

# Historica Canada Education Portal

## The Royal Newfoundland Regiment

### Overview

The Newfoundland Regiment suffered devastating losses at Beaumont-Hamel during the First World War. After this virtual annihilation, the Battalion was steadily brought back to full strength with the recruitment and training of new troops. The Newfoundlanders would go on to distinguish themselves in a number of important battles throughout the War including Gueudecourt, Monchy-le-Preux, Cambrai, and Bailleul. In recognition of their exceptional valour and skill, they were designated the Royal Newfoundland Regiment by King George V after the Battle of Cambrai, making them the only regiment to receive this honour throughout the First World War. The Royal Newfoundland Regiment was disbanded in 1919 but was resurrected as part of the Canadian Army Reserve Force.

Students are to analyze the role and function of the Newfoundland Regiment and contrast the regiment now with the regiment which fought so gallantly in the First World War.

### Aims

- To familiarize students with the military contributions and human sacrifice of the Newfoundland Regiment in the First World War

- To enhance the students' understanding of the inherent difficulties and deplorable conditions of trench warfare
- To involve the students in the utilization of both primary and secondary sources when conducting historical research
- To provide the students with an in-depth understanding of the human toll that war exacts, not only on soldiers but on entire communities
- For students to understand and appreciate the role played by the Newfoundland Regiment during the First World War
- For students to appreciate the true nature of heroism and the importance of realizing the contribution of those who made the ultimate sacrifice
- For students to understand the Royal Newfoundland Regiment of today and how it has been shaped by its experiences

## **Background**

The particular research project and presentation will be introduced as part of a unit of study on Canada's role in the First World War. The contribution of the Newfoundland Regiment at Beaumont-Hamel will be discussed in class before the students are assigned their research project.

## **The Royal Newfoundland Regiment**

### **Beaumont-Hamel**

The Allies committed some 27 divisions, a total of 750,000 men, to the Battle of the Somme. The heavy bombardment which preceded the planned assault failed to destroy either the barbed-wire or the concrete bunkers protecting the German soldiers. This meant that the Germans

were able to exploit their good defensive positions on higher ground when the British and French troops attacked at 7:30 a.m. on the morning of the 1 July 1916. The Newfoundland Regiment, as part of the 29th Division, were located opposite Beaumont-Hamel.

At 7:20 a.m., the planned explosion of a mine at Hawthorne Ridge went off as expected, signaling the attack to begin. At 7:30 a.m. the main assault began. As soldiers of the Inniskilling Fusiliers, the South Wales Borderers, the Royal Fusiliers, and the Lancaster Fusiliers climbed over the tops of their trench lines they were decimated by German machinegun fire. At 8:05 a.m. the support regiments which included the Scottish Borderers, The Middlesex Regiment and the Dublin Fusiliers attacked and were met with a similar fate. The Newfoundlanders were in the reserve trenches. At 8:40 a.m. they were ordered to move, but the order was countermanded. The soldiers were confident the assault had failed and no further charge would be ordered. Remarkably, at 9:15 a.m., having witnessed the preceding slaughter across No Man's Land, the Newfoundland Regiment was ordered to advance to their death and all did so without compromise. The Regiment was alone as the Essex Regiment was delayed in its attack by the congestion in the trenches caused by the dead and dying.

The Newfoundlanders left their trenches at St. John's Road and advanced forward a hundred yards to the British Front Line. They marched into a field of fire and charged to their death. In less than 30 minutes the assault had ended. Most never made it beyond the gap in the British barbed wire indicated by a lone tree (The Danger Tree). Colonel Hadow watched from a support trench as the Newfoundland Regiment bore the full brunt of German guns. It would take several days before the full accounting was complete, but by all standards the Newfoundland Regiment had been destroyed. The final grim tally revealed 12 officers

and 219 other ranks killed, 12 officers and 374 other ranks wounded, and 91 other ranks missing and presumed dead. Of the 801 officers and men that advanced that day 710 were killed, wounded or missing in action. The Regiment was all but wiped out.

At night, for the next four days, the survivors collected their dead comrades. Nearly twenty thousand soldiers lost their lives on the first day of the Somme offensive. On 6 July 1916, the remnants of the Newfoundland Regiment were ordered back first to Engleblemer and then to Maily Wood beyond the reach German guns. Few survivors from the Newfoundland Regiment had not suffered the loss of a brother, father, cousin, or friend. The Divisional Commander, General de Lisle wrote, "it was a magnificent display of trained and disciplined valor, and its assault only failed of success because dead men can advance no further." News of the Regiment's demise reached Newfoundland along with the casualty lists. There was scarcely a family or community that did not grieve the death of one of their own.

