



Private Eric Burt (Regimental Number 1152), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

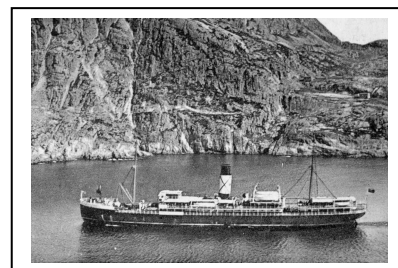


His occupation prior to his military service recorded as that of a *labourer* working for a monthly fifty dollars, Eric Burt presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on February 23 of the year 1915. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

Whether or not he had to return to the *Armoury* later that day to do so or not is not recorded, but Eric Burt was to enlist on the same February 23 – engaged at the private soldier's rate of a single dollar per diem plus a daily ten-cent *Field Allowance*.

However, whereas attestation for others had come about several weeks after enlistment, he was now to await only a further four days, until February 27, before *that* final formality would come to pass. On that date, having sworn his *Oath of Allegiance*, Eric Burt thereupon became...*a soldier of the King*.

For Private Burt, Number 1152, there was to be another, and final, waiting period of three weeks before he would be summoned to...*overseas service*. How he occupied himself during that time is not recorded among his papers; he may, of course, have temporarily returned to work, but this is only speculation.



(Right above: *The image of the Bowring Brothers' vessel 'Stephano', sister-ship of 'Florizel', as she passes through 'the Narrows' of St. John's Harbour is from the Provincial Archives.*)

Unlike the two previous contingents to have departed Newfoundland (see below) for...*overseas service*, Private Burt's 'D' Company was not to sail directly to the United Kingdom. On March 20 it, he a soldier of the Number 8 Platoon, embarked onto the Bowring-Brothers' vessel *Stephano* for the short voyage to Halifax, capital city of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, where it was thereupon to board a second vessel, the newly-launched *Orduña* for the trans-Atlantic crossing*.



(Preceding page: *The image of Orduña is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The vessel was not to be requisitioned during the Great War but would be used by the Cunard Company to operate on its commercial service between Liverpool and New York.*)

Having then sailed from Nova Scotia on March 22 for Liverpool, Private Burt and his draft landed there eight days later, on the 30th. Once disembarked in Liverpool, the two-hundred fifty men and officers of 'D' Company were thereupon transported on the same date by train directly to Edinburgh, the Scottish capital, to join the Newfoundland Regiment's 'A', 'B' and 'C' Companies.

These units were by this time stationed at the historic Castle, 'A' and 'B' having recently been posted from Fort George and 'C' having arrived directly from home (see further below). After 'D' Company's arrival at the end of that month of March, the Newfoundlanders were now to remain at Edinburgh for the following six weeks.

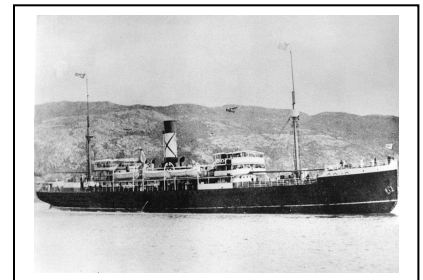


(Right above: *From its vantage point on Castle Hill, the venerable fortress overlooks the city of Edinburgh where in 1915 the Newfoundlanders were to provide the first garrison to be drawn from outside the British Isles. – photograph from 2011*)

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

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after 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 above: *The image of Florizel at anchor in the harbour at St. John's is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.*)

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



In the United Kingdom this first Newfoundland contingent was to train in three venues during the late autumn of 1914 and then the winter of 1914-1915: firstly in southern

England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland at *Fort George* – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness; and lastly at Edinburgh Castle – where, as recorded beforehand, it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.

Only days after ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 ‘C’ Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent* - would arrive directly from Newfoundland.

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

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As seen in a previous paragraph, for the month of April and the first days of May of 1915, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies, now united, were to furnish the garrison – the first troops from outside the British Isles to do so - of the guardian of Scotland’s capital city. Then, during the first week of May, ‘E’ Company was to report there...*to duty*...from home. Four days later again, on May 11, the Newfoundland contingent was ordered elsewhere.

On that day, some seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundland unit was dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, in the vicinity of the town of Hawick.

