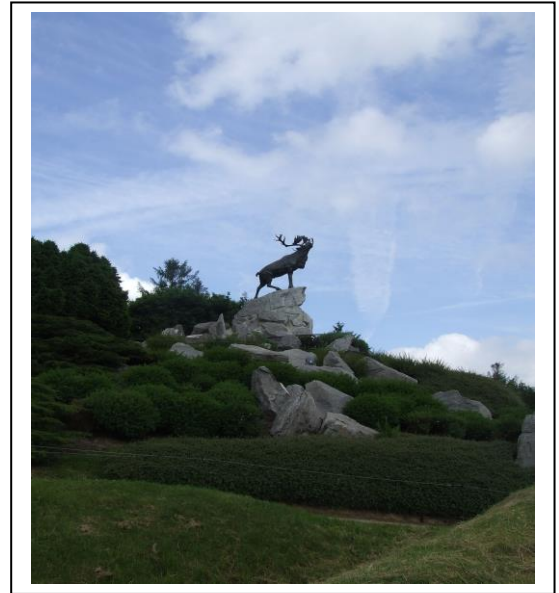




Private Ward Mellage Cooper (Regimental Number 1945), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fireman\*, Ward Mellage Cooper was a volunteer of the Seventh Recruitment Draft. He presented himself at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on October 22 of 1915 in order to enlist and was thereupon 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.



*\*As well as being a person who fought fires, a fireman was the person responsible for keeping the boiler fired-up on a steam locomotive or ship etc.*

On the day following his enlistment, October 23, Ward Mellage Cooper was to return to the same venue, the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, where he was now to undergo a medical examination. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as being...*fit for Foreign Service*.

There were yet four more days to pass after that medical assessment before there then came about the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On that same October 27 he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, at which moment Ward Mellage Cooper became...*a soldier of the King*.

A long waiting-period was now in store for the recruits of this draft, designated as 'H' Company\*, before they were to depart from Newfoundland for...*overseas service*.

*\*In fact, 'H' Company was to depart from Newfoundland in two detachments: the first one-hundred recruits, Private Cooper among that number, would be the first to leave in that December of 1915. The second part of 'H' Company would not follow until the fourth week of the upcoming month of March. It was to make the journey on board the SS Sicilian and report to Ayr on April 9.*

*Until as late as that spring of 1916 it had been the intention to form a 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment to fight on the Continent. In fact it would seem that the one-hundred sixty-three recruits of the second contingent, 'H' Company, were to form a part of the nucleus of that unit, while the personnel already at the Depot by this time would form a reserve battalion to serve as a re-enforcement pool for both the Regiment's fighting units.*

*It could not have been long before a change of plan came about as, very soon, men of the second half of 'H' Company were being sent to strengthen the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion already on the Continent – maybe Beaumont-Hamel had something to do with it.*

Private Cooper, Regimental Number 1945, would be one of the one-hundred men who comprised the first detachment of 'H' Company to travel for...overseas service. He was now to wait fifty-two days after attestation before being called, but where he was to spend this time is not certain: he may have temporarily returned to work or even perhaps to his home in the central Newfoundland logging community of Millertown – all of which of course is only speculation\*.

*\*It is also likely that some of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the city, or those who had no friends or family to offer board and lodging, were quartered in the curling rink at Fort William in St. John's, a building which was to serve as a barracks.*

This first detachment of 'H' Company left St. John's by train to cross the island to Port aux Basques on December 18, 1915. After the short sea-voyage to traverse the Gulf of St. Lawrence the detachment entrained once again, in North Sydney, for Saint John, New Brunswick.

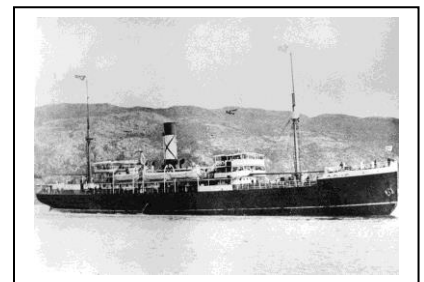


The Atlantic crossing was to be effected from there on board the Royal Mail Ship *Corinthian* and the draft reported to the Regimental Depot at Ayr on January 4 of the New Year, 1916.

