

Better Than The Best

The 100th Anniversary of Beaumont Hamel



The military heritage of Newfoundland runs deep and true as the Labrador Current. A regiment on the island was first founded to serve in the British Army in 1795. The Regiment was significantly involved in the War of 1812 when Major General Isaac Brock successfully deployed detachments of Newfoundlanders throughout Upper Canada and on board the Great Lakes ships of His Majesty's fleet.

When the Great War came, Newfoundland was a rural Dominion of the British Empire with a population of only 240,000. Yet a full battalion of 1,000 quickly formed to serve their sovereign. That unit was nicknamed the "Blue Puttees" because of a fabric shortage which saw them wearing blue puttees (rather than olive drab) – the nickname exists to this day. The unit fought at Gallipoli and was chosen to be part of the rearguard in that tragic Allied defeat.

But it was near the ancient Picardy villages of Beaumont and Hamel that the 1st Newfoundland Regiment would march tragically into the annals of history.

The Regiment went into the line in April 1916 confronting defenses which the Germans had fortified for two years. On 1 July 1916, the explosion of an 18,000 kilogram (40,000 lb.) mine successfully destroyed a major enemy strong point. But it also served to alert German defenders to an imminent attack.

At 07:30 hrs., two waves of British troops dutifully advanced, quickly floundering in No Man's Land, far short of the enemy barbed wire.

At 08:45 hrs. the Newfoundland and British Essex Regiments received orders to advance as the third wave. The Newfoundlanders were situated at St. John's Road, 250 yards (230 m) behind British front lines out of sight of the enemy. Movement forward through communication trenches was impossible because they were congested with the dead and under constant shell fire. The battalion commander decided to advance immediately in attack formation through British barbed wire defenses onto the surface. The Regiment breasted the skyline- the only troops moving on the battlefield and clearly visible to enemy gunners. German cross-fire cut down advancing infantry columns. With exemplary courage, the survivors picked up their assault formations as best they could "with chins tucked down as if walking into a blizzard." Most Newfoundlanders were dead, dying or wounded within 15 minutes of leaving their trench.

Those who survived reached no further than a shell-skeletoned apple tree in No Man's Land; the only shelter left on the battlefield. The tree provided meagre cover and men were silhouetted against the sky as they approached it, making them easy targets. The Germans shelled the area killing so many it would become known forever more as the 'Danger Tree'.

The few survivors who actually did reach German lines were horrified to discover the week-long artillery barrage preceding the attack had not cut enemy barbed wire. As a consequence, the majority of soldiers who reached the enemy trenches were massacred; tangled in uncut cable.

The attack proved to be a devastating failure. That day, 801 Newfoundlanders went into battle. By dawn the next morning, only 68 answered roll call. 255 had been killed, 386 were wounded and 91 were classed as missing. For all intents and purposes the Newfoundland Regiment had ceased to exist.

Afterward, the Divisional Commander was to write of the Newfoundlanders effort: "It was a magnificent display of trained and disciplined valour and its assault failed of success because dead men can advance no further."

In 1917, in part for its heroism on the battlefields of Ypres and Cambrai, King George V bestowed the prefix Royal, renaming them the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. This was the only time in the entire war such an honour was granted and only the third in the history of the British Army that it has been given during a state of war. It was a fitting tribute to a truly remarkable body of soldiers.

By war's end, the Newfoundlanders had acquired a reputation second to none.

The Royal Newfoundland Regiment was disbanded in 1919 and reinstated in March 1949 when Newfoundland joined Confederation. That October, King George VI approved the granting once more of the title "Royal". It was richly deserved.

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Beaumont Hamel, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment is extremely pleased to partner with one of Canada's leading watch designers, Time is Ticking Inc., which has a long and honourable history of creating watches which reflect our nation's great military heritage.

To show your pride in Newfoundland's own regiment and its remarkable history, we offer a Limited Edition, Regimental, 100th anniversary Battle of Beaumont Hamel watch. The cost to you is only \$83.00 plus applicable taxes and postage. The watch is being sold far below its retail value of approximately \$200.00. Generous proceeds from each watch are being returned to the regiment for them to use as a special initiative.

The slim-line watch has a Seiko Japanese movement, 24K, raised gold plating on its face, a curved crystal, engraved case back and a designer Speidel leather strap which is being offered in black, red and blue. The watch will be delivered in an embossed velveteen collector's box. This limited edition commemorative watch will make an excellent gift. All sales are final.

It is indeed the proper time to honour the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and the memory of those brave Newfoundlanders who fell at Beaumont Hamel.



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