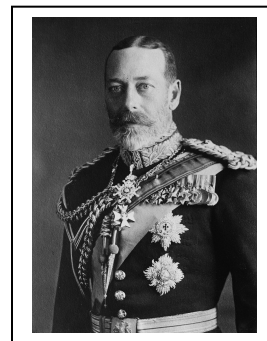
It was to be at *Stobs Camp* that the Newfoundland contingent would eventually receive the re-enforcements from home – ‘F’ Company which arrived on July 10, 1915 - that would bring its numbers up to that of British Army establishment battalion strength*. The now-formed 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland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

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



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

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



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

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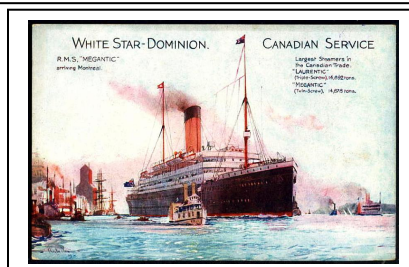
(Preceding page: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India* – the photograph is from *Bain News Services* via the *Wikipedia* web-site.)

It was while the Newfoundland Battalion was in training during those weeks at Aldershot, on August 15 that Private Burt would be prevailed upon to enlist for the duration of the conflict.

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



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



(Right adjacent: *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.*)



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



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



(Right above: *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*)*

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

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

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion was to serve but, even ever since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, was 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 above: *No-Man's-Land at Suvla Bay as seen from the Newfoundland positions – from Provincial Archives*)

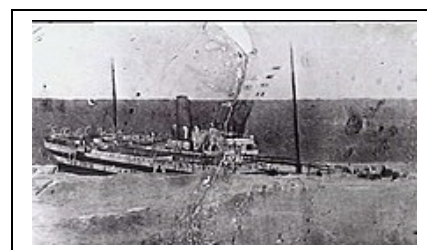
(Right: *An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at Suvla Bay – from Provincial Archives*)



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

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On October 17, Private Burt evacuated from the Newfoundland positions at *Suvla Bay* and taken on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Galeka*. He was then later reported as having been admitted on October 21 into the 5th Canadian Stationary Hospital at the Cavalry Barracks at Abbassia, Cairo. Originally diagnosed simply as having chronic diarrhoea, by the time of his admission he had at some point also been found to be suffering from dysentery.



(Right above: *The image of a sinking 'Galeka' is from the Australian War Memorial web-site. An elderly vessel, she had been launched in 1899 for service with the Union-Castle Line and spent much of her pre-War commercial life on routes to and from South Africa. Upon the outbreak of War, the vessel was requisitioned as a troopship and carried Australian and New Zealand soldiery to the Gallipoli Campaign. That mission accomplished she was converted for use as a hospital ship to accommodate some three-hundred sixty wounded. In October of 1916 she struck a mine entering Le Havre Harbour*

and, although beached, was a total loss. She was carrying no wounded at the time but nineteen medical personnel lost their lives.

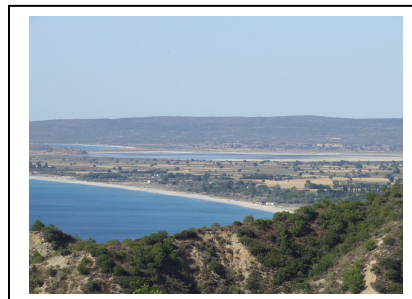
A hand-written note among Private Burt's papers then records...*Eleven fifty two Burt returned to duty November twenty two...* thus suggesting that he had been discharged from medical care on that date and ordered to Base Depot in Alexandria. From there some two months later, having travelled north to south down the length of the Suez Canal, he was to re-join the Newfoundland Battalion at Port Suez, the unit having been encamped there since the British abandonment of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

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In the mean-time after Private Burt's departure to Egypt for medical attention, the situation of the British – and thus the Newfoundlanders – at *Suvla Bay* had continued to deteriorate. November 26 would see perhaps the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at *Gallipoli*; there was to be a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm strike the area, particularly *Suvla Bay*, and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be the priority.

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

(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*)



By this time the situation there was daily 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 been evacuated to the nearby island of *Imbros*, some to *Lemnos*, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion was to be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



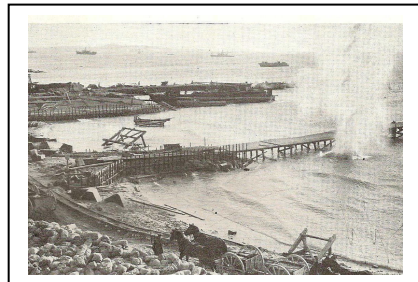
(Right above: *Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed *Achi Baba*, positions which were never breached: The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011*)

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

This final operation would take place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion to furnish part of the British rear-guard on this second occasion also.

