

The Blue Puttees

**Produced by:
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**For:
The War Amps of Canada**

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THE BLUE PUTTEES

(1hr version)

THE BLUE PUTTEE LOUNGE

CLIFF: Hello, I'm Cliff Chadderton of The War Amputations of Canada. I'm standing in a piano bar in downtown St. John's, Newfoundland. We have come here to do a film about a very famous World War I regiment, and it may seem a little surprising, but in this brand new hotel, when I checked in, I found that it had this lounge which was dedicated to the exploits of a World War I regiment, seventy-five years ago.

But that shouldn't be too surprising, because every inhabitant of this province of Newfoundland and Labrador, they all know the story of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, and what that regiment did in World War I. And it is a very remarkable story.

We want to tell the story from the stand-point of the rest of Canada. When this regiment was formed, it was formed from absolute scratch! There was no militia in Newfoundland, which was a colony of Great Britain at that time. There was no military district. There were no military stores.

But what happened was this...

The Great Britain declared war in early August of 1914. A message came through to the governor of this colony saying that, "the empire was at war." And almost immediately the governor wired back saying, "I think we can raise 500 troops." Raise them from what?!

CLIFF: And that tells the whole story. This regiment was raised from scratch. The uniforms were almost homespun, but they were khaki. But when the time came to make the puttee - now a puttee is a strip of cloth that goes around a soldier's calf, like a legging - they could not find any more khaki broadcloth. So from some place, they scrounged blue broadcloth, and from that they made the puttees.

And today, in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, to be a descendant of a blue puttee is a very, very great honour.

SUVLA BAY

CLIFF: Hugh McWhirter, he was a typical Newfoundlander of the 1914 era. He was born in Bay of Islands, in Humbermouth near Cornerbrook. And in April of 1914, he took part in the sealing expedition, sailing aboard the *Newfoundland*; that of course was his first taste of tragedy.

ADELE: Little did Hugh McWhirter realize, as the ships returned from the Spring Hunt of 1914, that slightly more than a year later, he would be engaged in another great adventure -- half-way around the world in Gallipoli, fighting the Turkish Army in the ill-fated Dardanelles Campaign.

And like the other survivors of the great seal hunt tragedy, Hugh McWhirter was not likely to forget the images of his shipmates, found encased in ice and frozen in grotesque shapes. Some standing upright, as they took their last step looking for the mother ship, others frozen in the clasp of a brother or friend, meeting icy death together, from sleet and gale-force winds.

CLIFF: On a cold morning of September 20th, 1915, the Newfoundlanders landed at Suvla

Bay, which is just north of the Sea of Marmora, which splits the northern part of Turkey.

KEITH: The Newfoundlanders were to take over the front line support trenches from the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and had moved forward to undergo indoctrination from the seasoned troops, whom they would be relieving.

Hugh McWhirter was among the advance group. One of his fellow soldiers wrote home, "We had just moved into a forward trench when we were spotted by the enemy artillery. A Turkish shell landed at Hugh's feet. He was no more."

Regimental No. 902 Private Hugh Walter McWhirter, was the Regiment's first fatal casualty. His grave can be seen today at Hill Ten Cemetery on Suvla Plain in Turkey.

CLIFF: Toward the end of the Gallipoli Campaign, the Newfoundlanders as part of the British 29th Division, were given the job of holding the Turkish forces. And so they formed part of this defensive line, and the fighting was "hellish" for a number of weeks. Eventually, the British decided to get out of the Dardanelles and the Newfoundlanders had one last task. That was to retire to Cape Helles, where the British evacuation was taking place. They earned an enviable reputation and many a story was told of the bulky mules who suddenly found themselves flung bodily into the cargo carriers of a ship by the brawny-arms of the boys from the colony, who knew all about loading ships.

KEITH: The Newfoundlanders today can look with pride to the fact that it is the Newfoundland Regiment alone, that has the distinction of having fought in Gallipoli. No military units, from what was Canada back then, made it to the Dardanelles. What these magnificent Newfoundland troops did, however, is now part of the history of all of Canada, and we can all share in the pride of their achievements.

RAISED FROM SCRATCH

CLIFF: Raised from scratch! That was essentially the distinguishing feature of the Newfoundland Regiment, compared with the other regiments and battalions raised in Canada.

