

Lieutenant* Cecil Bayly Clift (Regimental Number 505*), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.



**Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were not considered as enlisted. These officers thus had no Regimental Number allotted to them.*

And since officers did not enlist, they were not then required to re-enlist 'for the duration', even though, at the beginning, as a private, they had volunteered their services for only a limited time – twelve months.

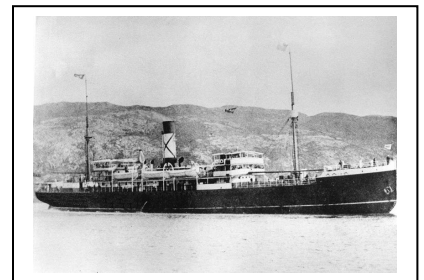
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *student* (of law?) with an income of six-hundred ten dollars per annum, Cecil Bayly Clift was to be a recruit of the First Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* on Harvey Road in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on August 29 of 1914. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

Cecil Bayly Clift enlisted – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar plus a ten-cent per diem *Field Allowance* - on September 7, 1914, at a time when the new recruits were undergoing a four-five week period of training on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the East End of St. John's.

Two weeks later, on September 21, he would be promoted to the rank of lance corporal.

The training for the most part over, the first two days of October would apparently be spent in a mass attestation of the Newfoundland contingent. However, there appears to be no confirmation that Lance Corporal Clift took his oath at this particular time.

He was then to embark on October 3 as a non-commissioned officer of the first Newfoundland contingent – it was not yet a battalion - to leave for *overseas service.*



(continued)

Having paraded through the streets of St. John's, the *First Five Hundred* – also to become known as the *Blue Puttees* - boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting them in St. John's Harbour. The ship would sail for the United Kingdom on the following day, October 4, via its rendezvous off the south coast of the Island with the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas.

(Preceding page: *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 during the autumn of 1914 and the winter that followed, Lance Corporal Cliff trained with the Newfoundland contingent: firstly in southern England on the *Salisbury Plain* where – no details appear to be recorded – he reverted to the rank of private soldier; then in Scotland as of early December at Fort George – on the Moray Firth close to Inverness, and in February at Edinburgh Castle – where it would provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles...and where on April 26 he regained the lost stripe.



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

Some three months after having reported to the Scottish capital, on May 11, and some seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the entire Newfoundlanders unit – by now 'A' and 'B' Companies re-enforced by 'C', 'D', and 'E' - was ordered moved 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, having accepted the recommendation made by telegraph on June 27 of the Newfoundland contingent's Commanding Officer in Scotland, Lieutenant Colonel de Burton, the Governor of Newfoundland – who was also Commanding Officer of the *entire* Regiment – granted Lance Corporal Cliff an Imperial Commission two days later. It was accompanied by an appointment to the rank of second lieutenant which in fact, came into effect in practice – he joined the officers' mess for dinner - on the same June 27.

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



(continent)

(Preceding page: *The Newfoundland Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp and about to be presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915* – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

At the beginning of that August of 1915, the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, 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.



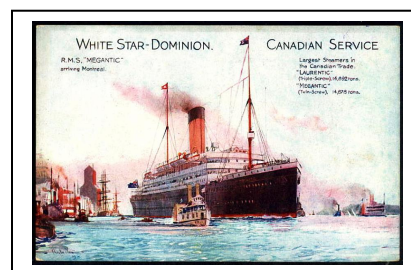
Meanwhile, the two junior Companies, the later-arrived ‘E’ and ‘F’, were ordered sent to Scotland’s west coast, to the once-Royal Borough of Ayr, where they were to provide the nucleus of the newly-forming 2nd (Reserve) Battalion*.

(Right above: *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* – photograph from *Bain News Services* via *Wikipedia*)

While the aforementioned ‘E’ and ‘F’ Companies were beginning their time of training at Ayr in that summer of 1915, those four senior companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, of the Newfoundland Regiment, having now become the 1st Battalion, had been attached to the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been despatched 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.)



On August 20 of 1915, Second Lieutenant Cliff and the Newfoundland Battalion 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 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: *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)

(Preceding page: *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*)



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

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

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

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

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

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

November 26 would see the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at Gallipoli; a freak rain-, snow- and ice-storm was to strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods 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.

On the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard. Some of the Battalion personnel had been evacuated to the nearby island of *Imbros*, some to *Lemnos*, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1st Battalion was to be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

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



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

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)

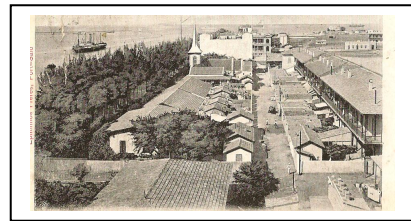
Immediately after the British had evacuated the entire *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916, the Newfoundland Battalion was to be ordered to the Egyptian port-city of *Alexandria*, to arrive there on the 15th of that month. The Newfoundlanders were then to be immediately transferred southward to the vicinity of *Suez*, a port at the southern end of the Canal which bears the same name, there to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29th Division had yet to be decided*.



**Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was soon to become a theatre of war.*

(continued)

(Preceding page: *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)*



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

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



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

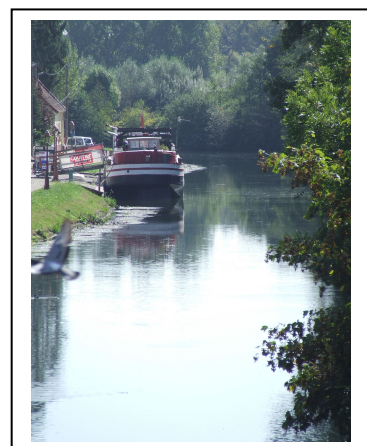
By the time that he landed in Marseilles, Second Lieutenant Cliff had been promoted to the rank of full lieutenant. An order to that effect dated March 21, 1916, from the *Office of the Governor* in London was received by the *Pay & Record Office*. It also ordered that the appointment be retroactive to January 1, New Year's Day, of the same 1916.

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

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

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

(Right: *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.*

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

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



* * * * *

During this spring period in France, Lieutenant Clift was evacuated from the forward area, suffering slightly from a venereal problem*, by the 22nd Ambulance Train and thence to the 9th Stationary Hospital at Le Havre on April 20, 1916. He was subsequently discharged from there for further treatment and convalescence to the Officers' Stationary Hospital in the so-called Cinder City** on May 7.



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

**It had also been diagnosed as NYD (Not Yet Determined) as was often the case with officers. Thus they avoided the social stigma as well as the financial penalty imposed by the military authorities. (Military personnel, particularly in the earlier years of the war, forfeited a part of their pay – fifty per cent in the case of 'other ranks' – plus all Field Allowance during the time of treatment.)*

***Cinder City was a camp at Le Havre built on a marsh which had been filled in with cinders. It was used for convalescent purposes for those military personnel too well to be in hospital, yet not deemed quite well enough for active service.*

His files record Lieutenant Clift as having remained at Cinder City until the final day of June 1916 which logically precluded him from having been present at Beaumont-Hamel on the morrow; however, the same files do *not* record the date of his eventual return to the Newfoundland unit – nor does the unit's War Diary. Other sources, however, have him as having returned two weeks further on, to a depleted 1st Battalion, on July 14.

This being the case, he was present for the visit of his father, James Augustus Cliff, to the Newfoundland Battalion which he inspected, then addressed, on the 20th. This was an event which *is* documented in the 1st Battalion War Diary.

* * * * *

During Lieutenant Cliff’s absence, of course, the Newfoundland Battalion had fought at Beaumont-Hamel.

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



(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel: Looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences: The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009)*

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



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

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

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



(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village. – photographs from 2010 and 2015)*

In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists today – at the time comprising two communities: Beaumont, a village on the German side of the lines, and Hamel which was behind those of the British. No-Man’s-Land, on which the Newfoundland Memorial Park lies partially today, was on land that separated Beaumont from Hamel.

(Right: A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland - dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from...?)



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

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

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

(Right: *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 reinforcements – 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 manpower having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1916, the 1st Battalion still numbered only...*11 officers and 260 rifles...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.*

On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1st Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after further re-enforcement – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.



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 above: *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.



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

It was apparently during this posting to Ypres that Lieutenant Clift, on at least one occasion, that occasion being a dinner hosted by 'D' Company in the ruins of an old mill – the Company's billets – was to prove himself to be an accomplished piano-player.

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

Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 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.

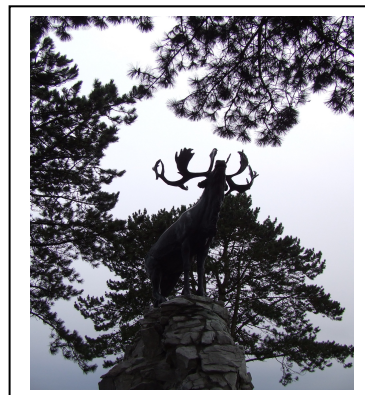


The encounter proved to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(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*)

'On October 12 I saw Lt. Clift lying in a shell-hole between the Germans' 2nd line and the British front, hit in the head, and later on the same day again saw him lying dead in the same spot.' – Corporal Butler (#457)

The son of the Honourable James Augustus Clift KC, OBE, barrister and solicitor, and of Agnes Clift (née *Paterson*)*, of 100, Military Road in St. John's, he was also brother to Captain John Clift (Regimental Number 503)**.



**The couple had married in Harbour Grace on June 25, 1891.*

Lieutenant Clift was reported at first as *missing (believed killed) in action* - this soon afterwards to be amended to *killed in action* - on October 12, 1916, while serving with 'B' Company and while he was leading two platoons to the attack at Gueudecourt.

Cecil Bayly Clift had enlisted at the age of twenty-three years – date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, May 23, 1892 (from St. Thomas' Anglican Parish Records).



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

****Lance Corporal John Clift had been struck off the Newfoundland Regiment's strength on April 8, 1915, in order to receive a commission with the Cameron Highlanders. On October 26, 1917, he transferred back from the Highlanders to the Newfoundland Regiment. Captain Clift was decorated with the MC (Military Cross) on September 16, 1918.**



(The photograph of Lieutenant Cecil Bayly Clift found on the previous page is from the Provincial Archives.)

(Right above: A family memorial – to the right – which stands in the Old Anglican Cemetery on Forest Road commemorates the sacrifice of Lieutenant Clift. – photograph from 2015)

Lieutenant Cecil Bayly Clift was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



19th October, 1916

Dear Sir,

I regret to inform you that the Record Office of the First Newfoundland Regiment, London, today advises the Lieut. Cecil B. Clift is reported Missing, but is believed to have been Killed in Action on October 12th.

XXXXXXXX

Office of the Colonial Secretary

**To Mr. J. A. Clift
100 Military Road
City**

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 11, 2023.