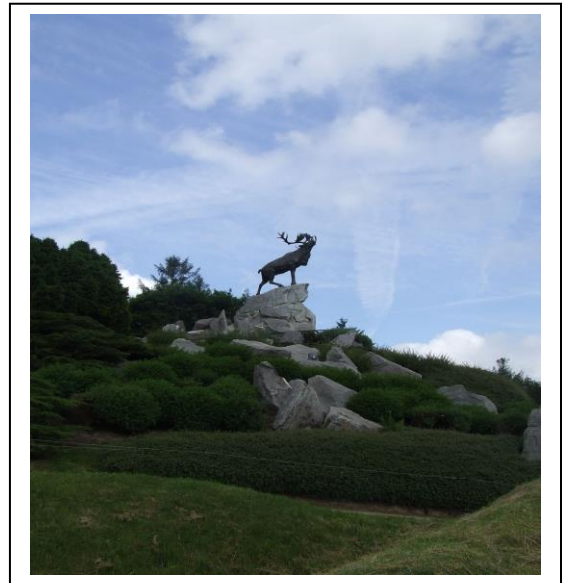




Private George Brinston (Regimental Number 1772), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of both *lumberman* and *fisherman*, George Brinston was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He presented himself on August 9 of 1915 for enlistment at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. Johns, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, whereupon he was engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was to be added a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.



He was then to return on the morrow, August 10, to the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, on this second occasion there to undergo a medical examination. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

On August 12, two days following again, there then came the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. At that time he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, at which moment George Brinston thus became...*a soldier of the King*.

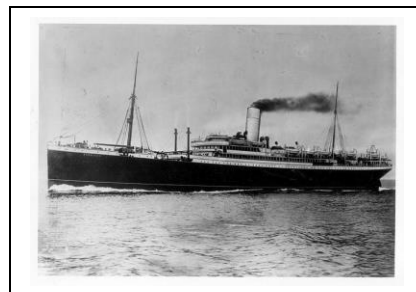
A further and more lengthy waiting-period was now in store for the recruits of this draft, designated as 'G' Company, before it was to depart from Newfoundland for...*overseas service*.

Private Brinston, Regimental Number 1772, was not to be again called upon until October 27 after a period of eleven weeks plus a day. In the mean-time, where he was to spend the aforesaid intervening weeks appears not to have been recorded although he possibly returned temporarily to his job and almost certainly was to spend at least some of that time at his and his parents' home community: North Harbour, Placentia Bay – but, of course, this is only speculation.

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

(continued)

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



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

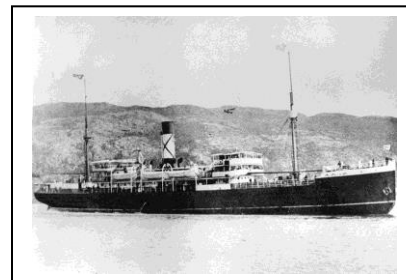


(Right: *The once-busy Royal Navy facility and harbour of Devonport almost a century after the Great War – photograph from 2012(?)*)

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

* * * * *

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



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

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

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

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

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

Once having disembarked* in the United Kingdom this first Newfoundland contingent was to train in three venues during the late autumn of 1914 and then the winter of 1914-1915: firstly in southern England on the *Salisbury Plain*; then in Scotland at *Fort George* – on the *Moray Firth* close to Inverness; and lastly at *Edinburgh Castle* – where it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.

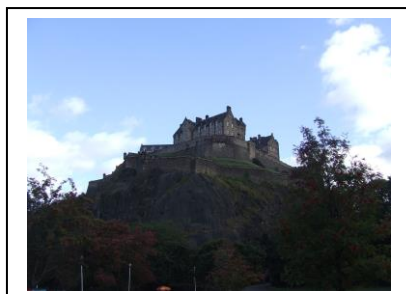


**It was to do so at Devonport through which 'G' Company would pass eleven months later.*

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

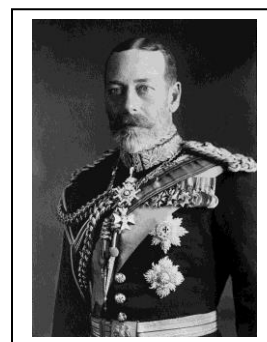
(continued)

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

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



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



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

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

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

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



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

(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.)