At one time, Great Britain had maintained a garrison on the Island Colony, but in 1869, the Imperial Government withdrew the financial support and the troops were disbanded. For the next, I think it was, 44 years, there was no military organization in Newfoundland. And of course, this was to have a singular effect on almost everything which happened to the Newfoundland Regiment, certainly when compared with the units of the Canadian Forces of that day.

ADELE: All this changed in 1914, when the Mother Country declared war on Germany and the Secretary of State for Colonies sent a message to St. John's. It said:

"War has broken out with Germany."

There was an immediate conference between the Governor, Sir Walter Davidson, and the Prime Minister, Sir Edward Morris, but neither could do a thing. A week later, the prominent citizens of Newfoundland had taken matters into their own hands. The Newfoundland Patriotic Association was formed, an event regarded even today as unique in the history of military organization.

CLIFF: It would be very easy to drive by this little monument and never even notice it. And yet, it is one of the most historic memorials in all of Newfoundland. As it says, *"First Training Ground, Newfoundland Regiment 1914."* This marks the parade ground on the shores of Lake Quidi Vidi, where the first 500 were placed in tents and did their parade ground drills.

ADELE: Pleasantville had been the city cricket grounds, a level expanse of green on the south side of Quidi Vidi Lake. This became the scene of a bustling encampment. Tents sprang up, kitchens were installed, latrines dug.

The War Office in London was unable to furnish uniforms, so local clothing manufacturers were commissioned. The result was ill-fitting, but serviceable uniforms and the "blue puttees" a dress distinction from any other troops who served under the British flag.

The S.S. Florizel, which regularly sailed the St. John's, Halifax, New York run, stood ready to transport 500 men and 25 officers to Great Britain.

The Captain hoisted anchor at 10:00 p.m. and the crowded vessels steamed slowly through the narrows into the Atlantic. It was just two months from the day that Britain had entered the war. Every man who reached the Dardanelles and later was to fight in France, was there because he wanted to be. This was a volunteer force in every sense of the word.

The Governor cabled to the Mother Country.

Governor Davidson:

"The men have been enrolled from all ranks of society. They are of fine physique, rather short in stature but thick-set and enduring. They are also handymen and very hardy and accustomed to hard work and little food. With almost no exceptions, the men are abstemious, they will render a good account of themselves."

BEAUMONT HAMEL

CLIFF: And now, let's go to the tragic battle of Beaumont Hamel.

July 1st, has always been known in Canada as the day in which we celebrated the birth of our nation. Originally, it was known as Dominion Day and later it was changed to Canada Day.

Not so in Newfoundland.

ADELE: For the school children and the general population in Newfoundland, however, July 1st had become, not a day to celebrate, but one to mourn and to remember the sacrifices of the Great War of 1914 to 1918.

KEITH: Why that one particular day? Any Newfoundlander will tell you. July 1st, 1916, was the Battle of Beaumont Hamel. 801 of Newfoundland's finest sons climbed out of their support trenches, starting at 8:45 a.m. Only 68 answered the roll call the next day.

In 30 minutes, the Battalion had all but been eliminated. Most of them never saw a German, never fired their rifles, and not one foot of ground was gained. This was the horror and the carnage of World War I, at its very worst. They were "cannon fodder" as the saying goes.

CLIFF: The plan had been rehearsed everywhere, that was when the Newfoundlanders were back in reserve. Let's turn now to a map which details this battle.

The idea was that the German front would be breached, and the Newfoundland Regiment together with the 1st Essex, would push through and make for the German

second position, a distance of some two miles.

KEITH: The official British war history tells what happened. The South Wales Borderers were in the first wave. The history states, "Within five minutes, nothing remained of the Borderers, but a few scattered individuals lying within a hundred yards of the German trench." The Newfoundlanders, lined up on the Beaumont Road (renamed St. John's road in their honour), needed only to peek over the parapet to know that a monumental fiasco was in the making. The Generals decided, however, to press on. The official history states, "When the military machine gets in motion, it is hard to divert or stop."

CLIFF: We can see the impossible task which the Newfoundlanders were asked to carry out.

Firstly, much has been written about the mine crater at Hawthorn Redoubt. Tons of explosives had been planted under the German front line positions. The question arose, "Should we wait until the British get near the position, thus gaining surprise, or should we blow it ahead of time, making sure there would be a path for our own troops?"

The decision eventually -- blow the mine before Zero hour. This had the effect of alerting the Germans all along the whole front.

How did the Commanding Officer see the battle?

