



Self-guided tour map

Canada



St. John's Road Trench, 1916

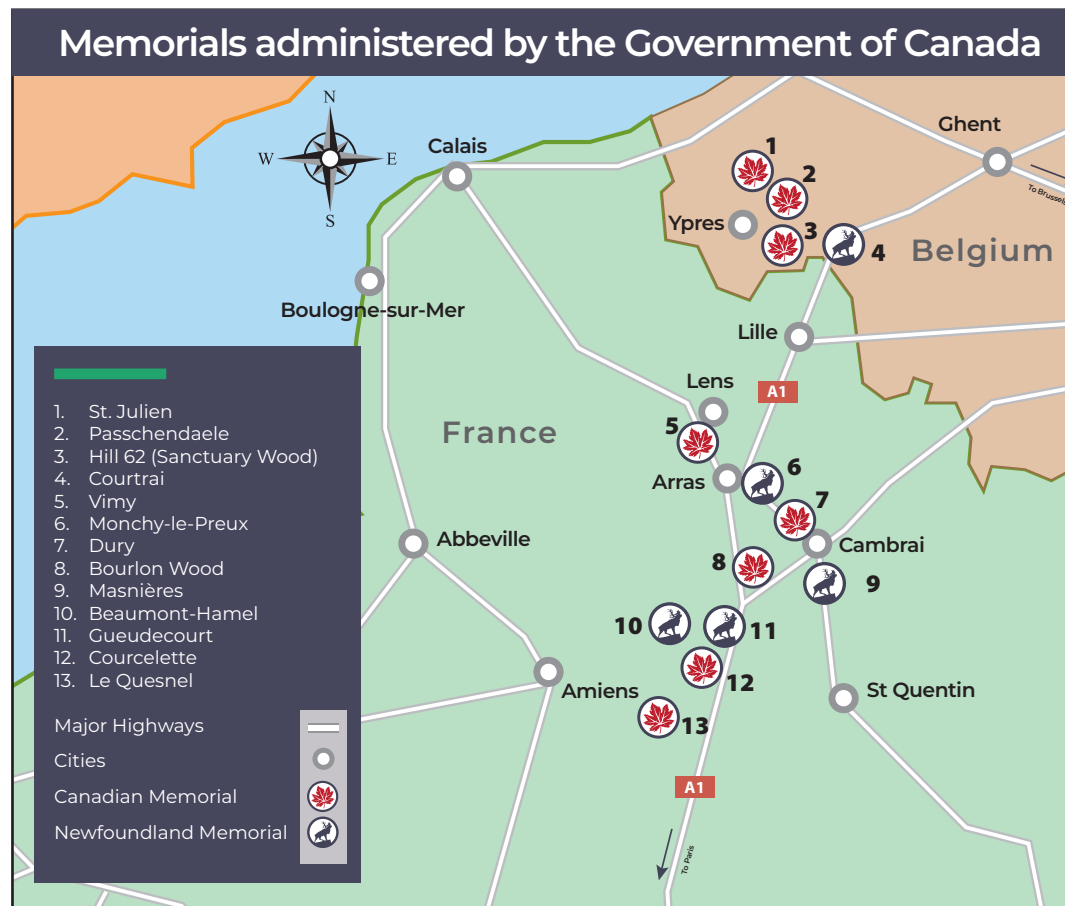
Welcome to Beaumont-Hamel

Five memorials in Europe recognize Newfoundlanders who served in the First World War. The largest of these memorials is the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial. At its heart stands a great bronze caribou—the emblem of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. It watches over the rolling fields where many fell and have no known final resting place.

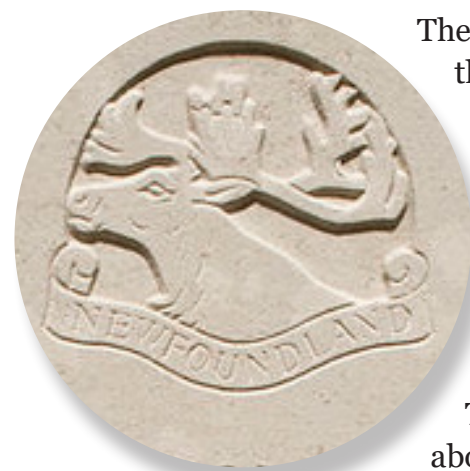
Newfoundland in the First World War

When war broke out in August 1914, Newfoundland was a dominion of the British Empire and not yet a part of Canada. Once Britain declared war, Newfoundland—like Canada—was at war. The people of Newfoundland responded with a great outpouring of patriotism. Many rushed to enlist. From a total population of about 242,000, more than 12,000 Newfoundlanders would serve in uniform.