(continued)

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

It was while in Scotland that Private Brinston became one of a number of Regimental personnel who suffered – some dying - during an epidemic of German measles. He was hospitalized there at *Gales Camp* from January 18 until April 4, this latter having been the date on which he was further diagnosed as having a chest infection, tonsillitis and infections in both ears. The subsequent treatment in the 3rd (*Stobhill*) Scottish General Hospital in Glasgow lasted until June 16.

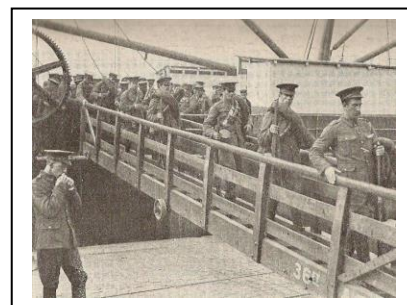
It was surely also during this posting to the Regimental Depot that, at some time before his departure to France on *active service* – the date does not appear among his records - Private Brinston was prevailed upon to re-enlist *for the duration of the War**.

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

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

It was not until some eleven months after his arrival there that Private Brinston in his turn was to be dispatched from the Regimental Depot, he as a soldier of the 11th Re-enforcement Draft.

The contingent embarked through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 3, 1916, and disembarked in the Norman capital city of Rouen on the 4th, the following day. From the quay the Newfoundlanders made their way to the nearby large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot where they received final training and organization*, and prepared to move on to their rendezvous with the parent 1st Newfoundland Battalion.



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

(continued)

**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.*

The union was achieved on October 14, two days after the action at Gueudecourt (also see further below). As the Newfoundlanders of the 1st Battalion had remained in the forward area to hold their lines in the days following the action of October 12, the newcomers were to be ushered forward from the *Transport Section* into *Switch Trench* and from there parcelled out among the four depleted companies two days after they had reported...to *duty**.

Then the Germans welcomed them on the following days with artillery bombardments, shelling the positions in which they now remained until they were relieved on the 20th.

**Private Brinston's draft of two-hundred sixty-six other ranks had arrived on the 12th, the day of the attack, but it had been obliged to remain to the rear in the transport lines. It was not until the 14th that its presence was officially recorded – on Lance Corporal Brinston's personal file, for example – although the Regimental War Diarist had found time to note the draft's arrival on the 12th.*

* * * * *

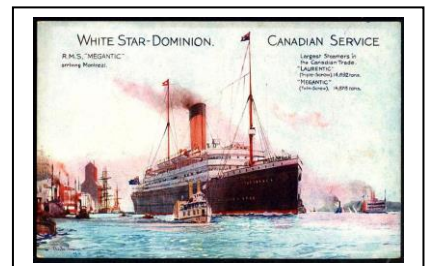
Just more than fourteen months prior to this juncture, in the early summer of 1915, the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both 'E' and 'F' Companies had only then been beginning their time of training at Ayr; and as for George Brinston, he has as yet been only at the point of enlistment and attestation at home, and he still had some two months and a-half to wait before the call was to come to sail overseas to the United Kingdom.

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



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

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



(continued)

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



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



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

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



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

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

Flies, dust, disease, the frost-bite and the floods – and of course the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command* had ever anticipated – were eventually to overwhelm the British-led forces and those of their allies, the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.

(Right: An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at *Suvla Bay* – from Provincial Archives)



*Many of the commanders chosen were second-rate, had been brought out of retirement, and had little idea of how to fight – let alone of how to win. One of the generals at *Suvla*, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.

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



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

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



There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number.

Numerous, however, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard.



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

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

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



(continued)

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.

(Preceding page: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles under artillery fire 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 above: *'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in that January of 1916 and by the Newfoundlanders who were to be the last soldiers off the beach: Vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011*)

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

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

There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.

