

About The Newfoundland Regiment during the First World War, Part 1

Introduction

Newfoundland became part of Canada in 1949, and until then was an English colony [1](#)). The island's population consisted of approx. 250,000 inhabitants.

Throughout history various military units existed on the island, but the last English soldier had left the island in 1870. At the start of the First World War there were only some cadet corps and a detachment of the Royal Naval Reserve, but no military organization of any kind to support the creation of the fighting force of initially 500 men - the 1st Newfoundland Regiment - which the colonial government made available to the English army.

With Newfoundland's geographical location on the Canadian east coast [2](#)) many contemporaries considered the battalion to be a Canadian unit, for which the good Newfoundlanders were very grateful, however - they were an English regiment! As such, however, it falls completely outside the period's normal division into *Regular Army*, *Territorial Army* and *New Army*, which is why many works on the British Army during the First World War do not mention the regiment.

After the union with Canada, where Newfoundland became the country's tenth province, The Royal Newfoundland Regiment was (re)established as part of the Canadian Army's reserve units (*Militia*); this status is preserved today.

st 1 Newfoundland Regiment



Regimental badge of the Newfoundland Regiment, 1914-1919.
From Source 2.

Historical summary

August 1914

1st Newfoundland Regiment is established in Newfoundland.

January 1915

2nd (Reserve) Battalion is established in England.

September 1915

1st Newfoundland Regiment becomes part of 29th Division.

January 1918

Name changed to Royal Newfoundland Regiment.

April 1918

1st Battalion transferred to GHQ Troops.

September 1918

1st Battalion transferred to 9th (Scottish) Division.

August 1919

Royal Newfoundland Regiment disbanded.

October 1949

The Royal Newfoundland Regiment (Canadian Army) is established.

The animal in the regimental badge is Newfoundland's national animal - a North American reindeer (*caribou*).

In the absence of a military organization on the island, enterprising citizens founded The Newfoundland Patriotic Association, which provided the necessary funds for establishment and equipment, a role the organization continued to play until 1917. Telegrams were now exchanged with the English government, asking whether how many men it was expected to be able to field, replied the governor⁸. August 1914, that "he assumed that 500 men could be recruited in the course of a month".



Newfoundland Regiment.

Card No. 14 in the Colonial & Indian Army Badges series,
John Player & Sons, 1917.

The text on the back of the card reads as follows:

The badge of the 1st Newfoundland Regiment ("The White Indians"). Formed in August 1914, this regiment was originally 500 strong, and is now recruited up to 3,000. It was one of the regiments of the "Incomparable 29th Division" at Gallipoli and has also seen service in Egypt. It landed in France, March 1916, and distinguished itself in the Big Push early in the following July. It has lost heavily and gained many honours.

The nickname *The White Indians* is not mentioned in other sources about the regiment; usually the nickname *The Blue Puttees* is used to commemorate the first 500 men.

The influx of recruits was even greater than expected - on 21 August 1914 800 men had signed up - but the situation was immediately worse with uniforms, equipment and weapons.

The uniforms were produced locally, but stocks of home-woven khaki-coloured cloth were insufficient to produce wraps. These were therefore made of dark blue cloth, a color which was not uncommon for wraps among English colonial troops. 500 Ross rifles ³) were also ordered in Canada (the Canadian Army's standard rifle before the war), but they did not arrive until the day after the battalion had left Newfoundland, so they had to be reshipped.

On 4 October, the first 500 men sailed from Newfoundland aboard the freighter SS Florizel, which joined the convoy carrying the first contingent of Canadian troops to England; here the "homemade" uniforms of the Newfoundlanders caused a stir. For fear of being merged with a Canadian battalion [17th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders), Canadian Expeditionary Force], great efforts were made to maintain an independent identity, and the soldiers of the first contingent, however, later proudly referred to themselves as *The blue putties*.