The Newfoundland Regiment—a unit of the British Army—first saw action in the Gallipoli campaign in Turkey. The regiment was then sent to France's Western Front for the opening day of the Battle of the Somme.



The Battles of the Somme and Beaumont-Hamel



The Allied assault on the Somme began in the early hours of 1 July 1916. Thousands of British and French soldiers advanced across No Man's Land on a front more than 39 kilometres wide. Despite intense preparations, the battle would be a bloody one, with more than 60,000 casualties, including 20,000 dead.

The 1st Newfoundland Regiment attacked at about 9:15 a.m. near the villages of Beaumont and Hamel. Unfortunately, the assault lacked the element of surprise. The initial Allied bombardment had failed to damage most of the German defenses. In less than half an hour, the Regiment suffered the second highest casualty rate for a battalion on that day. More than 700 were killed, wounded or missing. This tragedy touched almost every Newfoundland family.

Legacy and memory

Rebuilt with fresh recruits, the Newfoundland Regiment served during the rest of the First World War with distinction. In 1918, the Regiment received the designation "Royal". It would be the only unit of the British Army to earn that honour during the war years. By the end of hostilities, more than 6,200 Newfoundlanders had served in the Regiment. Over 1,300 lost their lives, with another 2,500 wounded or taken prisoner.

After the war, families and communities across Newfoundland mourned the loss of so many young lives. They soon turned their attention to honouring those who served. Newfoundland built a national war memorial in its capital, St. John's, and officially designated July 1 as Memorial Day. This custom is still observed today.

Newfoundlanders also selected five memorial sites in France and Belgium. The first regimental padre in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Father Thomas Nangle, led the selection and setup of these sites. The five sites together are known as the Trail of the Caribou. The largest of these sites is the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial. It sits on more than 30 hectares of the ground over which the 1st Newfoundland Regiment advanced on 1 July 1916.

29th Division Monument

The Newfoundland Regiment served most of the First World War as part of the 29th Division's 88th Brigade. Formed in early 1915, the 29th Division first saw action in the Gallipoli Campaign of that same year. They later saw action at the Battle of the Somme on the morning of July 1, 1916. On that day at Beaumont-Hamel, Newfoundland soldiers wore the 29th Division's red triangle on their shoulders, as seen on the monument dedicated to the Division (2) at Beaumont-Hamel. They also wore the cap badges featuring the Regiment's caribou emblem.

St. John's Road Trench

After arriving at Beaumont-Hamel in early 1916, the 1st Newfoundland Regiment trained and dug trenches in preparation for the upcoming British offensive. The St. John's Road Trench (3) was a reserve trench and was named after the capital city of Newfoundland. On the morning of July 1, 1916, the 1st Newfoundland Regiment waited in this trench for their order to advance. As part of the second wave of attack, their original objective was to take German positions approximately four kilometres away.

Caribou Monument and commemorative plaques

The bronze caribou (4) at the centre of the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial was designed by British sculptor Captain Basil Gotto. It pays tribute to the Newfoundland Regiment's caribou emblem. Six sculptures were cast. One stands at each of the five battlefield memorials in Europe and the sixth stands in St. John's. Surrounded by rocks and shrubs native to Newfoundland, the caribou faces in the direction Newfoundland troops advanced on 1 July 1916.

There are 821 names inscribed on three bronze tablets at the base of the monument in memory of Newfoundlanders who died during the First World War with no known grave. The names include 592 members of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 114 sailors of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve and 115 merchant mariners.