(Right: *The image of the Blue Funnel Line vessel Nestor is from the Shipspotting.com web-site. The vessel was launched and fitted in 1912-1913 and was to serve much of her commercial life until 1950 plying the routes between Britain and Australia.*



During the Great War she served mainly in the transport of Australian troops and was requisitioned once again in 1940 for government service in the Second World War. In 1950 she was broken up.)

**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.*

(Right: *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*)



(continued)

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 back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.



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

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

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

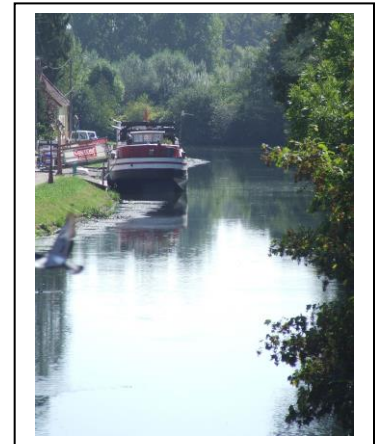


Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille.

It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having 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.

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



It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge which they had then traversed on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* was to have become a part of their history.

On April 13, the entire 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 re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.



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

(continued)

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 had then been 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: *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*)



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

If there is one name and date in Newfoundland history which is etched in the collective once-national memory, it is that of Beaumont-Hamel on July 1 of 1916; and if any numbers are remembered, they are those of the eight-hundred who went *over the top* in the third wave of the attack on that morning, and of the sixty-eight unwounded present at muster some twenty-four hours later*.



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



(Preceding page: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village.* – photographs from 2010 & 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...?*)

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

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

There were then 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 11-12, 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, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion was still to number only... *11 officers and 260 rifles...*after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

Of course, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had not been the only unit in the British Army to have incurred horrific losses on July 1, 1916, even though it had indeed been one of the most devastated. But even with its depleted numbers, the Battalion had been needed and, after that first re-enforcement, it had almost immediately again been ordered to man the trenches of the front line: as of July 14 the Newfoundlanders were to begin another tour in the trenches where...*we were shelled heavily by enemy’s 5.9 howitzers and a good deal of damage was done to the trenches* (excerpt from the 1st Battalion War Diary).

On July 27-28 of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – maybe even fewer - even after still further re-enforcement – would move northwards and enter into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

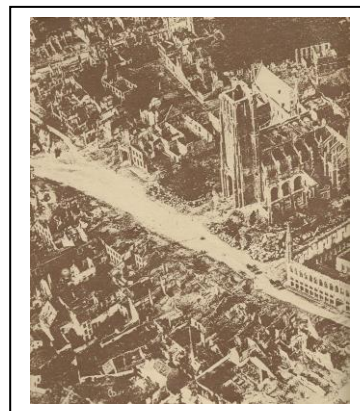
(Right: *The entrance to ‘A’ Company’s quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



The unit 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.

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

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



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

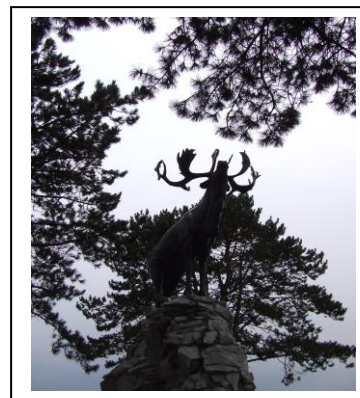
Four days after that above-cited return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.



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

(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 it was on the day of that action at Gueudecourt, of course, that Private Brinston had reported with his draft to the Newfoundland Battalion.

* * * * *

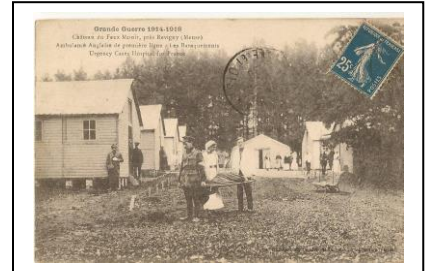
The Newfoundland Battalion had not been directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it had furnished two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires 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 eventually retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving continuously in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

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



The 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.