*(Right above: The Allan Line Ship 'Corinthian' was built in 1899 and was to serve mainly on trans-Atlantic routes between Great Britain and Canada. At the beginning of the Great War she formed a part of the convoy carrying the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the United Kingdom although after that it appears that she resumed her commercial work, transporting troops only if and when it suited her schedule. In December of 1918 she was driven ashore in the Bay of Fundy and although there was no loss of life, the ship was wrecked.)*

\* \* \* \* \*

Some sixteen months prior to that January 4 of 1916, 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.)*

(continued)

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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.



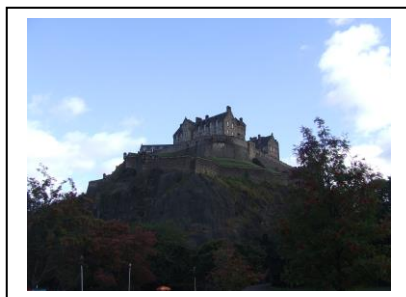
*\*It was to do so at Devonport through which 'G' Company was to pass eleven months later.*

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*.

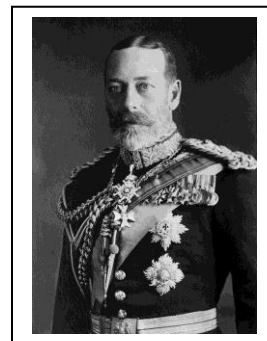
This had been an important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength\* of a battalion which could be posted on...active service.



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

(Right above: *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 1<sup>st</sup> 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*.



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 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

(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 – the photograph is from Bain News Services via the Wikipedia web-site.*)

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



(Right below: *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.*



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 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion\*.

***\*The first such re-enforcement draft was, in fact, to depart from Ayr for service on the Gallipoli Peninsula on November 15, some seven weeks before the arrival in Scotland of Private Cooper's 'H' Company.***

That November 15 of 1915 (see immediately above) was to see not only the departure of the 1<sup>st</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr to the Middle East and to the fighting of the *Gallipoli Campaign* but also, only five days prior, the arrival from Newfoundland of 'G' Company which would be obliged to take up quarters at *Gailes Camp*, some sixteen kilometres up the coast from Ayr itself – but just over sixty if one went by road.

A further seven weeks plus a day were now to pass before Private Cooper and the first one-hundred of 'H' Company were to present themselves at the Regimental Depot.

\* \* \* \* \*

Transferred upon their arrival in Scotland on January 4 to serve with 'G' Company, the new-comers of 'H' (now 'G') Company were to be quartered in the barracks of the Royal Scots Fusiliers; they, however, had not yet vacated the aforesaid premises, due to an epidemic of measles at the time. It was not long before the disease had also taken its toll on the Newfoundlanders amongst whom there would be fatalities.

Private Cooper, while not to be one of those to *succumb* to it, was to fall victim to the epidemic.

It was while at Ayr he was to be hospitalized at the *Bladda Hospital for Infectious Diseases* at not-distant Paisley – from March 13, 1916, until April 4 – for medical attention to his measles.

(Right: *The Newfoundland Military Plot in Paisley (Hawkshead) Cemetery wherein lie a number of Newfoundland Regiment personnel who died while in Scotland – photograph from 2011(?)*)



Private Cooper's medical tribulations were not over, however, as he was now to spend a month under care for a venereal problem: three days in the 4<sup>th</sup> Scottish General Hospital in Glasgow and four further weeks – altogether from May 15 to June 15 – after his transfer to the Workhouse Hospital at Newcastle-on-Tyne in England.