### **The Transformation of the Regiment**

On 1 April 1949 Newfoundland became Canada's tenth province. In October, His Majesty King George granted permission to remuster the Newfoundland Regiment as a militia unit. On 24 October the Newfoundland Regiment was placed on the Canadian Army Reserve Establishment. In November, King George approved the granting of the title "Royal" to the newly remustered regiment. The first unit Commanding Officer was Lieutenant Colonel J.P. O'Driscoll a veteran of both World Wars. In 1950, new companies were formed at Corner Brook and Grand Falls. In 1953, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment removed their Canadian Infantry Corps badge in favor of a Caribou Head, the symbol of the Regiment in the First World War. This was followed shortly by the

official recognition by Queen Elizabeth II of an alliance between the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and the Royal Scots which honoured the affiliation of both regiments throughout nearly two hundred years of military history.

Today, The Royal Newfoundland Regiment forms part of the 37 Canadian Brigade Group a section of Land Forces Atlantic Area which includes: 8 Canadian Hussars, 3 Field Artillery Regiment, 56 Field Engineer Regiment, 1 Royal New Brunswick Regiment, 2 Royal New Brunswick Regiment, 1 Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 2 Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 31 Service Battalion, 36 Service Battalion. Land Forces Atlantic Area controls both the Regular Force and Reserve components operating in the four Atlantic Provinces. LFAA includes four Regular Force units and 23 Reserve Units consisting of some 7,000 personnel. The mission of Land Forces Atlantic Area is to recruit and train highly effective combat soldiers capable of serving in any military operation in Canada or overseas and to assist in the provision of a Immediate Force for domestic operations or in aid of civil power.

Soldiers of the modern Royal Newfoundland Regiment train locally at their home garrisons and at summer training centers such as CFB Gagetown, New Brunswick and Aldershot, Nova Scotia. This specialized training ensures that each soldier is operationally ready to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Unique in the training system is the Reserve Concentration, which usually occurs in late summer. Soldiers in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment have served, with distinction, in nearly every overseas peace keeping unit authorized by the Canadian military. Deployments have included Cyprus, the Golan Heights, Sierra Leone and the former Yugoslavia as well as many others. Soldiers in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment continue to serve in this capacity today.

## **Activities**

**Time Allowance:** Two weeks of research; four to six class periods for presentations

### **Procedures:**

The students will be divided in groups of three or four. Each group will be required to retrace a battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment after Beaumont-Hamel (replacement troops) from the initial departure from St. John's, Newfoundland; their subsequent training in Canada, Britain, and France; and their participation in at least one important battle (ie Sully-Saillisel, Gueudecourt, Monchy-le-Preux, Langemarck, Poelcappelle, etc.) The presentations should include the contributions and sacrifices of particular individuals and snapshots of time spent away from the battlefield in order to put a human face on war for the students. Each group will also be required to conclude their presentation with a description of how the regiment has been memorialized both in Newfoundland and overseas.

### **Alternate Activity:**

Students (individually or in small groups) will prepare a technological presentation. The presentation should track the development of the Regiment from the First World War to today. How has it changed? How has it stayed the same? What functions did it serve then? Now? Students should highlight the different roles and functions the regiment has played over the last century. They should be given time to research the Newfoundland Regiment using the library and Internet. If possible, students could visit with a member of the regiment or visit memorials for the regiment to enhance the lesson. The teacher should provide a forum for the display of student work both within and outside the school.

## **Evaluation:**

Any appropriate teacher or teacher-students constructed rubric which assesses the quality of the historical research, the effectiveness of the PowerPoint presentation, and knowledge of the presenters (for examples, see [attached rubrics](#)).

## **Required Materials:**

Computer access, Microsoft Power Point, or other similar software, excerpts from Nicholson's book

## **Resources**

- Nicholson, G.W.L. The Fighting Newfoundlander: A History of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment McGill-Queens University Press, 2006
- [Veterans Affairs Canada](#)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Archives](#)
- [Library and Archives Canada](#)
- [Battle of Beaumont-Hamel – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)
- [First World War Collection – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)
- [Monuments of the First and Second World War – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)