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



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

(Right: ‘*W*’ Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in that January of 1916 and by the Newfoundlanders who were to be the last soldiers off the beach: *Vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen.* – photograph from 2011)



Immediately after the British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of *Alexandria*. 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 arrived on the morrow and where the Battalion landed and marched to its camp.



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 above: *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 from the battleship *Cornwallis* from *Illustration*)



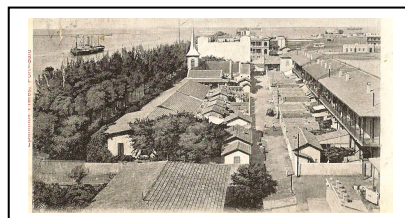
And it was of course some nine-ten days after the Newfoundland Battalion had settled into its new quarters at Port Suez that Private Burt was to report back...*to duty*. Port Suez was also to be where, from March 2 to 11, he would receive treatment in the 18th Stationary Hospital for a wounded scalp*.

**In those days prior to the advent of anti-biotics, it was often the likelihood of infection which presented as much if not more danger that the wound, injury or disease itself.*

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

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



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

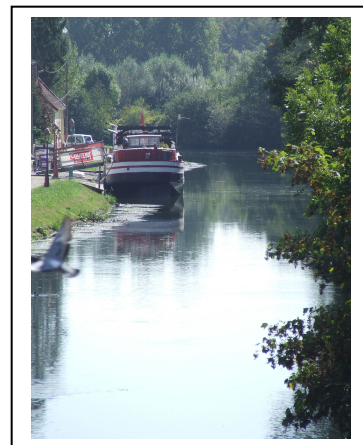
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably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

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

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



On April 13, the 1st Battalion had subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive re-enforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front*, two of the four Companies – 'A', and 'B' – were to take over several support positions from a British unit* before the entire Newfoundland unit was to then be ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.

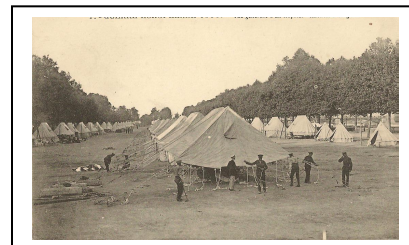
**It should be said that the Newfoundland Battalion and two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles who were serving at the time in the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment Battalion, were then the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles - true also on the day of the attack on July 1.*

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One month after the 1st Battalion had arrived in France and while it was still in the area of Englebelmer, on April 27 Private Burt was evacuated to the 29th Casualty Clearance Station at Gezaincourt. The complaint was tonsillitis but, as seen in an earlier paragraph, these being the days before antibiotics, recovery was not instantaneous and he was not released back to his unit until June 9 when he re-joined the Battalion at Louvencourt (see below).

In the interim he had been transferred from the 29th CCS to the St. John Ambulance Brigade Hospital at Étapes on April 29 and from there had been forwarded to a Convalescent Camp at Étapes, on May 12.

(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)



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

Only days after Private Burt's departure to the 29th CCS, at the end of that April, the 1st Battalion had been withdrawn to the areas of Mailly-Maillet and Louvencourt where the Newfoundlanders would be based for the next two months, and where they were soon to be preparing for the upcoming British campaign of that summer, this 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*.

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(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*)



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



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

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

It was to be the largest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the butchery of *the Somme* was to continue for 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 below: *A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland - dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?*)

Private Burt had been back with his unit only three weeks before the British Army launched its summer offensive, this to become known as the...*First Battle of the Somme*. On July 1, 1916, Private Burt was wounded at Beaumont-Hamel while serving with 'D' Company during the fighting of the first day of the battle. He had incurred slight injuries to the left arm inflicted by gun-shot – likely flying shrapnel – for which, on the following day, July 2, he was admitted into the 20th Field Ambulance for further medical attention.



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On the morrow, July 3, Private Burt was transferred to the 1st Canadian Stationary Hospital at Étaples and from there, on the 8th, he was sent on to the 6th Convalescent Depot, also at Étaples. Private Burt was recorded as having reported back...*to duty*...at the British Base Depot at Rouen only three days later again, on July 11.

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

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

It had then been a further two days before the unit had marched further again to the rear area and to billets in the village of Mailly-Maillet.