It was to be only some further two weeks after his discharge on this second occasion from hospital back to the Regimental Depot, but after that still some eight weeks before his departure to France on *active service*, that on June 30 Private Cooper was prevailed upon to re-enlist *for the duration of the War\**.

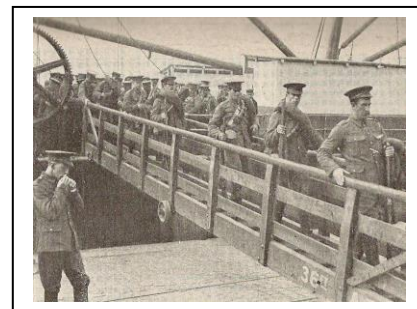
***\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits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

By the time of his calling the Regimental Depot had already seen the departure of the first of many re-enforcement drafts to eventually be dispatched from there: the First directly to *Gallipoli*; the Second which had sailed to Egypt before being turned back to land in France; and the Third which had sailed straight to France at the end of March.

Those which had subsequently sailed from Scotland – up until the winter of 1917-1918 – were also to cross directly to the Continent.

He, Private Cooper, had not been selected to serve in any of the first nine of those drafts; it was only after he had been serving in Scotland for more than seven months that his turn would come. When it *did* come, his draft would be dispatched directly to the Continent.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Cooper among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on August 24 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front. It disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, the 25<sup>th</sup>, and spent time at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, undergoing final training and organization\*, before making its way to a rendezvous with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way 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.*

Once in Rouen it would appear that Private Cooper's draft from Ayr was to be parcelled out in small numbers to eventually report to the parent Newfoundland unit in the several re-enforcement drafts sent from the Base Depot during the upcoming few weeks.

Private Cooper, however, was to be attached to none of them and, in fact, was to go no further than Rouen. Only three days after his arrival in France, on August 29 he was admitted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Stationary Hospital to be treated again for a venereal complaint\*. It was surely a strange case as he apparently was to remain in care at Rouen until March 9 of the following year, 1917, when he then embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Aberdonian* for the short crossing back to the United Kingdom where his problem's gravity was deemed as...*slight*.



*\*As late as that March of the following year, his family was being apprised that... his case has not yet been diagnosed. In all fairness, it should be said the a 'skin complaint' had been added to the original diagnosis by that time.*

(continued)

Once back in England – having arrived and disembarked there on March 10 – Private Cooper became a patient of the Alexandra Hospital, Cosham (*University War Hospital*) in the outskirts of the Royal Naval port-city of Portsmouth. Following further treatment there, he reported on May 24 to the *Newfoundland Pay & Record Office* at 58, Victoria Street in London where he was provided with a railway pass and sent on his way the following day back to the Regimental Depot in Scotland.

Private Cooper now remained in Ayr for two months – perhaps employed per-times in the vegetable garden?

(Right: *The new race-course at Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photo from 2012*)



The 27<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Barry\* – Private Cooper one of its number - passed through Southampton on July 22, and arrived in Rouen two days later. This time Private Cooper made it further than the confines of the Base Depot and the hospitals of the city, and after that inevitable period of final training, he reported...*to duty*...to the Newfoundland Battalion on August 28.

(Right: *The great and venerable gothic cathedral standing dominant in the centre of the French city of Rouen at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



*\*During the summer months of 1917, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. 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.*

Two detachments of re-enforcements are recorded in the *1<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary* as having arrived at *Penton Camp* – in the proximity of Poperinghe, Belgium – on that particular August 28, Private Cooper being one of the total of one-hundred sixty-five *other ranks* comprising those contingents.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some twenty-five months prior to this juncture taking place, back in the early summer of 1915 the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both ‘E’ and ‘F’ Companies, as seen further above, had only then been beginning their period of training there at Ayr.