KEITH: Hadow could see for himself, the open ground and trenches in front of them were so filled with bodies. They would have to advance, stumbling over the dead of the British troops who had gone before, in the open, in full view of the German machine gunners.

Nonetheless, Hadow passed the word to attack.

KEITH: He was the first man out of the trench, but his bravado didn't last long. He gestured with his walking stick toward the German lines when the bugles blew, then dropped into a trench to watch his men die. Later, apologists said he was following the standing instructions for the Battalion Commanders. "Do not advance with your men, as the risk of being killed is too high."

So Hadow was alive to take the tragic roll call the next day, and to command the Battalion in other later attacks in France. Commenting on the farce at Beaumont Hamel, Hadow simply noted in his diary, "The Regiment was nearly wiped out."

To add insult to injury, Hadow sent a message to the Governor in Newfoundland. It was devoid of any sympathy or honest feeling. It said:

HADOW: *"I deeply deplore the losses, but it will be some consolation to the people of Newfoundland to know that nothing could ever have been finer than the conduct of the Regiment and it has established a reputation in this our first battle, which will ever be remembered."*

KEITH: Cold words of comfort, indeed.

He had nothing further to say, and for years afterwards when he was living in retirement in England, he maintained his silence. His son told a writer, "My father never spent much time talking about what had happened during the war."

At least, the Divisional Commander spoke with more feeling. General Beauvoir de Lyle, wrote of the performance of the Newfoundlanders:

General Beauvoir de Lyle:

"It was a magnificent display of trained and disciplined valour, and its

assault only failed of success because dead men can advance no further."

KEITH: The phrase seems to tell it all. The Newfoundlanders, despite the odds, climbed over and around the bodies of those who had made the first assault, and kept going until they were all dead or wounded. The 69 who did survive, had been pinned down by vicious enemy fire and were able to crawl back to their own lines, only when they knew that the day had been lost.

CLIFF: Let's turn now to some word pictures of those who were actually at the battle.

KEITH: Bill Newbury was from St. John's. His first recollection was of Captain Eric Ayre, Commander of "D" Company, standing up to lead the attack and dying on the spot.

BILL: *"When I saw Captain Ayre killed, I expected I would be the next to go. I was assigned the job of carrying a wooden ladder, me and another man. We then heard the rip of the German machine guns. The ladder was splintered. My partner was killed. A second man grabbed the end of the ladder and he was killed. I then abandoned the ladder.*

KEITH: The copse was blasted bare of leaves by the Germans. One of the trees, standing gauntly isolated from the rest, marked the area where the enemy's bullets and shrapnel was the heaviest. Still, the gallant Newfoundlanders, determined to hang on, gathered around its base. At the end of the day, Frank Lind and at least two dozen other defiant figures could be seen, grotesque in the posture of death. It became known as "THE DANGER TREE" and still stands, 75 years later, withered and misshaped. A monument to the heroic Newfoundlanders who were to make it that far, only to die.

ADELE: The aftermath of the battle is remembered throughout Newfoundland, even today. Oh yes, the first official reports were glowing with pride and tribute. The Evening Telegram headlines read:

"British launch great offensive," and "German trenches captured over a 20 mile front."

The news accounts and editorials talked of a glorious victory. Then, on July 13th, twelve days after the assault, the colony at last was being told. The casualty lists filled column after column, of the daily newspapers.

A sense of anguish swept throughout the city of St. John's and into the smaller towns and outports. After all, the population of the Island Colony was only 250,000. The ranks of the Newfoundland Regiment accounted for a very large percentage of its able-bodied men.

For months afterwards, people spoke in a softer tone. They remembered the cheering crowds, which saw the contingents sail out of St. John's harbour. They knew now that many of them would not return, and the life of the Island Colony would be changed forever.

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

CLIFF: When the time came for the people of this proud colony to memorialize those who had lost their lives in World War I, they raised the funds.

But rather than build statues of bronze or marble monuments, they took a very different approach. They decided to create an institute of higher learning.

Adele Fifield, of Trinity East, is both a graduate of The War Amps CHAMP Program, because she is a leg amputee, and she is a graduate of this university.

ADELE: Thank you, Cliff. As a student of Memorial University of Newfoundland, or MUN as we affectionately call it, I was very conscious of the sacrifice that those men who fought in the war made for us.

CLIFF: Thank you Adele. Those men, whose sacrifices this University memorializes, would be justifiably proud of this, their legacy.