* * * * *

On November 19, Private Brinston was evacuated into the 5th Australian Field Ambulance and diagnosed as suffering from influenza. On the 21st he was transferred to an unspecified general hospital in Rouen from where, on December 6, he was embarked for the crossing back to the United Kingdom on board His Majesty's Australian Hospital Ship *Wandilla*



(Right above: The image of 'Wandilla serving as a troop transport ship early in 1916 is from the Old ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel had been built in 1912 and then used to serve the Australian Coast from Fremantle to Sydney. Just after this photograph was taken she was converted for use as a hospital ship, to serve as such from that time until the end of the conflict which she survived. Sold to an Italian company in 1935 she was to serve as a hospital ship in the Second World War as well – for the Italian Navy. The British torpedoed and sank her in September of 1942, claiming she was carrying military supplies.)

Upon his arrival in England on the morrow, December 7, Private Brinston was transported to and admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. The diagnosis by that time had been amended to that of a bronchial infection.

(continued)

(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 of 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010)*



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



(Right below: *The Newfoundland Plot in Ayr Cemetery Newfoundlanders whom the Commonwealth War Graves Canadians – here and elsewhere – photograph from 2014)*



He remained under medical care at Wandsworth until early January of the New Year, 1917. At that time the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel subsequent to treatment and convalescence in the United Kingdom was granted to Private Brinston from January 6 of the New Year, 1917, until the 15th, after which period of leave he was ordered to the almost-inevitable posting at the Regimental Depot in Scotland.

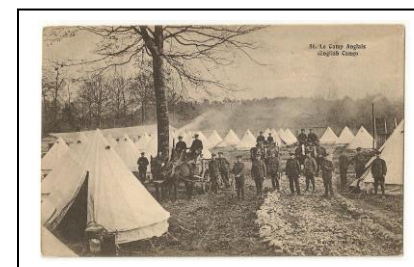
Yet it was not to be long before he was returning to the Continent. The 22nd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, Private Brinston among its ranks, made its way through Southampton on March 26, crossed the Channel, and arrived in Rouen on March 26. The Draft then proceeded to the Base Depot for those days of final preparation.

It was a detachment of thirty-nine *other ranks*, Private Brinston among that number, which next reported from Rouen...*to duty...to the 1st Newfoundland Battalion, at the time withdrawn to Arras, on April 18, four days following the shambles of Monchy-le-Preux (see below).*

* * * * *

In the mean-time, by November 19, the day that Private Brinston had been evacuated for medical attention five months before, the Newfoundland Battalion had already returned to the trenches from a two-week reprieve in the rear area and the War Diarist was able to report : *C Company relieved D in firing line. D moved to support. Heavily shelled. Things were normal at the Front.*

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



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

Those Christmas festivities having been completed – turkey dinner washed down with...*real ale*...apparently – it was not to be until a further sixteen days had passed, January 11, that the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amienois*, to make its way on foot to the community of Airaines.

From the railway station there it had entrained for the small town of Corbie where it thereupon had taken over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before. Days later again the unit had continued its progress back up to the forward area and to...*active service*. That recent six-week Christmas respite spent far to the rear now a thing of the past, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to *active service* on January 23, although they apparently had already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

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

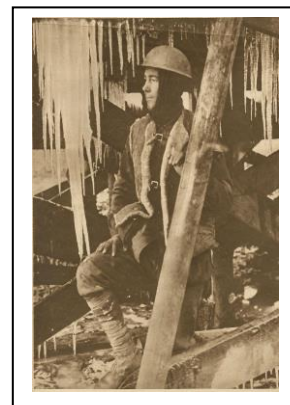
That winter period – as had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the *Great War* – would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable for most of the combatants of both sides. It was also to be a time of sickness, and the medical facilities had been kept busy, particularly,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

This period had also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and weaponry of war; in the case of the Newfoundland Battalion this had been at least partially undertaken in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.

(Right below: *A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, his 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*)

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

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



(continued)

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



(Right above: *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(?))