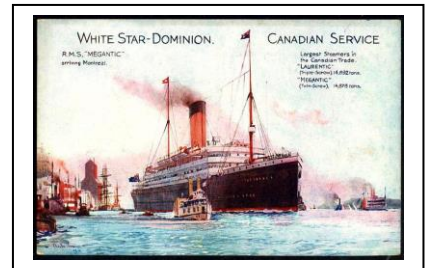
As for Ward Mellage Cooper, he had still been at home awaiting enlistment and attestation after which he still would have those fifty-two days to wait before the call was to come to sail overseas to the United Kingdom.

(continued)

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



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



(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.)*

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



(Right above: *'Kangaroo Beach', where the officers and men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

(continued)



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:

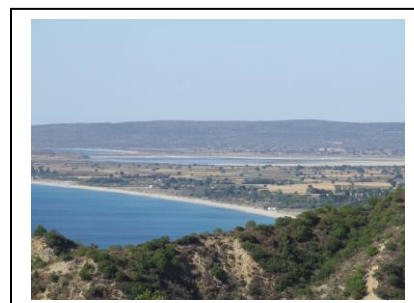
Flies, dust, disease, the frost-bite and the floods – and of course the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command\* had ever anticipated – were eventually to overwhelm the British-led forces and those of their allies, the French, and it would 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*)

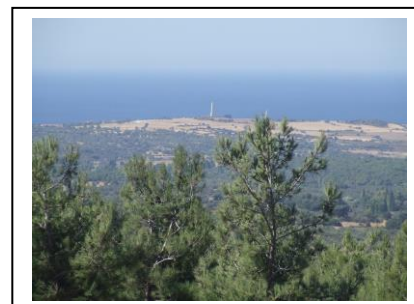
November 26 would see what perhaps was to be the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at *Gallipoli*; there was to be a freak rain, snow and ice-storm strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(Preceding page: *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.

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 above: *‘W’ Beach at Cape Helles under shell-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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16<sup>th</sup>, 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.

(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.*)



(continued)

There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division had yet to be decided

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

(Right: *The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)*



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and *other ranks* of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 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 above: *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)*



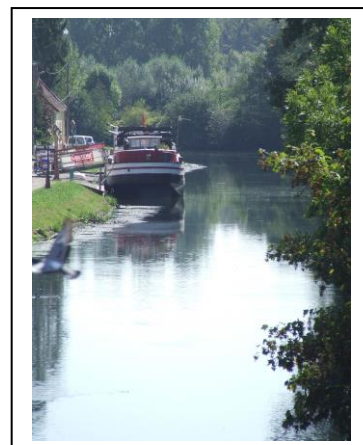
Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille.

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.



(continued)

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

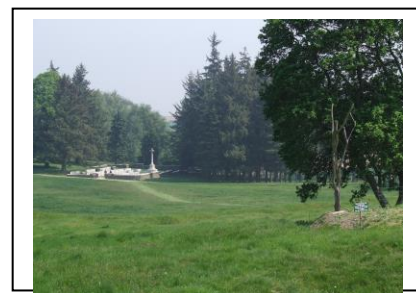


(Right: A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?))

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

Having then been withdrawn at the beginning of that May to the areas of Maily-Maillet and Louvencourt 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.



(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 right in the photograph.* – photograph taken in 2009)

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(?))

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



***\*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.***



**(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 above: *A further view of the re-constituted battle-field in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – today the barbed wire is there to control the tourists – photograph from 2007(?)*)**

**After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, at Beaumont-Hamel, 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.**



**(continued)**

(Preceding page: *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 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 still been needed and, after that first – above - 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 fewer even after two further re-enforcement drafts – would move northwards and enter into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

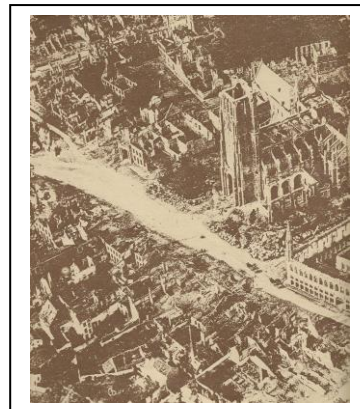
(Right: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



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 was to be transported back into France, and back into the area of the...*First Battle of the Somme*.