This fascinating story of how Memorial University came about, is yet another piece of vastly interesting history which should be known. Not just in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, but right across this country.

GUEUDECOURT

CLIFF: And now, we come to the battle of Gueudecourt. You know, if the story of the Newfoundland Regiment were to end at Beaumont Hamel, it would still be a magnificent story. A story of courage, story of everything that these islanders stood for. But the fact that after having been wiped out at Beaumont Hamel, they were able to re-group. They were on the parade ground, the survivors, within days.

ADELE: For 18 year-old George Chalker, the excitement of battle was about to begin. The Chalker family was well-known in St. John's. George's father, James, had founded a meat packing plant. The day war broke out, the 16 year-old George, lying about his age, enlisted. His father went down to the Armouries and brought him back home.

When George turned 18, he had his way and did enlist, joining the Battalion in France, a scant 12 days after the tragic battle at Beaumont Hamel. He told of the great exhilaration when the Battalion was ready to go back into action.

George: *"It was after midnight on October 9th, as I remember, that fall of 1916, in France was cold. They loaded us into buses, I think they called them charabancs. The vehicles had hard rubber tires and it was a rough ride."*

"When morning came, we were riding through an area which had seen more than two years of war, with the Germans and our troops seesawing back and forth."

"I remember Captain Bert Butler. He had gained great fame in the Regiment. The night before Beaumont Hamel, he had taken out a patrol and came back and told our Colonel Hadow that the attack planned for the next day would see the end of the fighting Newfoundlanders. How right he was."

"Anyway, Captain Butler sketched out our orders."

CLIFF: The orders called for the Newfoundlanders to advance some 800 yards. They were against the Brandenburg, or what was known as the "Iron Division" -- tough, tough, tough troops. On the left of the Newfoundlanders, we find the Essex Regiment.

KEITH: George Chalker takes up the story.

George: *"Some of us found shovels to dig a firing step. Then we heard the whistles and the German attack was underway. I thought we were done for when our own machine gunners, who had come up behind us, opened fire. I think I may have shot one or two Germans myself. They were good targets because the sun was in their backs. Anyway, the German counterattack petered out."*

"That night we were reinforced by the Hampshires."

KEITH: The stubbornness of the Newfoundland Regiment, in holding the Hilt Trench at Gueudecourt, was of great tactical benefit. The trench was a spearhead into the German positions which anchored the British defensive line for another two years.

The daily orders of October 14th read:

"The commanding officer wishes to convey to all ranks his admiration for the way in which the regiment held a front line trench under heavy shell fire for some 40 hours, and then repelled a counterattack."

This was, indeed, atonement for the devastation at Beaumont Hamel.

Colonel Hadow expressed it somewhat differently. These words, "Reputation gained by the regiment on July 1st, has been magnificently maintained."

THE FIGHTING NEWFOUNDLANDER

CLIFF: Military history buffs, tell us that you can characterize the World War I infantrymen in certain ways. For example, the British tommy was known for his discipline. The French Poilu was known for his fierce pride. The American doughboy for his "don't

give a darn" attitude. The Canadian has always been know for his initiative.

CLIFF: And I believe, that the fighting Newfoundlander has a blend of all of those characteristics. But he has a uniqueness that is his own. And that uniqueness was the demonstrated ability to fight as a unit.

SAILLY SAILLISEL

CLIFF: Any military buff will tell you, that the true mark of an infantry regiment is what it can do in a defensive role.

Thus far, the Newfoundlanders had proved the equal of any British unit in attack. It was at a little French town, with the odd name of Saily Saillisel, that the Newfoundland Regiment found itself in a defensive role. And here again, their achievement was absolutely remarkable.

KEITH: For three days, from the 1st to the 3rd of March in 1917, the Germans attacked with skirmishers, grenadiers, and artillery.

Tom Hussey, a "blue puttee" from St. John's, was confident. He told his Captain, "We can die here if we have to."

When the Germans penetrated one section of the trench, Lieutenant Gerald Byrne seized a pail of grenades, and rallied some of his men shouting, "No Newfoundlander gives way to a Boche!" He drove the Germans back, winning the Military Cross for his gallant action.

KEITH: During the little Battle of Saily Saillisel, the Newfoundlanders had twenty seven killed, and forty four wounded. But the Unit enhanced its growing reputation, by

proving it could stand its ground against the best the Germans had.

