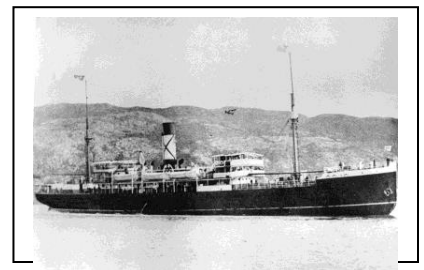




Private John Cook Barnes (Regimental Number 3614) is interred in Ypres Reservoir Cemetery – Grave reference II. C. 8.

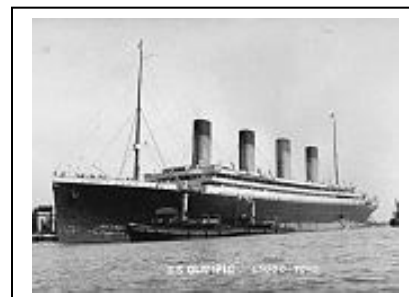
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a shell-maker (munitions) earning \$11.40 per week, John Cook Barnes was a recruit of the Fourteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on April 16, 1917, he then enlisted - engaged for the duration of the war at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attested on that same day.

Private Barnes was not to depart from Newfoundland until May 19, when the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) left en route to Halifax. His contingent of three officers and one-hundred eighty-two *other ranks*, and also ninety-nine recruits of the newly-formed Newfoundland Forestry Unit, then left Nova Scotia for the United Kingdom on board an unspecified* vessel, on May 29.



(continued)

****The ship in question may well have been the White Star liner Olympic (right) – sister ship to Titanic – requisitioned as a troop transport during the war, which sailed on June 2 from Halifax with Canadian military personnel as well – there are no other departures on or about this date. May 29 may have been the date of embarkation by the Newfoundland contingent.***



Arriving in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on June 9 the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were being despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st 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*)

****During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.***

The 34th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Private Barnes among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port-city of Southampton on December 2, 1917, crossing the English Channel to reach the Norman capital of Rouen on December 4. There Private Barnes' detachment disembarked to proceed to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot close by, there for a period of last-minute training and also to organize* before seeking out the parent unit.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route 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.***

Private Barnes is documented as reporting to duty with 1st Battalion on December 11 when a detachment of fifty-five other ranks arrived from Rouen – as did a smaller contingent on the next day again.

(continued)

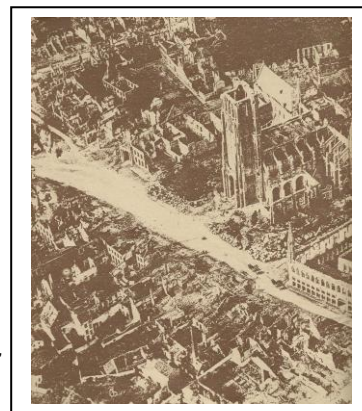
Only a week earlier, 1st Battalion had left behind it – on December 4 - the theatre of – and with it the exertions of - the *Battle of Cambrai*. By the time of the newcomers' arrival the parent unit was billeted in the vicinity of the community of Humbercourt, a number of kilometres just to the south-west of Arras. The Newfoundlanders remained there until the 18th when they marched to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There they were to spend both Christmas and New Year.

The weather obliged and even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow, a bit too much at times apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, and after that snowy Christmas period spent to the west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had been ordered into Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time.

There, as it was with the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.

(Right adjacent: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)



Meanwhile, while the Allies built their defences, by the beginning of 1918 the Germans were preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them.



It was expected that the Germans would launch a spring offensive. While they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders continued to dig.

(Above right: *countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were to be stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

Then the Germans did as was expected of them. Ludendorff's armies had already launched a powerful thrust on March 21, striking at first in the area of *the Somme*, overrunning the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while the advance seemed unstoppable. Then a second offensive, *Georgette*, was launched in the northern sector of the front, in Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders were stationed: the date was April 9. Within two days the situation of the Allies was desperate.



(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

On the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due to come out of the line and move back to the Somme, boarded buses at three o'clock in the afternoon and were suddenly directed southward, towards Nieppe. They were in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, three hours later.



(Right above: *the area of La Crêche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station – photograph from 2010.*)

The British were pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12th of April 1st Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

On April 13, during the defensive action near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening - were equally heavily involved.



(Right above: *ground just to the east of Bailleul where 1st Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

What exact role Private Barnes played at this frantic time is not known - it seems not to be even recorded of which Company he was a soldier - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.



(Right above: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, the scene of fierce fighting involving 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

Only days after the crisis of the German spring offensive had passed, on April 24, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion said farewell to their comrades-in-arms of 88th Brigade and 29th Division. On the following day there was a recessional parade. 1st Battalion was to later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 it was to move a world away from Flanders where it had just fought, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

(continued)

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – 1st Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four other ranks - took train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étaples, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening. For now, for them, the fighting was a thing of the past.

The summer of 1918 was to pass peaceably enough for most of the personnel of 1st Battalion. For the months of May, June and until early July, the unit was posted to Écuire, to the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



(Right above: *Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ – from Illustration*)

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1st Battalion of the recently-proclaimed *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* was no longer capable of serving in the field.

**Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that 1st Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

The posting to Écuire completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders were encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihe – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.



(Right above: *a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihe at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The Newfoundlanders returned to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28th Brigade of 9th Scottish Division. 1st Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today *Ingooigem*).



(Right: *British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days – from Illustration*)

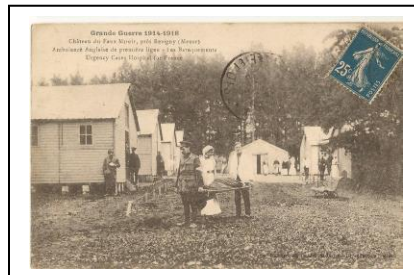
On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2nd British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive**. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge. After almost four years of stalemate, it was once again to be a conflict of movement.

(continued)

****This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3rd Somme.***

On October 15, Private Barnes was wounded during the fighting close to and in the village of Ledeghem. He suffered gun-shot wounds to the head and was evacuated from the field to the 140th Field Ambulance.

(Right: a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card)



The son of Ebenezer J. Barnes, blacksmith, and Jessie Selina Barnes (née Cook) – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Leslie Street in St. John's, he himself was recorded as a resident of Tilt Cove, Notre Dame Bay – where the family had originated. He was also brother to at least Frederick-William (died as an infant), to Gwendolyne-Gertrude, to Catherine-Mary, and to Annie and William-Henry (the latter two a twin).



(Right above: the re-constructed village of Ledeghem a century later - photograph from 2010)

Private Barnes was reported to have *died* of wounds on October 15, 1918, having been pronounced *dead on arrival* at the 140th Field Ambulance.

John Cook Barnes had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and nine months (date of birth June 2, 1899).

(Right: The Caribou at Harlebeke – commemorates the crossing of the Lys Canal and the sacrifices of the last campaign of the War. – photograph from 2012)



Private John Cook Barnes was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