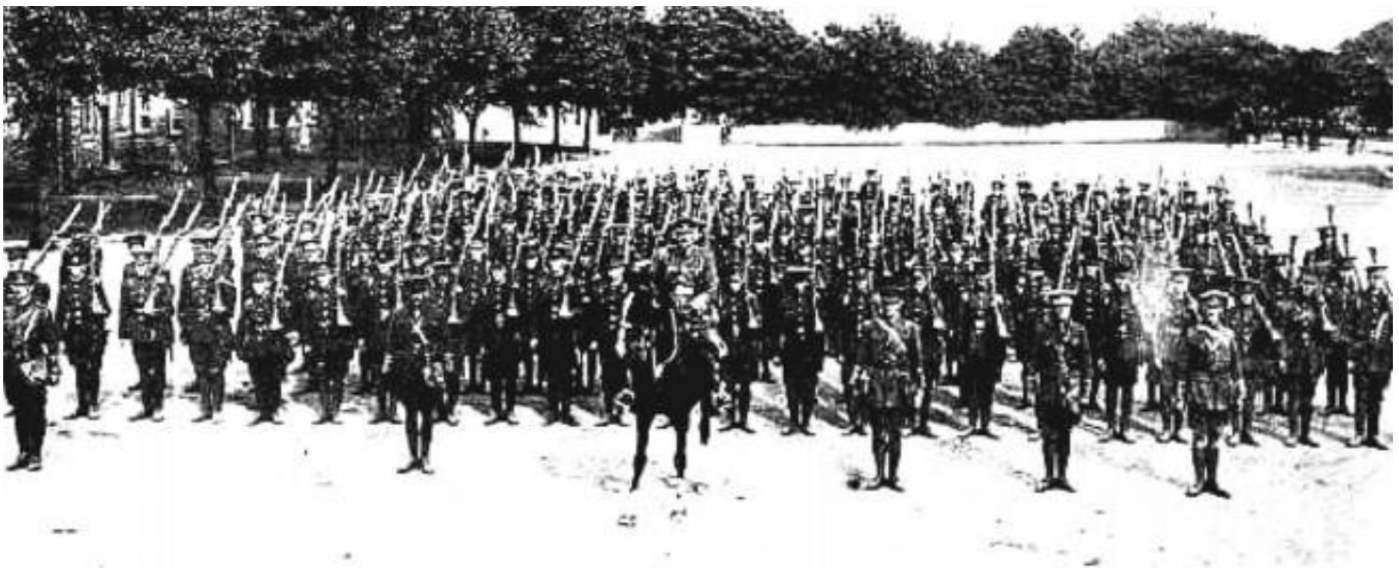
In December 1914, the battalion is sent to Stobs Camp (south-west of Edinburgh), where training takes hold in earnest.



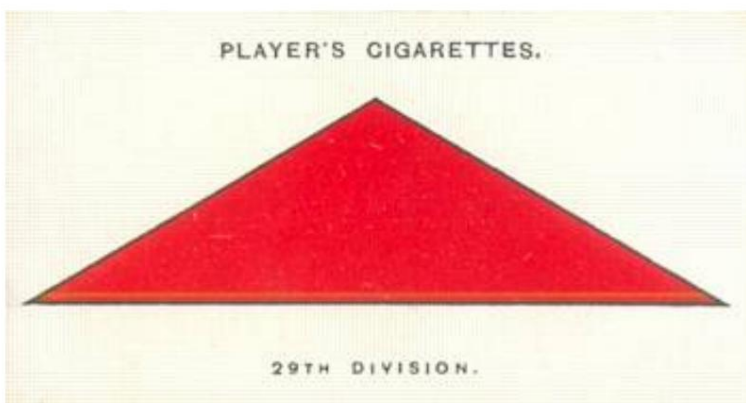
Soldiers of the 1st Newfoundland Regiment at Stobs Camp, Scotland.
From Stobs Military Camp, Hawick 1903-1959.

29th Division

Additional personnel were added over the next few months and in August 1915 the now fully formed battalion was sent to Aldershot for transport to the Gallipoli Peninsula, where the battalion was to form part of the 29th Division. The remaining personnel are sent to Ayr in Scotland, which will form the regiment's base for the rest of the war.



"A" Company, 1st Newfoundland Regiment, before departure for Gallipoli.
From Source 1.



29th Division.

Card No. 6 in Player's cigarette card series Army, Corps and Divisional Signs 1914-1918, Series 1.