MONCHY LE PREUX

CLIFF: Monchy le Preux, another battle honour for the Newfoundland Regiment.

KEITH: While the 1st Canadian Army, complete with four divisions, was making history at Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917, the Newfoundlanders were fighting fifteen miles to the south. The objective was Monchy Le Preux. But before their division could reach it, there was some hard fighting.

CLIFF: Standing in the way of this "rollup" operation, was an immense obstacle called Infantry Hill, and, it was held by the Bavarian Division. The orders of the Newfoundland Regiment, "Attack and take Infantry Hill at all cost."

KEITH: The kickoff time was 5:30 in the morning of April 14th, 1917. Two hours later nothing had been heard. Captain Herbert Rendell, commanding "D" Company, wrote this about it afterwards. Here are some quotes:

Rendell: *"Our artillery barrage was very thin and failed to silence the enemy machine guns. We got to our objective, then we were scattered. I saw some of my men disappear into a little wood and heard nothing more of them. I saw "C" Company under Captain Rex Rowsell were over on my right. They were under heavy artillery fire and I never saw them again."*

KEITH: The 3rd Bavarian Division, was one of the crack formations of the German Army. They fought the battle of Infantry Hill and the British Forces were badly out-manoeuvred. The German General Ludendorf, developed a new doctrine called, "elastic defence in depth." On the other hand, the British defence doctrine still applied, "Here we must stand or fall."

CLIFF: In the battle for Infantry Hill, the Bavarian Divisions fell back a little and then they counterattacked in fierce formations. 600 Germans from the Bois du Sart and another 200 from the Bois du Vert. And at the end of the day, the Newfoundlanders were completely surrounded.

KEITH: But the failure of the attack on Infantry Hill, was only part of the story. The rampaging Germans decided then to retake Monchy itself, the first salient which had been captured originally on April 12th. This set the stage for another brilliant chapter in the history of the Newfoundlanders.

They occupied a defensive trench just outside the village and began vicious, but sporadic firing. The Germans, believing themselves to be opposed by a powerful force, held up their attack. They held their position for four hours, until British reinforcements could be brought up, and Monchy was saved.

As the British official history said, "They represented all that stood directly between the Germans and Monchy, one of the most vital positions on the whole battlefield."

CAMBRAI

CLIFF: And now, to the Newfoundlanders and Cambrai. We must realize that Cambrai was smack in the middle of the whole Western Front, which ran all the way from Ostend in the north, to Switzerland in the south. The Germans had decided to make a stand of course, at Cambrai, and they built two major defensive lines. The first was known as the Hindenberg line, and it was backed up by the Hindenberg Support line. The second German defensive line, was known as the Masnieres Beaurevoir line, which was guarding the very outskirts of the city of Cambrai.

KEITH: November 20th was the date set for the big Allied offensive, which the British called the "Great Experiment." For the first time, tanks would be used as the major weapon.

A bold plan, and its success would depend on the ability of the 29th Division to capture the two strong points in front of the Masnieres Beaurevoir line -- Marcoing and Masnieres. The first strong point, Marcoing, was the objective of the Newfoundland Regiment on November 20th.

Captain Tait's diary tells the story. It was the greatest victory for any single battalion in the November campaign, and in the three years of the war.

TAIT: *"Shortly after 10:00 a.m. we heard the bugle call to advance. Fortunately, there was a heavy mist so the German aircraft were grounded. Four tanks were churning up the ground ahead of our forward companies. For the first time that I could remember, we were walking in a leisurely manner and, something which escaped me at first, the air smelled fresh. Other places men lay half-buried. Everywhere we were assailed by the putrid smell of decayed bodies. Once you have smelled that sickly odour you never forget it."*

TAIT: *"I knew we had to get across the Quentin Canal, and I remember looking through the mist and seeing the Marcoing Copse. When our tactical headquarters group got there, "D" Company, under Herb Rendell, had already captured it. Next we were on our way towards what showed up on the map as a canal lock, with a footbridge."*

"We came under fire and the Colonel sent a message up, telling me to find out what was holding us up. It was machine guns, and then a bloody miracle. A tank which had been patrolling our side of the canal showed up."

CLIFF: The war diaries tell us that the Newfoundland Regiment did everything that was expected of them in this battle of Cambrai, and perhaps more. The reason that the battle failed was a very simple one. And if we go to the map we can see why. There was a road leading from the British positions right smack through Masnieres, and Rumilly, and on into Cambrai.

