



Private George Baker (Regimental Number 1439), 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 fisherman earning a monthly \$35.00, George Baker enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 - on April 13 of 1915, apparently before presenting himself for medical examination three days later, on April 16. He then attested ten days later again, on April 26.



*\*A second source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.*

Private Baker embarked on board His Majesty's Transport *Calgarian* (above – original photograph from the *Provincial Archives*) on June 20 in St. John's Harbour and sailed (*almost\**) directly to the United Kingdom. He was one of the two-hundred forty-two men of 'F' Company and eighty-five naval reservists to take passage on that day.

*\*Apparently the ship took nineteen days to make what was usually the journey of about a week. Not only was Calgarian escorting three submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders apparently even having the time to cross the straits to spend a few hours in North Africa. She reached Liverpool on July 9.*



(Right above: *the Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background.* – from a vintage postcard)

On the day after its arrival in the United Kingdom, 'F' Company marched from the railway station and reported *to duty* at Stobs Camp near the Scottish town of Hawick on the evening of July 10. It was an important moment: the Newfoundland Regiment, as of that day counting fifteen hundred personnel, was now at fighting strength and could be posted on *active service*.

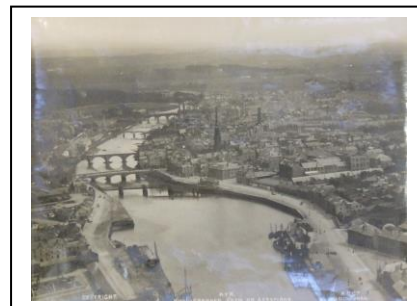


(Right above: *The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles.* – original photograph from the *Provincial Archives*)

From Stobs, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the senior Companies, having now become 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, were transferred to Aldershot in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before departing on active service to the Middle East and to the fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

'E' and 'F' Companies – the latter having arrived at Stobs Camp on July 10 - were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were to form the nucleus of the newly-formed 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. The Depot was to become Private Baker's home for the following eight months.

The Regimental Depot was being established during that summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland to serve as a base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were to be sent 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-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

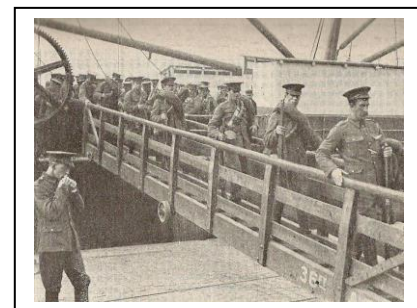
It was during this posting to Ayr that, on March 27, only a single day before his departure on *active service*, Private Baker re-enlisted *for the duration of the War*\*.

*\*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.*

On March 28, Private Baker, as a soldier of the 3rd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton and boarded His Majesty's Transport *Archangel* (right) on his way to join 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on the Continent.



Disembarking two days later, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, the contingent made its way to the Depot for several days of final training and organization\* before leaving to seek out the parent unit.



(Right: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

(continued)

***\*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.***

**On April 15, a detachment from Rouen of two-hundred eleven *other ranks* – accompanied by two officers – reported to *duty* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion already billeted in the village of Englebelmer some three kilometres behind the lines of the *Western Front*. Private Baker is documented as being among that number, a contingent which included not only personnel from Ayr, but also others from Gallipoli and Egypt whose departure from there had been delayed.**

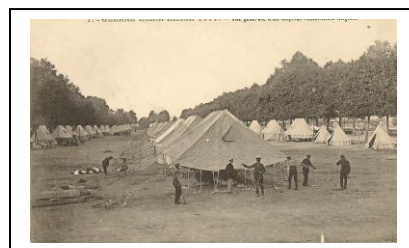
**Only two days prior, on April 13, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had *itself* marched into the village of Englebelmer – thus completing a month-long transfer from Egypt – where the Newfoundlanders were billeted, welcomed those re-enforcements from Rouen on the 15<sup>th</sup> and, on the evening of that same day, were ordered forward – along with the new-comers - to work in the communication trenches not so very far away.**

**The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the meandering river that flowed – and today still flows - innocuously through the southern part of the region to which it lends its name, *the Somme*.**

**(Right: *part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)**

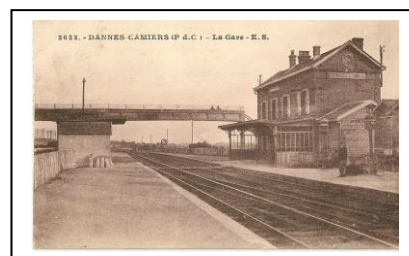


**On May 12, Private Baker was admitted into the 87<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance and was there diagnosed as suffering with pulmonary tuberculosis. Transferred on the same day to the 4<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station, likely by that time established at Beauval, he was forwarded from there to the 18<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers on May 15, where the report on his condition was downgraded to one of severe bronchitis.**



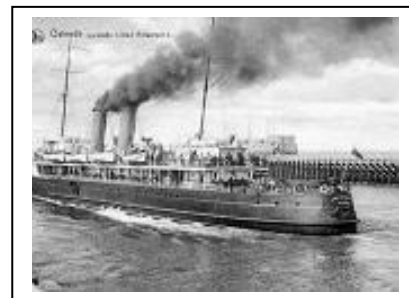
**(Right above: *establishing a British casualty clearing station – this one under canvas allowing for a speedy transfer if necessary – during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card*)**

**(Right: *the railway station at Dannes-Camiers through which thousands of sick, wounded and convalescent military personnel passed during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)**



**(continued)**

Ten days later, on May 25, Private Baker was evacuated on board the Belgian hospital ship *Stad Antwerpen* (right) for the short cross-Channel passage back to the United Kingdom. Upon his arrival in England, Private Baker was admitted on that same May 25, into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth.