The text on the back of the card reads as follows:

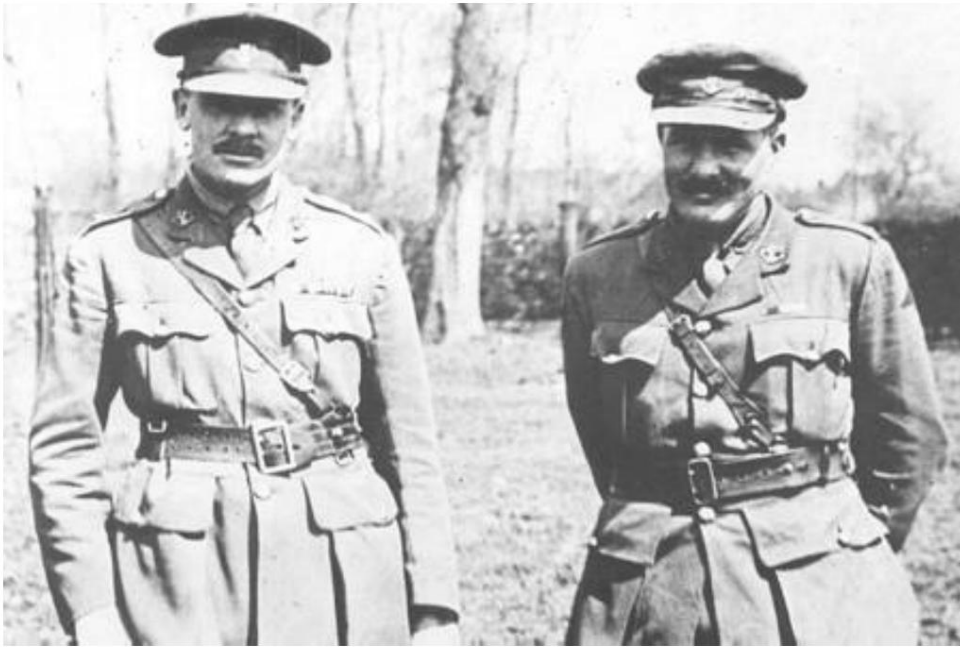
The origin of the red triangle is that it represents half a diamond, and was intended as a reminder to the Division of the advantage of the diamond formation in open fighting. As the badge was worn on each shoulder, the wearer actually wore one diamond.

This division was originally composed of Regular troops. Formed in January 1915, it went overseas in March 1915 to the Dardanelles. In January 1916 it went to Egypt, whence, after two months rest, it was transferred to the BEF in France, remaining there until the end of the War.

Via Egypt, the battalion landed at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli peninsula on 19 September 1915 - strength: 1,076 men.

During the coming months of service in the trenches, there is a gradual attrition of the battalion, where constant shelling from the Turkish lines and a very difficult supply situation are the order of the day.

The battalion distinguished itself on 4 November 1915 during a skirmish over a ridge aptly named Caribou Hill.



The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur L.

Hadow, and another officer from the 1st Newfoundland Regiment, 1917 [5](#)).

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur L. Hadow [4](#)) [assumes](#) command of the battalion on 6 December 1914.

The lieutenant colonel is described as the man who really helped make the battalion an effective fighting unit. He was, if not loved, much respected by the soldiers.

The other officer is probably Major James Forbes-Robertson, the battalion's second in command [6](#)).

On 20 December 1915, all positions in Suvla Bay are evacuated. The battalion, whose strength is now down to 170 men, is sent to Cape Helles on the southern tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula to assist in the final evacuation of the Expeditionary Force, which ends on 9 January 1916. Many of the battalion's soldiers were dock workers, an experience that now came to them benefit.

The battalion spent the next few months in Egypt and was then sent to France on 22 March 1916.

The battalion is brought back up to full combat strength with a view to participating in the attack at the Somme on 1 July 1916.

The attack against Beaumont Hamel 1 July 1916

At the start of the attack, the 29th Division's 86th and 87th Brigades were in the front line opposite the German positions around Beaumont Hamel. The attack on this front section was initiated by the blasting of a mine tunnel under the so-called Hawthorn Skanse (*Redoubt*) - almost 20,000 tons of explosives placed by the 252nd Tunneling Company, Royal Engineers. Two platoons of the 2nd Royal Fusiliers, with four machine guns and four trench mortars immediately occupy the crater.