But right here, there was a bridge which crossed the St. Quentin Canal. The third British tank over that bridge, collapsed it. And, of course, tanks can't cross canals without bridges. That was where the "Great Experiment" in the first battle of Cambrai, and the tanks failed.

KEITH: In terms of ground gained and lost, the "Great Experiment" with the tanks produced little profit. The tanks had proved their worth in open country, but could only get across canals and rivers if the infantry could protect the necessary bridges.

There was, however, no criticism of the Newfoundland Regiment. They had penetrated almost to the enemy's reserve line, and then their defence of Masnieres stopped the German offensive cold in its tracks. Told he was to be replaced, the

Brigade Commander said of them:

Commander: *"I don't care what happens to me now. I have commanded the most wonderful troops in the world, who have fought the best fight any man can see and live. I feel my career has been crowned."*

ADELE: Seven years later, when the Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig, came to St. John's to unveil the National War Memorial, he selected, as the single most notable achievement, the Newfoundlanders' resistance against the Germans at Cambrai. His words were:

"The story of the defence of Masnieres and the part which the Newfoundlanders' battalion played in it, is one which, I trust, will never be forgotten."

After the battle, the Regiment, and in fact all of Newfoundland, received the glorious news. The Newfoundland Regiment was awarded the prefix "Royal." The War Office stated in a letter dated January 31, 1963, and we quote:

"This is the only instance, in which this honour was conferred during the great war, though other regiments and corps received the title after cessation of hostilities."

BATTLE HONOURS

CLIFF: In the telling of this magnificent story of the Newfoundland Regiment, it's possible only to touch upon the highlights. But if one is to look at the battle honours of this Regiment, that's where we can fill in the blanks. The battle of Langemarck, for example.

You know, such was the importance of the success of Langemarck that the Commanding Officer, Sir Hubert Gough, issued an army order, calling on all other divisions to emulate the example. And, of course, the Newfoundlanders had been in the vanguard of that attack.

KEITH: In those times between the major battles, the Newfoundlanders remained busy, often on their own initiative. One example serves to illustrate. Forbes-Robertson, who had reverted to Major when Colonel Hadow came back, formed a group called, somewhat dramatically, "The Raiders." The Regimental Diary tells of an exploit on July 17th of 1917, where this feisty group carried out a trench raid bringing back an important prisoner from the 102nd Saxon Regiment.

Stan Goodyear from Grand Falls, was one of five brothers serving in France. He was the Battalion Transport Officer, and much loved. The troops knew that, whatever the obstacles, he would get through with supplies and ammunition. On October 9th of 1917, he was crossing a particularly dangerous stretch of road with his horse pulling the wagons. He was killed instantly, by a stray German shell. He was awarded a Military Cross, posthumously.

Another chance shell took the life of one of the Regiment's best known soldiers, Lance Corporal John Sheewak, the Eskimo from Labrador. His loss was felt keenly. He had become a real favourite among the troops, and even on one occasion while in the training barracks of Ayr, Scotland, he dressed up in a highland kilt.

CLIFF: Looking back at what is known as the battle of Poelcappelle. The somewhat small, but very important part, which the Newfoundlanders played in that battle, was at a place called Broembeek Creek. And, believe me, that is a name which the Newfoundlanders would never forget. Nevertheless, the fighting at Broembeek, which earned the battle honour of Poelcappelle for the Regiment, was no small victory.

They got through to their third objective, or nearly so. And, at the end of the battle, they were able to dig in along the Poelcappelle Road, until they were relieved by the 2nd Hampshires.

ADELE: Certainly the battle honour of Poelcappelle had been earned, not only from the gallant carefree way in which they disposed of the enemy machine gun nests, but for the skilful tactical manoeuvres, directed by their Company Commanders, including Joseph Nunns.

Captain James Ledingham, of St. John's, had been killed in the operation. The unusual award of the Military Cross to a Non-Commissioned Officer, was a further tribute. This went to Company Sergeant Major Albert Taylor, who had taken over from Captain Ledingham.

Other battle honours read like a blow-by-blow description of that terrible War. Gallipoli, 1915; Arras, 1917; Ypres, 1917-1918; Cambrai, 1917; Courtrai; The Somme; Mount Kemmell.

No British Regiment has more.

1918 - THE FINAL YEAR

CLIFF: 1918 - At last, a four year struggle might be coming to an end. The Newfoundlanders, at the start of the year, found themselves back in the Passchendaele section.