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

There on July 11, a draft of one-hundred twenty-seven re-enforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported *to duty*. They had been the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion had still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

That strength once again, as related above, was to include Private Burt who had been a soldier of the above-mentioned re-enforcement draft of one-hundred twenty-seven having arrived on July 11*.

**Another of the same strength was to report only ten days later.*

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Two weeks less a day afterwards, on July 24, the Newfoundland Battalion, having completed a short tour in the trenches – where it had incurred several further casualties, was out of the line and billeted at Beauval. On that day the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, accompanied by an officer from the...*Pay & Record Office*...in London, saw fit to visit the depleted unit to inspect it and to deliver a few words.

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It is not recorded if the re-enforcement draft of sixty *other ranks* from Rouen which reported to *duty* with 1st Battalion on that day was in time to hear Sir Edward's speech; what *is* recorded in the Regimental War Diary however, is that, even including the newcomers of that day, the Newfoundlanders numbered only five-hundred fifty-four, roughly half the strength of a regulation battalion.

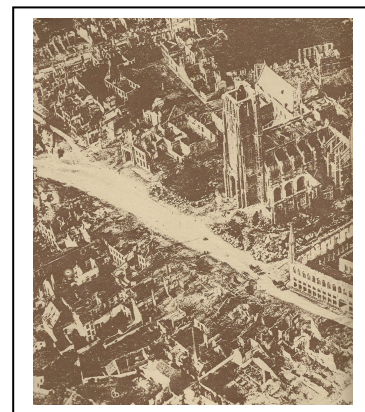
Three days following, on July 27-28 of 1916, the 1st Battalion had moved northwards and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time. It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce 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.

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



But little more than two weeks after having moved into Belgium with the Newfoundland unit, Private Burt was once more to be absenting himself to seek medical care.

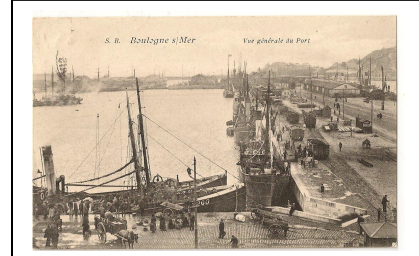
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On August 15 he presented himself at the 29th D.R.S. (*Divisional Rest Station*) with, once again, his tonsils proving to be a problem. Eleven days later, on August 26, Private Burt was forwarded to and admitted into the 8th Stationary Hospital – via the 3rd Canadian Casualty Clearing Station - in the coastal resort town of Wimereux for treatment to laryngitis.

(Right above: *The French sea-side resort of Wimereux just prior to the Great War, during which time it became a component of an important medical complex – from a vintage post-card*)



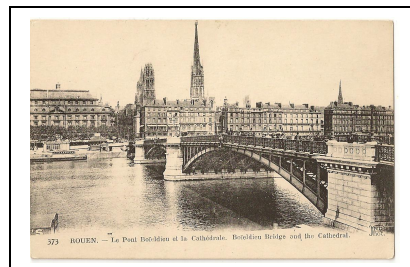
(Right: *An image of the French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



From Wimereux on September 12 Private Burt was sent to the 1st Convalescent Depot at nearby Boulogne from where he was thereupon released to the 29th Division Infantry Base Depot at Rouen only a single day afterwards, on September 13.

(Right below: *The River Seine flows through the centre of the French city of Rouen and past the vigilant towers of the venerable gothic cathedral. – from a vintage post-card*)

When exactly it was to be that Private Burt re-joined his 1st Battalion is not clear but since it was without doubt before October 12, it may have been on October 8 as a soldier of the small draft of twelve...*other ranks*...recorded by the War Diarist as having arrived at Corbie during the evening of the Newfoundland unit's arrival back from Belgium.



The Diarist has recorded no other draft during that period.

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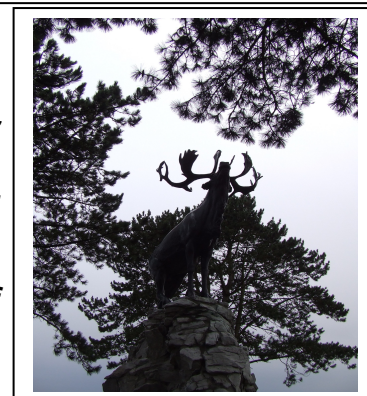
On that October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion, having been ordered to return south, moved to France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

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



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

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



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

On that October 12, Private Burt was admitted into the 140th Field Ambulance with gun-shot wounds and fractures to the right arm and the left wrist. From there he was transferred via an unspecified casualty clearing station on October 14 to the 5th General Hospital in Rouen from where nine days later again, on the 23rd day of the month, was embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Gloucester Castle* for passage back to the United Kingdom.