The two brigades then charged forward across No Man's Land, but were halted by enemy barbed wire, which had not been destroyed during the previous seven days of artillery preparation (which was now misplaced in depth), as well as effective enemy fire. Before an hour had passed the attack had stalled and most of the soldiers in the two brigades were dead or wounded. The closest you got to the enemy lines was approx. 100 meters, but most didn't even get that far.

During the Battle of the Somme, 1916, the 29th Division consisted of the following combat units [7](#)):

86th Brigade:

88th Brigade:

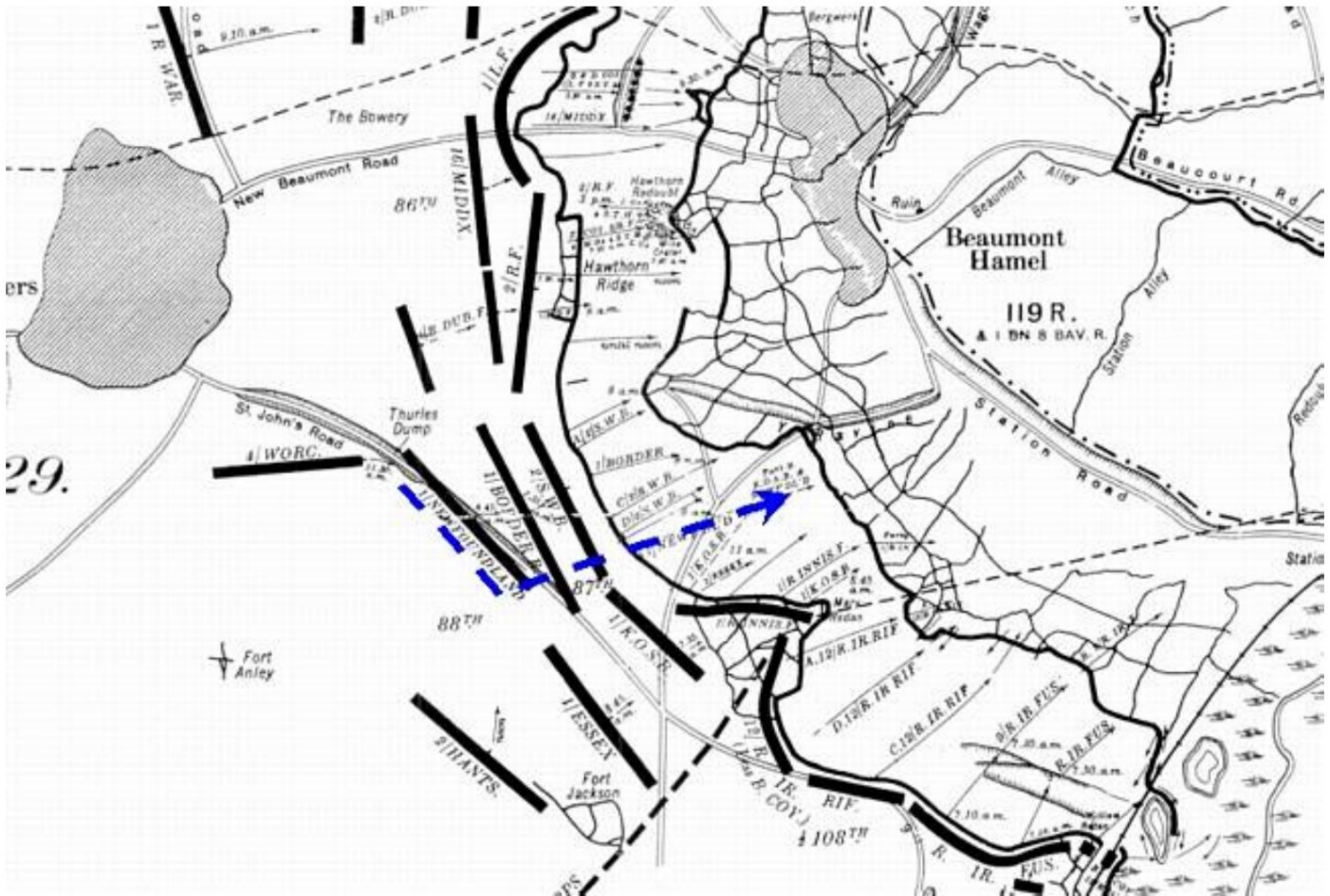
2nd Royal Fusiliers 1st Essex Regiment 1st Lancashire Fusiliers 1st
Newfoundland Regiment 16th Middlesex (Public Schools Battalion) 4th Worcestershire
Regiment 2nd Hampshire Regiment. 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