General Haig, told his Commanders at the start of the year, to expect a very, very difficult time, because the British knew that the Germans were going to mount a major offensive.

The first action in which the Newfoundland Regiment found itself, was at a place called Bailleul. And it was on April the 9th, George Chalker takes up the narrative at this point. He talked about it many years later, and I was privileged to be sitting in on that meeting. George held in his hand, a copy of Sir Douglas Haig's order of the day, and it read:

CLIFF: "There is no other course open to us, but to fight it out! Every position must be held to the last man, there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind alike, depend on the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment."

And I could just imagine how the Newfoundlanders felt, when they saw that particular order of the day. Anyway, George reminisces:

George: *"It was a rough, rough time. We were being shelled with mustard gas. The British Army was falling back all along the line. We lost places like Passchendaele and Poelcappelle. Then we were told to make a stand at Bailleul. I think they called the whole show the Battle of the Lys (like in Fleur de Lys). I think Bailleul started about April 13th. No, it was April 12th. The next day, the 13th, I got wounded for the second and last time. I had gunshot wounds in the thigh, and the leg, and ended up an amputee. The war was over for me."*

CLIFF: Let's backtrack to the battle of Courtrai for a moment. The Royal Newfoundlanders were on the left of the advance, together with the Second Royal Scots Fusiliers. The objective was Steenbeek, and then on to St. Catherine Capelle to capture the railway line running north from Courtrai.

Attempts were made by various small parties, which resulted only in more casualties. Lieutenant Stanley Newman, of St. John's, with a handful of his men, succeeded in

reaching a small depression, but could get no closer to the German guns.

Something had to be done, and what transpired was undoubtedly the bravest act of

anyone in the
Newfoundland
Regiment in
the entire war,
and it was
carried out by
a 17 year-old,
Private
Thomas
Ricketts of
Middle Arm,
White Bay.
Like many of
his
Newfoundland
buddies, he
had lied about
his age on
enlistment.

CLIFF: He had already been wounded at Marcoing, back in November of 1917, but had rejoined the Battalion in time for the fighting at Bailleul. The extract from the London Gazette of January 6, 1919, tells the story of his heroism in the battle of October 14, 1918.

KEITH: Here, we paraphrase:

"Private Ricketts at once volunteered to go forward. The enemy, seeing an opportunity to get the field guns away, began to bring up gun teams. Private Ricketts, realizing the situation, doubled back 100 yards, under heavy machine gun fire, got further ammunition, and dashed back to the Lewis gun. By very accurate fire, he drove the enemy and gun teams into a farm. By anticipating the enemy intention and his utter disregard of personal safety, Private Ricketts secured the further supply of ammunition, which directly resulted in these important captures and undoubtedly saved many lives."

Private Ricketts was the youngest winner of the Victoria Cross in the British Army.

CLIFF: After Ingoyghem, the British Army had finally completed its advance from the Lys, through to the Scheldt, a distance of some 35 miles.

On October 26th, 1918, just fifteen days before the Armistice, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment finally handed over its positions for the last time to the British army. And isn't it interesting, that the last battle casualty of this regiment was a man by the name of Ronald Courage. He was a regimental cook, miles behind the lines, hit by a stray German shell.

And if that doesn't sum up all of the travesty, as well as the glory of this story, I can't think of anything else that does.

LOSSES

CLIFF: To understand Newfoundland, one must know a bit about the character and history of what is the oldest colony. And nothing indicates this better than the traditional way in which they decided that they would commemorate their war dead.

In 1919, the British adopted the poppy from Flanders Fields. But two years before that, the Newfoundlanders had decided to do it just a little differently. They had chosen the beautiful blue Forget-me-not, as their symbol of remembrance, and they wear it to this day.

The monuments marking the last resting place of those brave Newfoundlanders stand out. Even as the soldiers from the island colony stood out at Beaumont Hamel and elsewhere. The visiting pilgrim will see a magnificent bronze statue of a caribou, always facing the enemy positions. These magnificent animals, thousands of which still roam the province, represent a remarkable tribute to those heroic men who came from a colony across the ocean, never to return.

ADELE: When the Florizel sailed for the United Kingdom on October 4th of 1914, there were some 500 blue puttees aboard. The total enlistments for the Regiment in the four years of war was 6,241.