(continued)

(Preceding page: The image of ‘Gloucester Castle’ clad in her war-time hospital-ship garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Built in 1911 for commercial service for the Union-Castle Line, the vessel was requisitioned and converted for use as a hospital ship as early as September of 1914, capable of accommodating just over four-hundred hospital beds On March 30, 1917, she was torpedoed while en route to Southampton but not sunk, and all but four of the three-hundred ninety-nine wounded on board survived. The ship itself remained afloat, was towed to be repaired and to return to service. On June 21 of 1942, one war later, Gloucester Castle was sunk by the German raider Michel.)

Once arrived in England, Private Burt was transferred on October 24 to the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth where his treatment and convalescence were now to last some seven weeks.

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



On the twelfth day of December, his wounds healed and now considered as...Fit for light duty..., Private Burt began the customary ten-day furlough allowed to those military personnel discharged from hospital, that leave to terminate on December 21. This was followed by the almost inevitable posting to the Regimental Depot where he is recorded to have arrived on January 5* of the New Year, 1917.

***Which, of course, leaves two weeks unaccounted for – at least unaccounted for among the papers in his personal dossier.**

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



(Right above: An aerial view of Ayr, likely from the period between the Wars: Newton-on-Ayr, where were quartered the ‘other ranks’, left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, 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.*

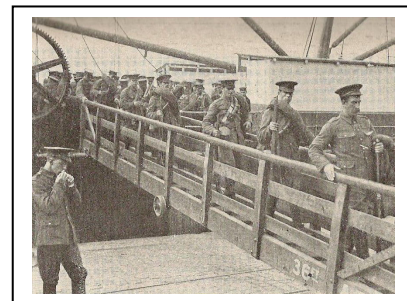


As seen recently above, where or how he had spent the festive season during that Christmas interim of 1916-1917 seems not to be recorded.

His time thereafter at Ayr is better documented: apart from time in February - spent on a course? - at Edinburgh and perhaps at the Castle, Private Burt was hospitalized on three occasions: twice in the 4th Scottish General Hospital, Glasgow – during May, June and July – with venereal and then gastric problems; and following that in the Dundee War Hospital at the end of July and the beginning of August, again for his tonsils*.

**A letter from the Newfoundland Minister of Militia written on or about August 3, 1917, suggests that at some time during that period of 1917, Private Burt had been declared unfit for service – not precisely true, however. A second letter was sent shortly afterwards requesting that furlough be granted back to Newfoundland for Private Burt. Unfortunately he had by then been passed as...fit for General Service...and sent back to 'active service' on the Continent.*

On September 7, 1917, the 29th Re-enforcement Draft from Barry* – Private Burt among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent. The ship docked two days later, on the 9th, in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot where the draft must have thereupon spent several days for final training and organization* before leaving to seek out 1st Battalion.



**During the summer months of 1917, the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

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

**Apparently the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

It was on September 18 that Private Burt, a soldier of the re-enforcement draft of twenty-eight...*other ranks*...from Rouen to arrive at *Penton Camp* just to the north-west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe. This was the time of *Passchendaele* when the entire British force involved was to undertake a three-four week period to re-enforce and re-organize.

Two days after Private Burt's arrival there, the Newfoundlanders began to move again towards the front lines – and at the same time the rains started again.

* * * * *

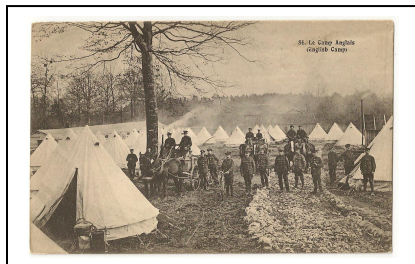
After the action at Gueudecourt of October 12 during which Private Burt had been injured, the Newfoundland Battalion was not to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of although, on October 18, it would supply two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires and the Worcestershires, of the 88th Brigade.

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



On October 30, the Newfoundland unit had eventually been retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1st Battalion would once more begin to wend its way back up to the front lines.