(Right: *The main building of what became 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital during the Great War was opened, on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010*)



(Above far right: *Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing at the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

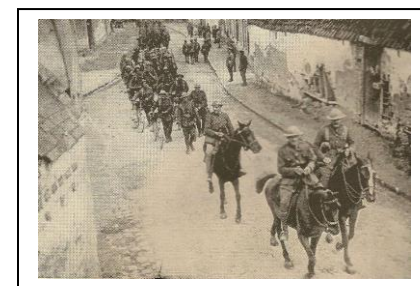
On July 8, Private Baker began the customary ten-day furlough granted to military personnel in the United Kingdom upon release from hospital. This period of leave having terminated on the 17<sup>th</sup>, there immediately followed a posting back to the Regimental Depot. He was to remain there for the next nine months.



(Right: *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 – photo from 2012*)

On April 25, 1917, Private Baker was again passing through Southampton, on this occasion with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Re-enforcement Draft, and a day later was then disembarking through Rouen, on his way to re-join 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. For Private Baker there was to be yet another six weeks, most of which time was inevitably spent at a Base Depot, likely the one in Rouen, before he was re-united to his unit. That date was June 7.

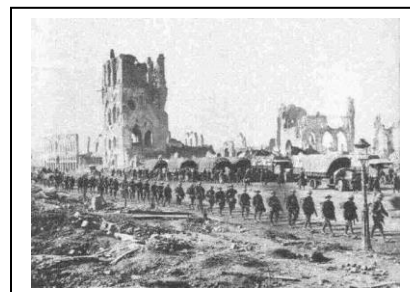
Meanwhile, after the exertions – and heavy losses of April at or near Monchy-le-Preux - May of 1917 had been a period when the Newfoundlanders were moving hither and thither on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches. Apart from the ever-present artillery, there had been little infantry activity – except for the marching. At the beginning of June, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville and spent its time re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.



It was at Bonneville that Private Baker was re-united with the parent unit, one of a detachment of four officers and ninety-two *other ranks* to report *to duty* on that day.

(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville in early May of 1917 – from The War Illustrated*)

The Newfoundlanders then once again moved north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again to the area of the *Ypres Salient*. This had been selected by the High Command as the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, borrowing that name from a small village on a ridge that was one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right above: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion remained in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army which floundered its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders. Notably it fought in two major engagements, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9. The records do not permit us to know what role Private Baker played at the former action, but that he was present at the Broembeek is not to be doubted.



(Above right: *an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

After a relatively quiet month of September, on October 9 the Battalion was ordered again to take to the offensive, only a couple of kilometres to the north of the *Steenbeek* where the Newfoundlanders had fought on August 16. On this occasion the name of the stream was the *Broembeek*.



The second son of Caleb Baker, fisherman, and Theresa Baker – to whom he had allotted his personal savings of sixty cents per day in the event of his death, but later cancelled - of Clareville (perhaps moving to Bishop's Falls in 1917) – he was also brother of Esau (see below), Mark, Marca, Benji, Rachel, Walker, Isaiah and Edmund.

Private Baker was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 9, 1917, while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting at the *Broembeek*. At home, it was the Reverend Ward of Shoal Harbour who was requested to bear the news to his family.



George Baker had enlisted at twenty-two\* years of age.

*\*But at twenty-seven if the birth date of February, 1890, in the 1911 census is correct. Twenty-two years is recorded on his enlistment papers.*

*(Preceding page: This is the Broembeek, pictured here as a placid watercourse, but overflowing in late 1917, and transforming the surrounding area into a swamp. – photograph from 2010)*

*(Preceding page bottom: The sacrifice of Private George Baker and that of his brother Private Esau Baker are honoured on the Clarenville War Memorial. – photograph from 2010)*

*\*His brother Esau – photograph far right - (Private, Regimental Number 3696) was reported at first as Missing in Action, his record later amended so as to read Killed in Action, at Marcoing- Masnières on December 3, 1917, during the Battle of Cambrai. Private Esau Baker, in common with his brother, has no known last resting-place.*



*(The photographs of Privates George and Esau Baker are by courtesy of Wendy\*.)*

*\*My apologies Wendy, for having mislaid your family name – especially after your above contribution. If you – or anyone – could remind me of it, I shall amend my revision accordingly.*



*(Right above: the names of the Baker brothers together on the bronze at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?))*

Private George Baker was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

(continued on following page)



Hon. A. E. Hickman  
Minister of Militia  
St. John's

Clarenville  
July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1919

Dear Sir:-

I am the father of Private George Baker Reg. No. 1439 who was killed the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1917. I understand there is due me what is termed as death money which I have not received as yet. I am unable to work and require some support in view of the fact that I lost two sons in the Newfoundland Regiment. Esau Baker is the name of my other son who was killed on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1917\*. I believe the Country which my two sons died for will see to the parents at home.

Thanking you for your kind attention to the above, I remain, sir,

Respectfully Yours truly,  
Caleb Baker

***\*There seems to be no explanation for the discrepancy in the dates of Private Esau Baker's death, the official one – in separate sources – being December 3, 1917.***