Total fatal casualties were 1,305. In other words, one in every five paid the supreme sacrifice, that is 20 percent. Comparisons are sometimes odious, but the corresponding proportion for the Canadian Expeditionary Force was 9.6 percent.

But the loss of many of its finest young men was felt in Newfoundland, to a much greater degree than in other countries.

The decimation of the finest sons of two families, tell the story.

ADELE: The Goodyears of Grand Falls were movers and shakers. Their interests ran all the way from retail stores to road building. Of the six boys, five joined the service. Hedley, graduate of the University of Toronto, was killed near Beaucourt on August 8, 1918. Ray Goodyear, the youngest, was killed on October 12th, 1916, at Gueudecourt - his first battle. Stan Goodyear met his death on October 9th, 1917, near Langemarck.

The two brothers who came back, Ken and Joe, along with Roland, who remained in Newfoundland to look after the family's interests, did well enough. But if the other three brothers, one of them with a university education from Toronto, had come back, is it not fair to speculate that Grand Falls and the surrounding community would have been the better for the combined effort which would have been possible with all six sons of a great family?

Probably even more tragic, was the loss of the Ayre dynasty. C. R. Ayre was a merchant prince, and a benevolent one in St. John's. The development of his enterprises would need the impetus that would come from his four grandsons. They were all killed on that fateful July 1st, on The Somme in 1916. Think about it!

WAR MEMORIAL - DOWNTOWN ST. JOHN'S

CLIFF: When I stand in front of a war memorial, be it at Beaumont Hamel in France, or here in downtown St. John's, Newfoundland, I realize that it is a tribute to those who did not come back. But to me, there's a much more significant meaning, a deeper meaning.

CLIFF: Let's use the words, "what might have been." Because we have to realize in terms of economic loss, that the potential of those young men who didn't come back, the potential died with them. Many people in Canada are not aware of the fact that in 1914, when the British Empire went to war, Newfoundland was the most prosperous colony in the whole British Empire.

What happened? In World War I, in four years, they lost approximately 10 percent. And that 10 percent were the best. They left their lives, they left their potential, they left their imagination. They left everything on the battlefields of Flanders, in France and some of them in Gallipoli.

What does that absence mean? Well, it doesn't take too much imagination. If this was the most prosperous colony, it had everything. It had raw resources, it had minerals, it had forestry, it had fishing. But what it needed after World War I, was it needed manpower. And that did not happen.

I would like to read from a book called *The Danger Tree* by David McFarlane. I think he says it, as well as I have heard it said anywhere. He says...

"But the greatest change the war brought was one that no one could measure. It was an absence. It was marked eventually with war memorials and parades, which by their very existence, contradicted what they were supposed to represent."

"The best were gone... or doomed..., and what the world would have been like had they not died is anybody's guess."

Perhaps, we should consider a case in point. Sergeant Major Cyril Gardner, was from British Harbour. When he went away to war in 1914, British Harbour was a bustling outport community. After World War I, British Harbour petered out. It just doesn't exist any more.

CLIFF: But one has to wonder, that if the Cyril Gardners had come back, and had been able to pour their expertise, to pour their work, and their labour, and their capital, and their adventurous spirit; had been able to pour it into the outport community, would they really have disappeared? I can tell you one thing, that the descendants of Cyril Gardner do not think so!

British Harbour

(Sang by Wayne Rostad)

Once there were fishing boats moored in the harbour
 And work on the stages by the water,
 There were kids playing duck
 On little brook hill above the harbour.
 And once upon a time, the church was filled with people,
 Gathered every Sunday by the bell in the steeple,
 All what remains of the souls of the dearly departed.
 My mind paints a picture of a dory on the water,
 Holding from the little empty houses in the harbour,
 Mothers and fathers, sons and daughters.
 I see people with tragedy written on their faces,
 The fear and pain of displacement,
 Of leaving their beloved harbour.
 But in spite of all the change, images remain.
 And sometimes voices call out names,
 In the wind that blows through the ruins of British Harbour.
 Oh I wish that the fishing boats were still in the harbour,
 Men at work on the stages by the water.
 I'd love to play duck, and share the children's laughter.
 But the bells in the steeples don't ring any longer,

The little houses are gone forever,
All that remains of the souls of the dearly departed.
But in spite of all the change, images remain.
And sometimes Caroline calls my name
In the wind that blows through the ruins of British Harbour,
The wind blows through the ruins of British Harbour.