Preserved trenches

Early in the war, there was a stalemate in trench warfare along the Western Front. This saw front line trenches zigzag across nearly 1,000 kilometres of France and Belgium. Today, the preserved trenches provide a good idea of the limited view soldiers had as they prepared for battle in 1916. Reinforced with sandbags, the walls of the trenches were originally about 2.5 metres tall. Soldiers needed periscopes to see enemy positions across No Man's Land. Wooden platforms, called duckboards, attempted to provide a dry passageway. The curved shape of the trenches protected soldiers from shelling and raids. With little protection from the elements though, life in the trenches was miserable. Soldiers were often wet, muddy and cold as they lived side-by-side with pests such as rats, lice and fleas.

British front line

On July 1, the 29th Division's 87th Brigade stood on the most forward position occupied by the Allies (5). From this position at 7:30 a.m., the 87th Brigade began the first wave of the Allied advance on Beaumont. Unfortunately, seven days and nights of preliminary artillery bombardments had not inflicted as much damage as expected to the German lines. The 87th Brigade sustained heavy losses and was soon pinned down in No Man's Land. The 1st Newfoundland Regiment began its advance almost two hours later. By then, German machine gunners and riflemen had targeted the narrow passages cut in the barbed wire.

Preserved battlefield

Deep craters still scar today's grassy landscape and hint at the danger Allied forces faced as they advanced directly into German fire. The first wave of the Allied attack was unsuccessful. Those waiting to go in as part of the second wave received new orders to reinforce the 87th Brigade. At 9:15 a.m., the 1st Newfoundland Regiment and the 1st Essex Regiment left the St. John's Road Trench and advanced. Moving



slowly through communication trenches filled with wounded men and exposed to German artillery, the 1st Essex were quickly pinned down by German fire. For their part, the 1st Newfoundland Regiment moved across ground which was out of sight of most German forces. However, as they reached the ridgeline, Newfoundland soldiers were silhouetted in the morning sunlight and were now a clear target for the opposing force. As the only soldiers moving on the battlefield, they were subjected to the full wrath of the German army.

Danger Tree

In the face of heavy machine gun fire, few members of the 1st Newfoundland Regiment made it past the initial barbed wire defenses. Many of those who did were forced to take cover behind a small ridge next to one of the few landmarks on the ravaged landscape: a lone tree. Located halfway

across No Man's Land, the Danger Tree (6) marked an area of particularly heavy fire. It is the site of a high concentration of Newfoundland casualties. After the battle, the tree's broken and twisted remains emerged as an important symbol of the scope of devastation the fighting caused. Today, a replica of the original tree stands in its place.

The Newfoundland advance was called off at 9:45 a.m. After only 30 minutes of battle, the 1st Newfoundland Regiment would suffer an 86% casualty rate.

Wellington Trench

Despite the high number of casualties sustained by Allied forces on July 1, the Battle of the Somme continued until November 1916. Although originally planned for the initial attack, Wellington Trench (7) wasn't built until late July. Its position further forward in No Man's Land later provided an advantage. On 13 November 1916, the British front line used the trench as the 51st (Highland) Division finally captured Y Ravine and the villages of Beaumont and Hamel.

German front line and Y Ravine

When Allied forces advanced on July 1, Germany's Württemberg 26th Division had occupied its position (9) near Beaumont-Hamel for 18 months. The German forces had a good view of the surrounding area and clear lines of fire from their trenches. Having arrived in the Somme well in advance of the Allies, German positions were able to develop well-fortified positions with deeply dug trenches, a well-established tunnel system and dugouts for soldiers stationed there.

51st (Highland) Division Monument

Unveiled in 1924, the 51st (Highland) Division monument (10) is located at Beaumont-Hamel. It recognizes the Division's capture of the Y Ravine and of both villages during November 1916's Battle of the Ancre. This battle was the last great offensive of the Battle of the Somme. A Gaelic plaque on the front of the monument reads *La a'Blair s'math n Cairdean*, which means "friends are good on the day of battle."

Legend

1. Visitor Centre
2. 29th Division Monument
3. St. John's Road Trench
4. Caribou Monument and commemorative plaques
5. British front line
6. Danger Tree
7. Wellington Trench
8. Y Ravine Cemetery
9. German front line
10. 51st (Highland) Division Monument
11. Hunters Cemetery
12. Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery N° 2

- Road
- - - Walking trail
- Trenches
- P Parking
- ♂ ♀ Toilets