

They have always been—and eternally will be—‘The First Five Hundred’.

Who were the First 500?

In fact, they numbered 22 officers and 521 mostly unmarried volunteers; 543 military men, all told. They comprised the first of 27 drafts of Newfoundlanders (and others) enlisted in the Newfoundland (from November 1917: Royal Newfoundland) Regiment to serve in ‘The Great War’, 1914 to 1918. (Not until May 11, 1918 was Regiment membership compulsory.) Regimental records (as best can be interpreted) reveal ‘The First 500’ did not include all of the first 521 volunteer recruits to be enlisted. Rather, they were chosen from among the first 616 men; most of them native to the Island of Newfoundland or Labrador, who signed to join the Regiment, at St. John’s, in 1914. Although enrollment of volunteers began on August 21, 1914, formal enlistment did not commence until September 1, 1914 (three days before the 1914 version of the Regiment (first established in 1795) was authorized by Newfoundland’s Volunteer Force Act). The first—and only—volunteer enlisted on that date was eventually assigned Regimental No. 33. Among those enlisted on September 5, 1914 was the volunteer given Regimental No. 1.

Last of the volunteers to form part of the ‘First 500’ enlisted on 02 October 1914. He was assigned Regimental No. 616, and died in combat at Beaumont Hamel.

More than a few enlisting volunteers overstated their ages when requested to attest (swear) they were the required minimum enrollment age: 19 years. (They didn’t have to produce their birth certificates.)

Of the 521 enlisted men, 386 (74%) were from St. John’s; 131, from 44 other Island communities; one, from Labrador (Battle Harbour); 2 from England, and 1 from Quebec. (Later Newfoundland Regiment drafts—besides Newfoundlanders and Labradorians (1 of them a Mount Cashel Orphanage resident)—included adolescent and adult males from England; Scotland; British Columbia; Ontario; Quebec; Nova Scotia; Portugal, and what was then Russia.) Except for two officers (one—the operational commander—who left on October 2, 1914 on the S.S. Carthaginian, and another who departed on November 2, 1914 on the S.S. Mongolian) and 2 volunteers (who departed on October 24, and November 2, 1914), the rest of ‘The First 500’—that is 20 of 22 officers and 519 of 521 enlisted men—embarked for combat on October 3, 1914. At 4 PM that date, they paraded from their Pleasantville tent training facility (established September 3, 1914) to St. John’s Harbour, in stride with ‘The Banks of Newfoundland’ (composed in 1820 by the Island’s then Supreme Court Chief Justice, Francis Forbes). On the Harbour’s north side, at Furness Withy Company pier, they crowded onto a passenger (sometimes sealing) vessel, the S.S. Florizel (commissioned in Scotland in 1909 for 181 passengers), which had been converted to a troop carrier. By sunset, they were transported to mid-Harbour; where Florizel anchored.

Some well-wishers who, on October 3, 1914, ringed the Harbour shores or loitered on Harbour waters, lingered overnight and through the next day during a long farewell. Not until 10 PM on October 4, 1914 did Florizel weigh anchor and exit the Harbour, to join a convoy of Canadian contingent vessels for a 10-day voyage to England; destination: Southampton (altered to Plymouth during the voyage, for security reasons).

What happened to the First 500?

In England (on Salisbury Plain); later in Scotland (at Fort George, Edinburgh and Stobs Camp), then back in England (at Aldershot), most of ‘The First 500’ were further hardened for combat. On August 20, 1915, by train and boat, the combat-ready portion of members of ‘The First 500’ travelled to European battle theaters as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). They

anticipated adventure. They encountered anguish. Their first military engagement was at Gallipoli, Turkey where, on September 23, 1915, they suffered their first combat casualty (20 years old).

By then, and since, they have also been called the 'Blue Puttees'. To distinguish them from other BEF contingents, they were originally kitted with dark blue cloth leggings known as 'blue puttees', apparently obtained from the St. John's Church Lads' Brigade. ('Puttee' is from the Hindi term, 'patti', meaning 'bandage'.) The puttees were later replaced, in Europe, with khaki serge to conform with B.E.F service uniforms. (Contrary to often-published myth, whether or not khaki serge was available in Newfoundland when 'The First 500' were originally outfitted did not influence the choice of blue puttees; probably intended to distinguish 'The First 500' from other allied combat contingents.)

Of the 521 enlisted men, 41 would later return to St. John's during World War I, on furlough or duty; then, again, set out for military service in Europe (France and Belgium). One of them did so twice. Among them, 18 had been wounded (2 of them, twice) before returning to St. John's and, after arriving back in Europe, 8 of them were wounded, and 5 died: 3 in action, and 2 from illness.