87th Brigade:

2nd South Wales Borderers 1st
King's Own Scottish Borderers 1st
Inniskilling Fusiliers 1st
Border Regiment.

Pioneer Battalion:

1/2nd Monmouthshire Regiment.



29th Division's attack on Beaumont Hamel on 1 July 1916.

Extract from map in Source 4.

In the divisional staff, the situation was unclear and no one in their wildest imagination could imagine that things had gone as wrong as they actually did. White light balls (*flares*), which were observed from the front German lines, were taken as marking that own units had reached their objective, and the reserve brigade was now ordered forward. Unfortunately the signal - 1 white ball of light - was the English sign of success and at the same time the German signal that the artillery was firing too short...

The commander of the 88th Brigade (Brigadier General DE Cayley) was ordered to immediately send two battalions forward to clear the German trenches, therefore the 1st Newfoundland Regiment and 1st Essex Regiment are sent forward.

The 1st Newfoundland Regiment was in positions approx. 300 meters behind the front line. According to the original plan, at 08:40 they were to advance to attack the third German trench line; 08:20 this order is postponed "for the time being".

At the muster on 30 June 1916, at 21:00 the night before the attack, the force numbered 25 officers as well as 776 non-commissioned officers and privates (Source 2). The previous weeks of intensive training had given the soldiers a belief that they had mastered their craft. Morale was high. In addition, there were 22 men from the 88th Brigade Machine Gun Company and 1 officer and 11 men from the 88th Brigade Trench Mortar Company.

At 08:45 the brigade commander gave field phone Lt. Col. Hadow the order to advance.



Soldiers from the 1st Newfoundland Regiment in the reserve positions at St. Johns Road, photographed before the attack on 1 July 1916.
From Source 2.

The battalion had to leave its current positions as quickly as possible and advance to the German front line. On the right wing, the 1st Essex Regiment would carry out a similar attack.

To the lieutenant colonel's question as to whether the front line was held by own or enemy units, the brigade commander replied that the situation was unclear. Should the lieutenant colonel coordinate his attack with the commander of the Essex battalion? No, the two battalions were to attack independently of each other.

Lieutenant Colonel Hadow now gave his own orders and at 09:15 the advance was reported to have begun. The battalion first had to cover almost 300 meters to reach the forward English trenches.

From here it was between 500 and 900 meters to reach the front German lines.

Instead of advancing through the crowded liaison trenches to the front line, the 752 Newfoundlanders are now advancing over open ground! The 1st Essex Regiment was perhaps more experienced and chooses the opposite solution. The result is now that the Newfoundlanders are exposed to a murderous fire from machine guns and artillery.

The sluices cut in the English barbed wire are quickly filled up with dead and wounded, but the rear advance over their comrades, and they do not fare much better. A few dozen

stubborn soldiers reach No Man's Land and a few even reach the German barbed wire where they fall. It is believed that a few had the opportunity to throw hand grenades into the German trenches. Before half an hour has passed the battalion is almost bled to death... 684 men have fallen.

At 09:45 Lieutenant Colonel Hadow, who had been observing the situation from a shell hole, informs the brigade staff that the attack has failed. He makes a personal report at the brigade's forward command station, which is located approx. 100 meters behind own lines (Source 6). Here he is ordered to collect the unwounded personnel and continue the attack, but counter-orders quickly come (Source 2).

1st Essex Regiment [8](#)) advanced through the overcrowded and partially destroyed liaison trenches, delaying the battalion's attack, launching at 09:55. The result is the same, but the losses are less.



