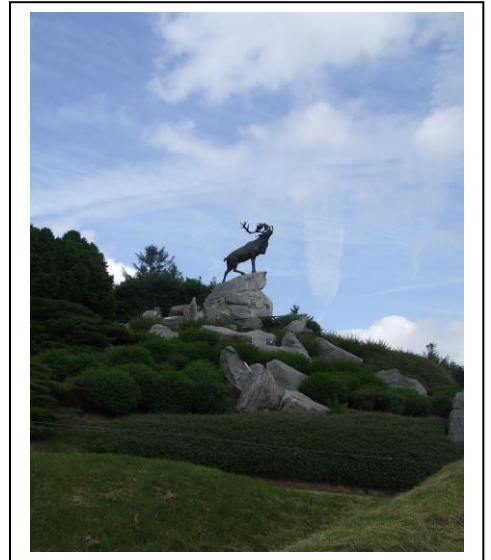


ABBOTT, E.

Private Eli Abbott (Regimental Number 2119), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a coal-trimmer, Eli Abbott was a recruit of the Eighth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination on February 17, 1916, he then enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the daily rate of \$1.10 – on February 23, before attesting on the following day.



*\*Another source has him attesting on the day that he enlisted.*

It was to be some four weeks before Private Abbott was to embark for overseas service to the United Kingdom. It was as a soldier of the second contingent of 'H' Company that he took ship for overseas service on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right) in St. John's Harbour on March 23-24. The ship did not sail from Newfoundland until the 25<sup>th</sup> and likely crossed the Atlantic in convoy.



This would explain what was apparently a slow voyage<sup>\*\*</sup>: Private Abbott did not disembark in the United Kingdom until April 9, at which time the contingent was transported to the Regimental Depot in Scotland.

*\*Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched – the vessel, originally built for the Allan Line, had been requisitioned as a troop-ship and transport carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War.*

*\*\*Convoys often altered course and obviously had to travel at the speed of the slowest ship. Sicilian would also have had to sail to a rendezvous point to meet the accompanying vessels – a convoy left Halifax on March 31-April 1 to arrive in Liverpool on April 9.*

*It could also be that she embarked some Canadian troops before crossing the Atlantic as she could carry well over one-thousand passengers with ease.*

(continued)

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-upon Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

During the winter of 1915-1916 the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been lodged in several venues, at a nearby military camp at Gales, but also as far afield as Paisley Barracks, some sixty-five kilometres distant. However, by the spring of 1916 the difficulty had been overcome by housing the men in a requisitioned school, in a tented community and in the Ayr Racecourse Grandstand, all in the district of Newton-upon-Ayr.

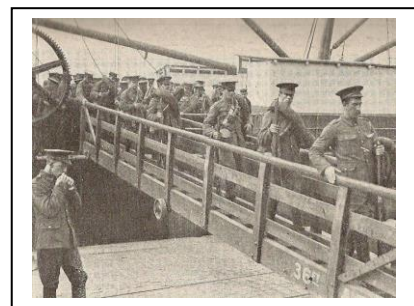


(Right above: *the new race-course at Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photo from 2012*)

It was while at *the Racecourse* at Newton-on-Ayr, on June 30, that Private Abbott re-enlisted, only some nine days before his departure for the Continent.

*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

July 9 saw the 8<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Abbott among its ranks - pass through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to France. On the day following, the 10<sup>th</sup>, it disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and made its way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, there to undergo final training and organization\* before moving to a rendezvous with the parent unit.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

*\*Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

There must have been a sense of urgency at the time: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had suffered terribly at a place called Beaumont-Hamel on the morning of July 1, and on July 6 its depleted strength, as reported by the Regimental War Diarist, still numbered no more than one-hundred sixty-eight *other ranks*, less than twenty per cent of the regulation strength of a British battalion.

Private Abbott was one of the contingent of one-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* from Rouen to report *to duty* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on July 21 in the small community of Acheux. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had marched to there from the trenches in front of Mailly-Maillet four days prior, and would continue this march as far as Beauval on the 23<sup>rd</sup> where they were to be billeted for only forty-eight hours before covering – still on foot – a further twenty kilometres to Candas on the 26<sup>th</sup> to board a train.

On July 27-28 of 1916, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still under battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after re-enforcement - moved north and entered into Belgium for the first time. It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.



(Right above: *the entrance to 'A' Company's quarters in the ramparts of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

*The Salient* was relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there, yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number of them fatalities. On October 8, after ten weeks in Belgium, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to move south, back to France and back to the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.



(Right above: *the city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – and eight months before the Newfoundlanders were posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)

Four days after its return to *the Somme*, on October 12, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion went again to the offensive at a place called Gueudecourt, some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel. It proved to be another costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told in only two days - for little gain.



(Right above: *This is the ground over which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)

(continued)

After the action at Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period to be broken only by the loss – on November 2 - of Private Abbott's knife, rifle cover, and ten rounds of ammunition, all of which he was obliged to replace at his own expense...



... and then by the several weeks – as of December 11-12 - spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, the Newfoundlanders being withdrawn well behind the lines and encamped close to the city of Amiens.

(Right above: a typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card)

After that welcome six-week Christmas-time respite away from *the Front*, the Newfoundlanders *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917. More were soon to follow.

On January 28, 1917, five days after returning to *active service*, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was completing its first tour in the trenches of the New Year. The Regimental War Diary entry of the day reports that ...*'C' Co. were out helping to bring in wounded & carrying up materials for consolidating purposes...enemy shelled the whole area very heavily in the evening. Batt moved to Intermediate Line. Casualties 7 killed 17 wounded.*



The only son of Charles Abbott and Annie Abbott – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Grand Falls, he was also brother to Elsie, Evelina and Doris.

Private Abbott was reported as *missing in action* on January 27-28, 1917, while serving with 'C' Company in the trenches near Guillemont in the French *Département de la Somme*.

However, only days later, on or about February 10, 1917, his file was amended so as to read *killed in action 28/1/1917*. At home, it was the Reverend W. T. D. Dunn of Grand Falls who was requested to bear the news to his family\*.



*\*It was not the practice for clergymen and others to visit families in the case of missing in action.*

Eli Abbott had enlisted at the age of eighteen year and ten months.

(Right top: *Guillemont Road Cemetery and the area where Private Abbott died on January 28, 1917* – photograph from 2010)

(Preceding page: *The War Memorial in Grand Falls-Windsor honours the sacrifice of Private Eli Abbott – photograph from 2010*)

Private Eli Abbott was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