Thirty-one of the 521 enlisted men never engaged in military action with the Regiment. They did not proceed beyond training (October 1914 to August 1915) in England (1) or Scotland (30). They included the Regiment's first non-combat casualty (20 years old), who died from illness (pneumonia) on New Year's Day, 1915 at Fort George. The other 30 disengaged from the Regiment either because their initial one-year term of duty expired and they chose not to re-enlist with the Regiment, or they deserted, or were discharged as medically unfit. Five of the 31, though, later transferred to, or enlisted with, allied combat forces, and 1 joined the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve.

The remaining 490 volunteers—among 'The First 500'—saw combat. Among them, 151 died in, or resulting from, action. At Beaumont Hamel, 74 (including 1 classified 'missing/presumed dead') were killed and 6 later died from Beaumont Hamel wounds. Elsewhere, 54 perished during battle (also including 1 reported 'missing/presumed dead') and 17 died from battle wounds.

Twelve of the 490 volunteers who performed combat duty were removed from harm's way by the enemy. They were captured in France (10 at Monchy in April 1917, and 2 at Mesnieres in December 1917). Eight of them had earlier been wounded: 1 at Beaumont Hamel; 6 elsewhere, and 1, both at Beaumont Hamel and elsewhere. The 12 captured volunteers remained prisoners of war for periods of about 12 to 22 months. Not until January 1919 was the last of them repatriated (after treatment, in Switzerland, for lingering combat injuries and partial foot amputation by his German captors).

One of the 12 served on a committee which risked death by complaining (successfully, in the result) to the enemy about their treatment while imprisoned (principally, in what is now Poland).

The 'First 500' officer who debriefed them after the war became a Newfoundland lawyer in 1921. (The only Newfoundland lawyer to serve with 'The First 500' was an officer who died of Beaumont Hamel wounds.)

Among the 490 'First 500' battle-active volunteers, 381 (78%) were hospitalized at least once. (Included were: 122 hospitalized twice; 35 of them, 3 times; 8 of them, 4 times, and 1, on 5 occasions.)

Of the 381 hospitalized volunteers, 230 were treated for war wounds (at least 2 from wounds

caused by ‘friendly fire’), consisting of: 80 wounded at Beaumont Hamel, 112 wounded elsewhere, and 38 wounded both at Beaumont Hamel and elsewhere. The other 151 hospitalized volunteers were treated for illnesses, mostly incidental to combat (such as weather or horrific trench conditions). But not all of the 381 hospitalized volunteers were released following treatment. In hospital, 6 died from combat wounds sustained at Beaumont Hamel, and 17 expired from battle injuries suffered elsewhere; including 1 treated aboard a hospital ship and buried at sea. Some others may have died from illness.

Fifty-seven of the 230 wounded ‘First 500’ volunteers sustained combat injuries on multiple occasions (including 38 of those wounded at Beaumont Hamel). Among them, 1 volunteer was wounded 4 times, and 2 others wounded 3 times.

Thirty-eight of the 230 volunteers hospitalized due to wounding either at Beaumont Hamel (11) or elsewhere (27) were killed in combat after hospital discharge. One Regiment member, hospitalized twice—for treatment of wounds at Beaumont Hamel, in July 1916, and at Gueudecourt, France, in October 1916—was killed in action at Broembeek, France, in October 1917.

Of the 490 active Regiment volunteers, 132 were eventually assessed medically unfit to continue combat (at least one of them due to blindness). (One of those 132 later regained sufficient health to return from Newfoundland to duty in Europe.)

Among all Newfoundland Regiment enlisted men engaged in the futile Beaumont Hamel assault on July 1, 1916 (unredeemed by any territorial gain), approximately 26 percent (80) of those who were killed or died of wounds or were missing, and about 30 per cent (114) of those wounded, were from ‘The First 500’.

Among the 22 officers serving with ‘The First 500’; 5 saw action at Beaumont Hamel. None were killed there; although all were wounded, and 1 of them later died from his wounds.

Elsewhere during the war, 3 were killed; a fourth died from war wounds, and 3 survived wounding. Fourteen of the officers were hospitalized, due to wounding or illness (1 of them 5 times). Two officers were discharged as medically unfit.

Remarkable is that any of the 22 ‘First 500’ officers survived the war. They served with walking sticks and handguns (probably Webley Mark VI .455 revolvers). Their enlisted men, in contrast, were equipped with Ross rifles or (from May 1915) Lee-Enfield No. 4 Mark 1 rifles; Lee-Enfield bayonets; Mills Bomb grenades; and, in some instances, Stokes Trench mortars and (eventually) Vickers Mark 1 heavy machine guns.