Over the Top, approx. 1916.

Reproduced from a postcard drawn by Ernest Ibbetson (1877-1959).

The soldiers may represent the Essex Regiment at the Somme on 1 July 1916.

Captain GE Malcolm of "D" Company, 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers (87th Brigade) later makes contact with a company of the 1st Newfoundland Regiment in No Man's Land. They numbered 40 men, but had lost their officers, wherefore he takes command; Captain Malcolm's company is already heavily decimated. He himself is wounded approx. 60 meters from the German lines and the attack dies out barely 20 meters in front of the enemy lines. These 40 Newfoundlanders are probably the ones who are supposed to have made it

threw hand grenades at the German lines. (Source 6)

68 men, including Lt. Col. Hadow, are left unscathed after this terrible morning. In addition, there is the cadre 9) of 10%, which a battalion left in its readiness area before an attack, so that it had a basic stock for a later repositioning. During the afternoon, the cadre joins the remnants of the battalion. On 6 July 1916, the battalion was withdrawn to the emergency area in the village of Englebelmer - personnel strength: 168 men.

It took a few weeks before the extent of the tragedy really reached the people of Newfoundland, but from July 13, 1916, the first lists of the names of the dead, wounded and missing filled the columns of the newspapers.

Information on the battalion's losses varies from source to source, but these figures come from the battalion's war diary.

1st Newfoundland Regiment - Tab 1. juli 1916	Officerer	Underofficerer og menige	I alt
Døde	11	66	77
Sårrede	12	362	374
Døde af sår	2	21	23
Savnede, form odet døde	1	209	210
I alt	26	658	684

From *War Diary - 1st Newfoundland Regiment, 1st July 1916*, as reproduced in Source 6.

When the number of fallen officers is greater than the muster on 30 June 1916, it is because, among other things, the intendant also participated in the attack (Source 5).

Subsequently, Lieutenant Colonel Hadow wrote to the governor of Newfoundland: "*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.*"

The commander of the 29th Division, Major General H. de Bevoir de Lisle, later wrote about the battalion's efforts: "It was a magnificent display of trained and disciplined valour, and its assault only failed of success because dead men can advance no further."



In 1917, Newfoundland chose July 1 as its national day of remembrance and a forget-me-not as its symbol.

The tradition is analogous to the *poppy*, which in the rest of the English-speaking part of the world from 11 November 1919 became the symbol to remember the fallen. The tradition is still carried on in Newfoundland.

Notes:

1) For information on Newfoundland's constitutional status, see e.g. Constitutional Documents - The Constitutional, Legal, and Political History of Newfoundland and Labrador.

2) Map of the Dominion of Canada approx. 1900 (incl. Newfoundland).

3) See e.g. my article Uniform Planche - The Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914.

4) Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Lovell Hadow (1877-1968), Norfolk Regiment. From ThePeerage.com.

5) From *Field Service Head Dress, 1902 to the present day, The British Soldier in the 20th Century* by Mike Chappel, Wessex Military Publishing, Hartherleigh, Devon 1979, ISBN 1-870498-01-1.

6) Major Arthur L. Hadow (1884-1955), Border Regiment, was, with the rank of captain, assigned to command the battalion in June 1916, replacing a Major Drew who was sent home for health reasons. Later awarded the rank of major and acting lieutenant colonel. Commanded the battalion at various critical times in 1917, i.a. at Monchy-le-Preux, where he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his efforts. In August 1917 became commander of the 16th Middlesex (Public Schools Battalion), 86th Brigade/29th Division. Awarded the Victoria Cross 10 April 1918. (Source 12)

7) From the website The long, long trail - The story of the British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918 and Regimental Warpath 1914-1918.

8) Excerpts from the 1st Essex Regiment's war diary can be found on the website The long, long trail - The story of the British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918 and in Source 6.

9) This cadre is specified in my review of the book *The British Army in World War I (2) - The Western Front 1916-18*. The battalion's second-in-command usually commanded the cadre. The fact that the battalion commander did not participate in the attack himself was, moreover, completely in accordance with the regulations; he was to advance only when the first objective had been reached. See also *Postscript*.