

Kevin Major



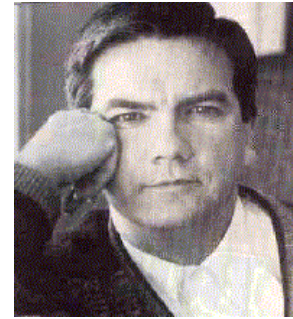
No Man's Land

A Playgoer's Guide

Synopsis:

The play is set in France during World War I. It shows the final days of the Newfoundland Regiment, and their preparation to go into battle. They start off excited and full of hope, then experienced mixed feelings of doubt and determination, until their entrance into the battlefield. The story is bittersweet, since most readers are aware of the fate of the regiment at the beginning. The suspense builds throughout the play, as the young men wait in the trenches, unaware of their own fate. When the battle finally happens, the men are forced to make their way through barbed wire and into hails of machine gun fire, leading the Newfoundland regiment to suffer more casualties than any other in World War I.

Kevin Major:



Kevin Major was born in Stephenville, Newfoundland on September 12, 1949. He ended up obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. In grade 10, one of his teachers predicted that he would write a novel one day. After completing his degree, he travelled the world for a few years, he started writing more, beginning with poetry, moving to short stories and finally to novels. He ended up writing ten, and winning countless awards for his work. Kevin Major's first book for children, *Hold Fast*, won several awards in Canada and was placed on the Hans Christian Andersen Honour List. His second novel, *Far from Shore*, was the winner of the Canadian Young Adult Book Award and was chosen as Best Book of 1981 by School Library Journal.

Battle of Beaumont-Hamel

The sector of the front in Beaumont-Hamel where the 1st Newfoundland Regiment would see action was supposed to be taken by surprise, but the Germans knew the attack was coming. In addition, the initial Allied bombardment failed to damage most of the German defenses. At about 9:15 a.m., the Newfoundlanders—forming part of the 29th British Division—attacked from a support trench nicknamed St. John's Road. They attacked from this trench, which was actually behind the front line, because of the sheer number of soldiers involved in earlier attacks that were dead or wounded filling the front trenches. This meant that the Newfoundlanders had to traverse more than 200 metres in full view of the enemy before they even made it to the Allies' own front line. Once they made it to the trenches, they went “over the top” into No Man's Land. They then had to cross through tangles of shattered barbed wire to reach the enemy trenches more than 500 metres down the slope. By the time the Battle of the Somme was all over, the Allies would have more than 650,000 soldiers killed, wounded, missing or taken prisoner, and both the Allies and the Germans would each lose about 200,000 lives. For this incredible cost, the Allies moved the front line forward about 10 kilometres.

Definition of the term “No Man’s Land”

“No Man's Land” is the term used by soldiers to describe the ground between the two opposing front lines. Most commonly associated with the First World War the phrase "no man's land" actually dates back until at least the 14th century.

This area contained a considerable amount of barbed wire. In the areas most likely to be attacked, there were ten belts of barbed wire just before the front-line trenches. In some places the wire was more than a 100 feet (30 metres) deep.

In order for troops to advance, they would often times use the cover of artillery. Then when the command was given and the bombardment ceased, the troops would then simultaneously go “over the top” of the trench into the enemies returning fire, hoping to make it clear across the gap into the enemy trenches. From there, the troops would fight to the death in hope of gaining only feet in advancement.



Origins of the Play

No Man's Land was actually first published as a novel by Kevin Major in May of 2001. The book was later formed into the script which would later be put into a production. The production was put into motion thanks to the Rising Tide Theatre Company and has been doing productions across Canada even since.

Characters

Alan Hayward is in his early 20s, a Second Lieutenant. He was a member of the Methodist Guards, one of the several church organizations in the city that conducted itself with military-style discipline. He rose in the ranks, took charge of a platoon of men, and came to be well-liked and respected by them.

Bruce Clarke is also a Second Lieutenant in his early 20s. Clarke appears worldly and self-assured, and tends to stretch the bounds of the discipline the

Regiment imposes on him. Jane Farrell, whom he met back in Newfoundland, is his fiancée.

Ned Martin is 17, and has lied about his age to join the Regiment. He is full of the naive vigour of a new recruit, but must now face the reality of war suddenly presented to him.

Jane Farrell is a young nurse from the south coast of Newfoundland and engaged to be married to Clarke. She serves with the Voluntary Aid Detachment in Rouen, in France, not far from the front lines where the Newfoundland Regiment is serving.

Colonel Hadow is a professional soldier, the Englishman who commands a regiment of Newfoundlanders. He can be a tough disciplinarian, but beneath his severe demeanour, he too must question the wisdom of the orders coming from the generals behind the battlefield lines.

The Captain is the officer whom Hayward and Clarke must answer to directly. He was a leader in the Methodist Guards back in Newfoundland, and had known Hayward since childhood. The Captain plays by the rules, takes his job very seriously, and expects the same of his men.

Wilf Myers is a Second Lieutenant recently relieved of his duties as a platoon leader after suffering a partial mental breakdown. He is just back from leave, and has been reassigned to Regiment Headquarters.

Private Moss left his outport fishing community to join the Regiment and see a bit of the world. He's a good soldier but hasn't forgotten how to have a good time.

Corporal Bennett is from the west coast of Newfoundland and joined up to get away from the stresses of his life back in Newfoundland. His father was drowned in a sealing disaster, and his mother is also dead. He is determined to make a life for himself in the Regiment.

Private Smith is one of the oldest men in the Regiment. He is the one to keep an eye out for young Ned.

This guide was researched by

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The Page and the Stage

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