Only 32 of the 490 combat active volunteers among the Newfoundland Regiment’s ‘First 500’ who saw action, and six of their 22 officers, survived the war without being captured, wounded, hospitalized, or discharged as medically unfit.

Of the 22 officers and 490 volunteers among ‘The First 500’ who fought: 4 officers and 8 volunteers were mentioned in dispatches by their superiors; 16 decorations were bestowed on 11 of the officers (1 of them being decorated 3 times, and 3 of them, twice), and 41 decorations were presented to 35 of the volunteers (1 of them 3 times; 4 of them, twice).

Newfoundland Regiment officers and volunteers totaling 591 are interred in graves of uncertain location; including 12.5%—1 officer, and 73 volunteers (42 of them killed at Beaumont Hamel)—from ‘The First 500’. (Some were decimated in combat; and the remainder buried by allied forces or the enemy in unmarked graves.)

Overall, among the 22 officers and 521 enlisted volunteers—543, in all—who were ‘The First 500’: 31 (5.7%), all of them volunteers, never saw action; 512 (94.3%), including 22 officers and

490 volunteers, entered combat. Of those 512: 395 (77%), including 14 officers and 381 volunteers, were hospitalized; 238 (46.5%), including 8 officers and 230 volunteers, were wounded, and 156 (30.5%), including 5 officers and 151 volunteers, laid down their lives (in, or as a result of, combat). None of the 356 (69.5%) who survived from among the 512 combat officers and volunteers—17 officers and 339 volunteers—or their families, were ever again, during their lives, able to enjoy occasions “when the great red dawn is shining” (from British lyricist Edward Lockton). Some of the survivors were blinded, crippled, or lacked limbs. Many were severely substance (alcohol or medication) addicted. All probably laboured, undiagnosed, from what now is called ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’.

The last of ‘The First 500’ volunteers to survive the war died on July 21, 1993; age: 101 years. The last of the widows of ‘First 500’ volunteer survivors of the war died in 2000; age: believed to be 108 years.

#### “The First Five Hundred” In Supreme Court

In Newfoundland, tears had not yet dried, and hearts not yet (if ever) mended, when the former colony, by 1914 a Dominion of Britain, decided an historical record needed be made of the service, suffering and sacrifice of the Newfoundland Regiment, including ‘The First 500’, in World War I.

Granted, the first book about the Regiment’s exploits in ‘The Great War’ had been published (probably in Toronto) in 1916 (and more recently, republished in St. John’s by DRC Publishing). The author was a Regiment volunteer, 26-year-old John Gallishaw (not among the ‘First 500’). But his 135-page book was limited, primarily, to an account of some aspects of the Regiment’s service at Gallipoli, from September 1915 to January 1916. Newfoundland wanted a much more comprehensive Regiment war publication.

Chosen for the task—in 1918—by the War History Committee of Newfoundland’s Patriotic Association was Frederick A. MacKenzie (sometimes spelled McKenzie), a Quebec-born author and London newspaper correspondent. The basis for his knowledge of ‘The Great War’ is not readily apparent. In any event, he produced nothing up to January 1920 (and when, in 1927, he did provide a manuscript, the Committee rejected it).

By the start of 1920, however, a law student being mentored at the St. John’s law firm of Squires and Winter had commenced work on an elaborate (although not complete) war history volume limited to ‘The First 500’. He was 30-year-old Richard Cramm, native to Small Point, Conception Bay.

By 1921, Cramm had completed *The First Five Hundred of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment*, which he arranged to have printed in Albany, New York: 114 pages of text (including 33 photos and eight maps) and 201 pages of regimental records of 21 of the 22 officers and 519 of the 521 volunteers in ‘The First 500’; as well as photos of most of them. (He included a 520th person as a volunteer who, in fact, was the 22nd officer.) Most probably, Cramm intentionally omitted at least one of two other volunteers because he dishonourably separated (deserted) from the Regiment in Scotland.

He prepared the book “to chronicle briefly the military operations of the heroic, fighting battalion that represented Newfoundland among the gallant and victorious troops of the British Empire in the greatest war of history, and to illustrate its persistent gallantry and splendid achievements by reference ... to conspicuous individual heroism” in performing “the most solemn duty that has ever been thrust upon our country.”

Cramm’s effort to publish and sell the book is, in itself, a compelling narrative.

Not flush with funds, Cramm found public support for publication and sale of his book within Newfoundland's government. This was not surprising. Senior partner in the firm where he was studying law was the (controversial) Prime Minister of Newfoundland: Richard A. Squires (from 1919 to 1923; and again, from 1928 to 1932).