(continued)

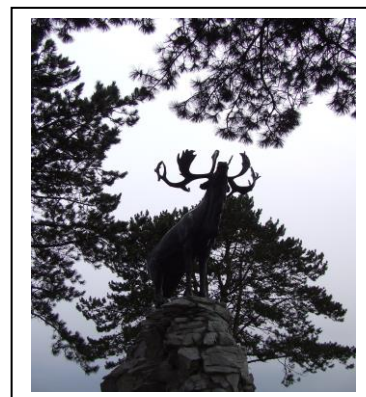
Just four days after the unit's return to France from Belgium, on October 12 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.



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

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



The Newfoundland Battalion had not then 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 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of which the Newfoundland unit was a battalion.



(Right above: *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 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.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks retired to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the Battalion had begun to wend its way back 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.



(continued)

(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 town 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, by 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.

It had now been the beginning of the winter period. As had been and as was to be the case of all the winter periods of the *Great War* – that of 1916-1917 would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable – there was a shortage of fuel and many other things, particularly in 1917 - for most of the combatants of both sides. It had also been a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were kept busy, particularly, so it seems - at least according to Canadian medical documents and records - with thousands of cases of dental work.

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

On February 18 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had begun a five-day trek back from Coisy to the forward area where it went back into the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers.



This relief had been at a place called Saily-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans had been warm and 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 had been withdrawn on February 25...to return three days later.

They were to be carrying with them orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Saily-Saillisel...to be carried out on March 1.

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



(continued)



(Preceding page: *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(?))

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.

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March had been a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events. They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from The War Illustrated*)

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

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had commenced 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 below: *The Canadian National Memorial which has stood atop Vimy Ridge since 1936 – photograph from 2010*)

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.



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

(continued)

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

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After *Beaumont-Hamel*, the ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux had proved 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 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.

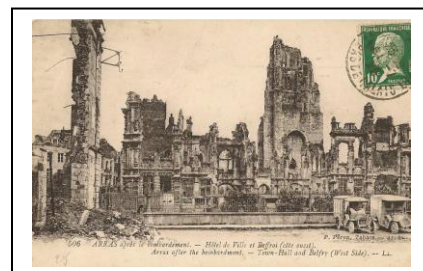
When the other thirty-nine *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen had reported to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 18, they had been just in time to march the dozen kilometres or so from Arras up to the line to take over trenches from the Dublin Fusiliers. They had been only two hundred twenty in number plus twelve officers now serving with some two hundred of the Essex Regiment in the aforementioned composite force. Those of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had spent the 19<sup>th</sup> salvaging equipment and burying the dead. They had then remained there until the 23<sup>rd</sup>.



(Right above: *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* had been the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This had in fact been an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies.

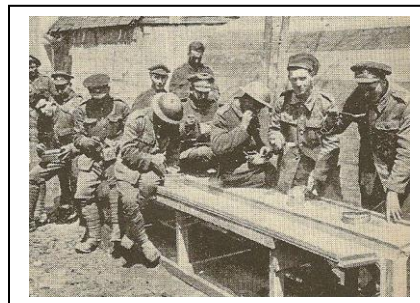
It had apparently not been a particularly successful venture, at least not in the sector of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions which had been accompanied by heavy losses.



And the Newfoundlanders also had sustained further casualties: ten...*killed in action*, three ...*missing in action*, and forty-eight...*wounded*.

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

(Preceding page: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery* – from a vintage post-card)



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

The *Battle of Arras* had by then been 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 be moving in a circular fashion on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches.



