

# NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

Canada's eastern-most province has had a proud military history, both while it was a self-governing British colony and following its entry into Confederation. Shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, the Newfoundland Regiment was formed. It saw action in many of the important Great War engagements, including Flanders and Gallipoli, for which it was granted the prefix "Royal".

Arguably the best-known—and infamous—event of Newfoundland's military history took place on July 1, 1916, at the tiny French village of Beaumont Hamel on the Somme. In half an hour of intense fighting, virtually the entire regiment was annihilated. Out of 778 men, only 68 answered the evening roll call. The others were killed, wounded or missing. Given the island's small population, there was almost no one untouched by the slaughter. There is a bitter irony on "the Rock" even to this day, as July 1 commemorates both Canada Day as well as this bloody carnage.

Along with the courageous land forces, more than a thousand sailors from the Royal Naval Reserve saw action on ships such as HMS Calypso and HMS New Zealand.

In proportion to its small population – less than 250,000 in 1914 – Newfoundland's contribution to the First World War was outstanding. About 8,500 men enlisted; more than 80 per cent of them were in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and the Forestry Corps. Casualties were exceedingly high, with almost 1,500 deaths and more than 2,400 wounded.

Newfoundland's contribution to the Second World War was no less

significant. Given its strategic location, the island played a vital role in the Allied effort in the North Atlantic. Even prior to the war, it had already become important in the development of transatlantic flight, especially at Gander Airport. The Canadian government built additional air bases at Torbay and Goose Bay, which both were vital in military aircraft flights to Britain. The Canadian naval base at St. John's was the home port for the escort ships and planes that protected essential convoys bound for Europe. When the Battle of the Atlantic was at its height, German U-boats penetrated Conception Bay and sank two iron-ore steamers. Early in the war, the United States leased its first territory in the British Empire at St. John's, Argentia and Stephenville.

Two Newfoundland regiments saw action with the Royal Artillery: the 59th Heavy Regiment fought in France and Germany and the 166th Field Regiment fought in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. In addition, several thousand Newfoundlanders served in the Royal Navy, the Royal Canadian Navy and merchant navies, the R.A.F., the R.C.A.F. and the Forestry Corps in Scotland. Some 600 Newfoundlanders were killed during the Second World War; more than a thousand were wounded.

Both World Wars – and Newfoundland's contribution to them – occurred while this was a self-governing British colony. Newfoundland and Labrador became Canada's tenth province in 1949. Just as it had a proud military past as a self-governing colony, Newfoundland and Labrador's contribution to Canada's peacekeeping operations over the last six decades has been a source of pride for citizens of our newest province.



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**F.A. BRENNAN**  
**Canadian Forces**

Lieutenant-Colonel Alex Brennan was born, raised and educated in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. In 1987, after six years as a cadet, he enrolled as a private soldier with The First Battalion, The Royal Newfoundland Regiment. He became a Commissioned Officer in 1988. In 1986 - 1987 he was employed with the Signal Hill Military Tattoo as Company Commander.

During 1991-1992, Brennan was deployed to Cyprus on Operation Snow Goose as a dismounted Platoon Commander with The Second Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment. During June - August 1992 he attended Phase Four Mechanized Warfare training in CFB Gagetown, New Brunswick. In 1993 he was promoted to Captain during his deployment with The Second Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry on Operation Harmony in Croatia, where he was employed as a Mechanized Platoon Commander. During this tour he fought as a Platoon Commander in the Medak Pocket Operation, for which his unit received the Commander-in-Chief's Commendation. In 2008 he deployed on Operation Safari and was employed both as the Canadian Deputy Task Force Commander and as Deputy Chief CIMIC (Civil Military Coordination) at Force Headquarters with the United Nations Mission in Sudan.

Prior to graduating from Memorial University with a Bachelor of Arts, Lieutenant-Colonel Brennan was employed as a police constable with The Royal Newfoundland Constabulary in St. John's. He is currently assigned to Patrol Division.

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**1.866.701.1867 or [memory@historica-dominion.ca](mailto:memory@historica-dominion.ca)**

## Classroom Activities and Questions

- 1 What features and events help make Newfoundland and Labrador's military contribution unique?
- 2 You have been hired by the province to produce a PowerPoint presentation entitled "The Notable 20th-Century Military History of Newfoundland and Labrador" for this year's 60th anniversary of the Island's entry into Confederation. Working in groups of three, conduct further research on the topic. Then design the most informative and engaging PowerPoint presentation that you can. Time permitting, have the class view all of the presentations.
- 3 Working with a partner, brainstorm and research in order to find proof for the assertion that "Canada's eastern-most province has a proud military history."
- 4 Are there unique challenges – and possibly advantages – for Newfoundland and Labrador in terms of military participation? Explain in a thoughtful editorial entitled "Newfoundland and Labrador's Distinctive Military Position."
- 5 Beaumont Hamel is arguably the single greatest military engagement in the island's military history. Working in groups of three, research various aspects of the battle, such as causes, men involved, aims, course, consequence and legacy.
- 6 Lieutenant-Colonel Alex Brennan is in several ways different from many of the other military personnel profiled in the Memory Project Digital Archive. Working with a partner, identify some of the elements of his distinctiveness.
- 7 If Lieutenant-Colonel Brennan were to come into your class as a speaker, what three questions would you most want to ask him?
- 8 Lieutenant-Colonel Brennan spent six years as a cadet. Research the cadet corps in your area. What do they do? Why might someone might want to join them? Would you?
- 9 Lieutenant-Colonel Brennan joined The Royal Newfoundland Regiment. That regiment has a long and distinguished history. Working with a partner, research that history and then design the most engaging and effective way of presenting your findings to the class.
- 10 Lieutenant-Colonel Brennan was the Company Commander of the Signal Hill Military Tattoo. In groups of three, examine the various aspects of military leadership. Create a chart that analyzes the similarities and differences between military leadership and various other kinds of leadership (political, athletic, business, etc.) What significant conclusions can you make about the nature of military leadership?
- 11 Lieutenant-Colonel Brennan has held various military ranks. Many non-military people are confused by ranks in the military. Working with two other partners, research the various ranks, in order, within the military and provide a brief description of each.

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