First: the Newfoundland government agreed to purchase 500 copies of Cramm's book, at \$5.50 a copy, for a total of \$2,750. Second: government advanced Cramm \$1,000.00 of that amount (from government's 'War Expenses' account), to assist him pay some of the book's printing costs. Third: government agreed to pay Cramm the balance—\$1,750.00—when the book was printed and 500 copies were delivered to government. And, fourth: government waived customs duties otherwise payable on the books when imported by Cramm from the printer in Albany, New York.

In 1921, Cramm ordered printing of 1,500 copies of his book, for \$4,500.00. When the copies reached St. John's from Albany, he promptly delivered 500 of them to government, which then paid him the \$1,750.00 balance of its promised total financial assistance of \$2,750.00. Cramm stored the remaining 1,000 copies in St. John's; covered by insurance provided by Continental Insurance Company.

On February 21, 1922—after Cramm had sold or gifted 369 of the 1,000 stored copies of the book—fire damaged the remaining 631 copies. An insurance umpire determined that Cramm was entitled, under the Continental policy, to the cost he would incur to arrange reprinting of each of the 631 damaged copies and, in addition, an allowance for the work invested by Cramm in authoring the book (\$1.33 1/3, per copy).

Continental was not amused. Legal action resulted in Newfoundland Supreme Court. The Court decided, in 1922, that Cramm was entitled to recover from Continental the cost of reprinting the 631 damaged copies of the book, but nothing for his authorship.

Unknown is what amount Cramm eventually was compensated by Continental, or whether he applied the amount received to have the 631 fire-damaged copies of his book reprinted. Known is that in 2015, elite book publisher Boulder Publications, of Portugal Cove-St. Philips, republished Cramm's book at a currently-reasonable price of \$29.95 + HST.

For his part, Cramm, on April 2, 1923, was admitted to the Bar as the 150th lawyer to be licensed to practice law in Newfoundland. He was still practicing law, in St. John's, in 1958 when he died.

The author has personal connections to the First World War.

Two of the author's paternal uncles—brothers—both employed, before World War I, sewing seats in men's trousers at St. John's, fought at Beaumont Hamel as part of the Newfoundland Regiment's C Company—not part of 'The First 500'. Both survived Beaumont Hamel, uninjured, though neither knew then how the other had fared. One of the uncles, Private James Lewis Day (Regimental No. 1484), who enlisted 27 April 1915 at age 19, later died in combat 23 April 1917, at Les Fosses Farm, near Monchy, France (where he was buried in an unmarked grave). His brother Private Walter Bennett Day was hospitalized in London when he received the news that James was killed. He replied (mistakenly), "I know. He died at Beaumont Hamel."

Walter (Regimental No. 1660) enlisted 19 June 1915 at age 15; giving his name as Walter Valentine Day because he was born on Valentine's Day. (Identification such as birth certificates were not required to enlist in the Regiment.) He served as a Regimental drummer. He survived the war; but when demobilized on 15 January 1919, he was profoundly damaged psychologically by what he had endured during combat. He was among the first patients admitted to the Caribou

Pavilion, General Hospital, St. John's. He died on 18 November 1982. The author, in memory and honour of his two uncles, volunteered his face for A Hundred Portraits of the Great War, forged in bronze by eminent Newfoundland sculptor Morgan MacDonald.

Two second cousins were among Newfoundlanders who served in 'The First 500' during World War I. Both were sons of John Day, a St. John's, NL Protestant who, following marriage to a woman of the Roman Catholic faith, changed his surname from Day to O'Dea. One of his sons who served in World War I was Private John Eugene O'Dea (Regimental No. 455). He enlisted 08 September 1914, and was demobilized 05 March 1919. He was available for combat for only part of World War I. The reason was that he spend part of the war in prison; but not as a prisoner of war. He was, in Scotland, convicted 23 October 1917 of the criminal offence of bigamy—for having, 04 September 1916 at Ayr, Scotland, wed a Scottish woman, while having a wife in St. John's—and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment. The other of John (Day) O'Dea's sons who served in World War I was Private Leo Patrick O'Dea (Regimental No. 186). He enlisted 04 September 1914, and was demobilized 15 February 1919. He was wounded at Beaumont Hamel, France, on 01 July 1916, and again wounded at Mesnieres, France, on 30 November 1917. During his World War I service, he was promoted from Private to Lance Corporal, then to Acting Corporal, and ultimately, to Acting Sergeant.

The author, a practicing Barrister at St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador since 1968, and a Master of Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador since 2010, was junior law partner, at Lewis, Day Law Firm, of Hon. P. Derek Lewis, Q.C. When, on 19 January 2017, Lewis, Q.C. passed, he had practiced law longer (69 years, 3 months and 3 days) than any other lawyer, anywhere, at any time