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

(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville* – as cited immediately above - in early May, perhaps the 7<sup>th</sup>, of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated*)

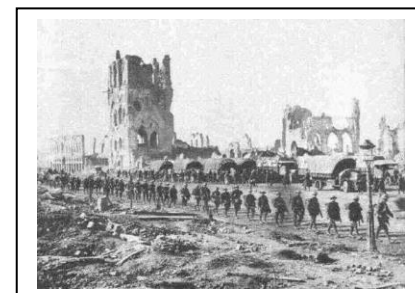
At the outset of June, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville, there to spend its time again re-enforcing, re-organizing and in training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

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



(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right* – photograph from 2014)

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



(continued)

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

Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.



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

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



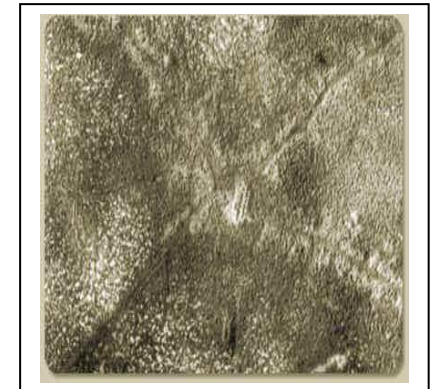
(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration*)

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 would be higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

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



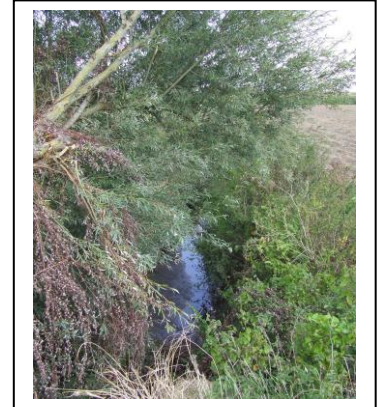
(Right: *The once-village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

\* \* \* \* \*

(continued)

As related further above, it had been at the end of the month of August – after the action at the *Steenbeek* but before that at the *Broembeek* – that Private Cooper, a soldier of one of the two drafts had reported to the Newfoundland Battalion at *Penton Camp*

There were then to be four weeks of relative calm which was for the Newfoundland Battalion to begin on August 24 with a four-day withdrawal from the forward area to the aforementioned *Penton Camp* to the north-west of Poperinghe. This reprieve would continue while the British forces re-enforced and re-organized after a month of fighting that had not gone as well as the British High Command had optimistically anticipated.



Private Cooper's unit would go back to war during the last days of what had been a fine month of September, in contrast to what had gone before – but, as the fighting started once more...so did the rain.

The offensive recommenced for the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 it came at the *Broembeek*.

(Right above: *An innocuous, placid stream shown here, in 1917 the Broembeek was a torrent which would flood the surrounding terrain, transforming it into a quagmire. – photograph from 2009*)

The son of William Cooper (killed by a rock fall in a mining accident on August 24, 1900, at Tilt Cove) and of Annie Cooper (née *Gillard*\*) – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of fifty cents from his pay – of Little Bay, Tilt Cove and Ward's Harbour before eventually of Millertown, he was brother to Annie-Beatrice, to William-Henry and to Mary-Margaret who drowned in Tilt Cove on April 27, 1894, at the age of five years.

*\*The couple was married at Little Bay on December 14, 1887. After William Cooper's demise, she re-married on January 8, 1906, to James Inder of Ward's Harbour (today Beaumont North) with whom she had a daughter, Olivia(?). James passed away due to tuberculosis on April 30, 1908.*

*On October 16 of 1909, Annie Inder (also found as Endor) wedded John Jones by whom she was to give birth to Ernest and Stanley. Apparently Ward, son of William Cooper, was to remain with his mother until the time of his enlistment.*

Private Cooper was reported as having been...*killed in action*...on October 9, 1917, while serving with 'B' Company in the fighting at the *Broembeek*. At home it was the Reverend William Eddy of Millertown who was requested to bear the news to his family.

Ward Mellage Cooper had enlisted at a *declared* nineteen years of age.

(continued)

Private Ward Mellage Cooper was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 4, 2023.