The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had then been withdrawn to the rear once more, late in the night of March 3-4, where it would now spend almost an entire month. On the morning of March 4, after baths and anti-trench-foot treatment, the personnel – except for the transport which had moved by road – had enjoyed the relative luxury of a train to carry them – at least temporarily - away from the war.

After Sailly-Saillisel that month of March had proved to be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events. They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band come from Ayr, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



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

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



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

On April 9 the British Army had launched 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.

(continued)

(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* was to be 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 had played its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that began at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which finished 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: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the remains of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed community. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

After the set-back at Monchy-le-Preux on April 14, the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area for but a few days. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, be amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming re-enforcements would allow the two units' strengths to once more resemble those of bona fide battalions.

* * * * *

Private Brinston had been one of thirty-nine *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen which reported to the Battalion on April 18; they were just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers. But they were still only two hundred twenty – plus twelve officers - in number now serving with some two hundred of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. The personnel of the 1st Battalion spent the 19th salvaging equipment and burying the dead and remained there until the 23rd.



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

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* was 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.

Apparently it had not been a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1st Battalion, several of the adjacent units having reported being driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

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

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

(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*)

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

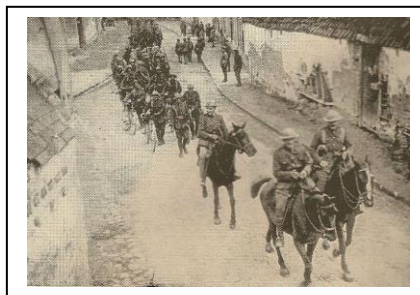
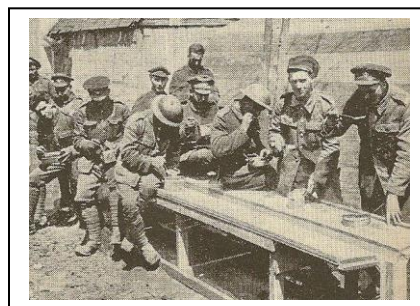
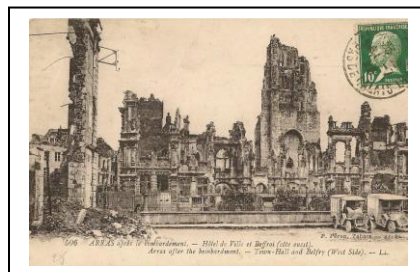
The *Battle of Arras* was proceeding to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-month, but the Newfoundland unit was not to be further involved in any further co-ordinated offensive action – it was too exhausted; this now would be a period when the Battalion was to move in a circular fashion on the *Arras Front*, in and out of the trenches.

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

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

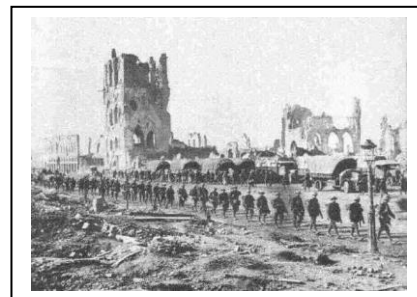
At the outset of June, the 1st Battalion retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

(continued)



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

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



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

Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, 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: *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 *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9.

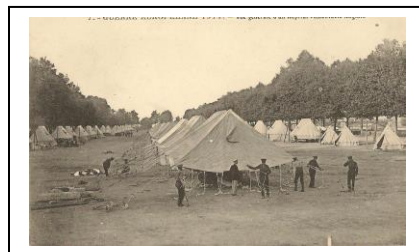


At the former it would incur nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost was to be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

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

* * * * *

But Private Brinston had been *hors de combat* for six weeks during that period. At the end of the third week of July, on the 23rd, in need of medical attention, he had been evacuated into the 64th Casualty Clearing Station at Mendinghem*, in the proximity of Poperinghe. Suffering from diarrhoea, he was transferred south on July 28 to the 22nd General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers. He recovered rapidly, being sent to the Base Details at Rouen on August 5, and then reporting back...*to duty in the field...on September 3.*