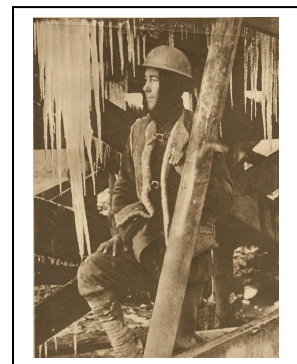


There it had continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period broken only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the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

(Right 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 ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and out of 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.

After that recent six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve* far to the rear, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to *active service* on January 23, although they apparently had already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.



(continued)

Those casualties, however, were only a small number of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig somewhat casually referred to as *wastage* as the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches.

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

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



(Right: *The fighting during the period of the Battalion's posting to Sully-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time. - photograph from 2009(?)*)

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



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

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



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

(Right: *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* was to be yet a further disaster.

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



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

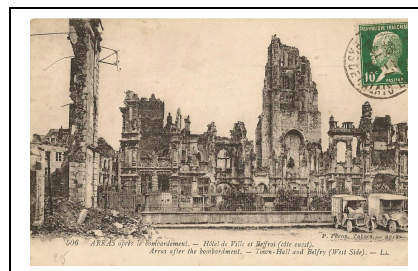
**It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained in the area of Monchy-le-Preux until the morrow when it retired to the outskirts of Arras. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, be amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming re-enforcements would allow the two units' strengths to once more resemble those of bona fide battalions.

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This was in fact an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5th, 3rd and 1st Armies. It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1st Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

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

(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*)

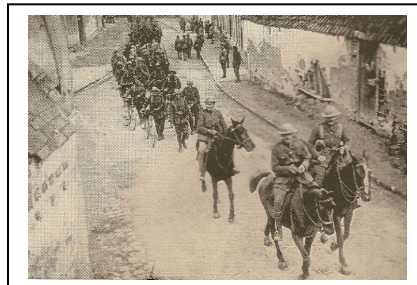


(Right above: *A number of the surviving Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from *The War Illustrated**)

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

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

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



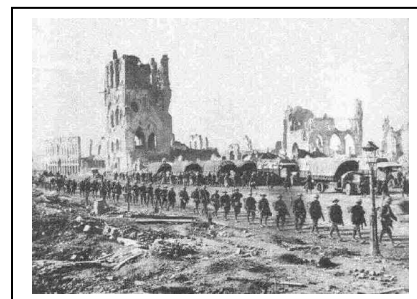
The Newfoundlanders had then soon once again been moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.

(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: 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 from the railway station, march in single file past the vestiges of the historic Cloth Hall and through the rubble of the medieval centre of Ypres en route 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 above: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – 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.

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



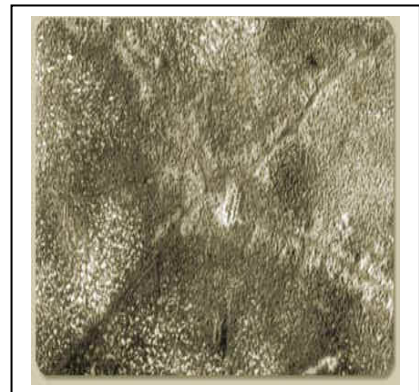
Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9.

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*.

(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*)



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



Private Burt, of course, not having landed on the Continent from England until September 7, was to play no part whatsoever in the confrontation at the *Steenbeek* in mid-August.

(Right below: *In September the Broembeek is normally little more than a placid stream. In the autumn of 1917 it was a formidable obstacle and the surrounding fields were no better than a swamp. – photograph from September 2010*)

The son of John Burt, fisherman, and of Jemima Burt (née *Green*) – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Cook Street and the Upper Battery Road in St. John's, he was brother to Harold*, to Otto-George and to Frederick.

Private Burt was reported as having been...*killed in action*...on October 9, 1917, while serving with 'D' Company in the fighting at the *Broembeek*, Belgium.

Eric Burt had enlisted at a *declared* nineteen years of age – but had been cited as a thirteen year-old in the 1911 Census.



**Private Harold Burt, Regimental Number 323, oldest of the brothers, was one of the 'First Five Hundred'. He was never to see active service as he was discharged on October 15, 1915 on board the SS Corsican during the voyage home – Corsican docked in Quebec on October 20 from where he was to make his own way back to Newfoundland.*

The reasons for his discharge appear to have been two-fold: his enlisted time had expired and he had been deemed as medically unfit although there is nothing among his papers to confirm or to elaborate on this.

Private Eric Burt 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).



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 6, 2023.