(Right above: *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*)

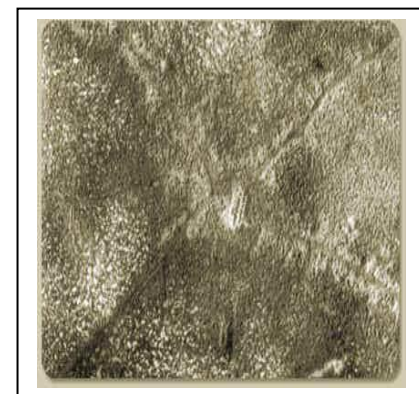


(Right above: *The railway station at Dannes-Camiers through which many thousands of sick, wounded and convalescent military personnel passed during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

**Several names such as Mendinghem, Bandagehem and Dozinghem were invented by the British troops since they resembled the Belgian and northern-French fashion of naming villages. These sites were occupied by medical facilities only – and the inevitable cemeteries which today remain. But Lozinghem seems to be an exception in that it is a real place – however much the name lends itself to the morbid spirit of the British soldier.*

* * * * *

At the time, the 1st Battalion had just withdrawn *from* the field, on August 28, a retirement which had terminated at *Penton Camp* to the north-west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe. It was the time of a lull in the fighting of 3rd Ypres: *Passchendaele*, a respite which lasted another three weeks while the British Army re-enforced and re-organized. Private Brinston arriving on September 3 had been one of a re-enforcement draft of twenty-six.



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

(continued)

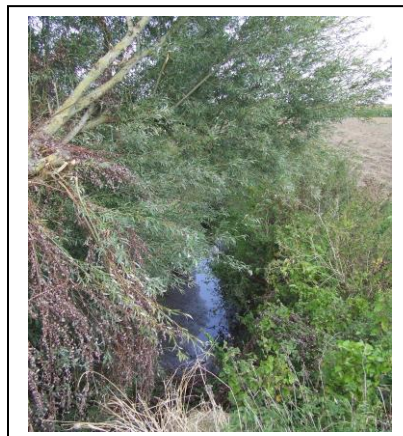
After those four weeks of relative calm which had begun on August 28, the Newfoundland Battalion went back to war during the last days of what had proved to be a fine and warm September – and as the fighting started once more...so did the rain.

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

The son of Robert William Brinston, fisherman, deceased 1922, and of Amelia Jane Brinston (née *Giles**, deceased *March 3, 1921*) - to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of eighty cents from his pay - of North Harbour**, Placentia Bay, he was also brother to Allison-Allington, Erelena-Blanche, Leslie-Atheling*, Reginald-Alston, Elizabeth-M., and Robert W. (died infant).

**The couple was married on Sound Island on December 10, 1895.*

***All offspring appear to have been born on Sound Island.*



(Right above: *The Broembeek, normally a placid, innocuous water course as shown here, was an overflowing torrent in October of 1917 which transformed its surrounds into a swamp. – photograph from 2009*)

Private Brinston was reported as...*missing in action*...on October 9, 1917, during the fighting at the *Broembeek*, Belgium. Some thirty weeks later, on May 7, 1918, he was...*officially presumed dead*.

George Brinston is recorded as having enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years and eleven months. (A second source has him only seventeen at the time of his death and the *Brinston Families Worldwide* web-site cite the year of his birth as 1900.) His age appears not to be recorded in vital statistics**.



**Leslie Atheling Brinston, Seaman 305x, Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve, died on HMS Laurentic (right) on January 25, 1917, when the vessel was sunk, likely by a mine.*

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

***In fact, his father addressed a letter the Colonial Secretary requesting that his son be sent home on account of his sickness and young age. The Colonial Secretary's Office declined on this occasion to intervene in matters such as furlough after sickness!*



(Preceding page: A family memorial which stands in the United Church Cemetery in North Harbour commemorates the sacrifice of Private George Brinston and Seaman Leslie Brinston. – photograph from 2015 with thanks to Cyril Bennett for having found the site.)

Private George Brinston was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – February 4, 2023.