



Private Albert Chesley Bastow (Regimental Number 2750) is buried in Condé-sur-l'Escaut Communal Cemetery – Grave reference A. 8.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a farmer earning a monthly \$25.00, Albert Chesley Bastow was a recruit of the Tenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on May 11 of 1916, he then enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – five days later, on May 16, also attesting on that same day.

It was the 28<sup>th</sup> of August when Private Bastow embarked for passage to the United Kingdom and it was on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right) that he was to make the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom.

(continued)



This was the third such voyage that the ship was to make in 1916, the Newfoundlanders again likely sharing the vessel with Canadian personnel\*\*. Private Bastow was a soldier of Section 1, Platoon 9, 'C' (Reserve) Company of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (see \*\*\* below), and one of a draft of two-hundred forty-two personnel from Newfoundland in all.

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

*\*\*Sicilian had been re-fitted in 1906 to carry just under twelve-hundred passengers, thus her journey to St. John's in March of 1916 was likely followed by the short passage to Halifax to embark Canadian military personnel. Likewise, in July, she had sailed from Montreal on July 16 with Canadians to embark the Newfoundlanders awaiting passage overseas.*

*\*\*\*3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was based in St. John's, whereas 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion – 'E', 'F', 'G' and 'H' Companies - was stationed in the United Kingdom. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was the edge of the sword – 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies – and was posted to the front.*

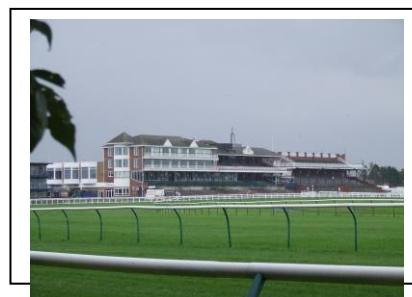
Upon arrival in the United Kingdom, the ship docked in the south-coast naval port of Devonport from where the Newfoundlanders entrained for the journey north to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot where each newcomer was delegated to one of the four resident companies - and the where the somewhat confusing title of 'C' Company was abandoned.

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.



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(Preceding page: *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*)

On February 15, 1917, the 19<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Bastow among its ranks – took ship in the English south-coast port of Southampton for the crossing to France. On the following day, the 16<sup>th</sup>, it disembarked in the Norman capital, Rouen, where time was spent at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, in final training and organization\* before moving onward to join 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right: *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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.

Two contingents arrived to report to duty at the encampment in the vicinity of the small community of Meaulté on March 6: Private Bastow's re-enforcement contingent from Rouen of one officer and thirty-one *other ranks*, and also the Regimental Band which had made the journey from the Regimental Depot in Scotland, comprising the Bandmaster and twenty-eight *other ranks*.



The parent unit, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, had arrived at Meaulté just the evening before and was still in the process of recuperating from the heavy fighting of the previous days at Sailly-Saillisel.

(Right above: *the Regimental Band, led by Mascot Sable Chief, on parade at Chelsea Barracks in September of 1917 – photograph via The Fighting Newfoundlander from the Provincial Archives*)

After that infantry affair at Sailly-Saillisel, the month of March was a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris (right), the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



On March 29, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, on to the village of Monchy-le-Preux.



(Preceding page: *the remnants of the Grande Place in the city of Arras in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

On April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties it was the most expensive operation of the War for the British, its only positive episode being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



The French offensive was a disaster.

(Above right: *the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part in the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at a place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, Monchy-le-Preux was to prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 alone.



(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community. The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

It was after the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 that Private Bastow was reported as being *missing in action*. However, a later file received in London – this sent from official German sources via the offices of the *Geneva Red Cross* - and dated June 18, confirmed that Private Bastow had been one of those taken prisoner on that day at Monchy-le-Preux by the enemy.

The son of Francis (Frank) and Lavinia Bastow (née *Mercer*) – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Pennywell Road in St. John's, he was also brother to at least Mabel and Elizabeth.

It was a later document received at the *Newfoundland Pay & Record Office* on or about January 10 of the following year, 1918, that then reported his death. Private Bastow had died - according to German records of the time - in the German P.O.W. Camp Hospital (*Kriegsgefangenenlager Lazarett Keserne*) in Condé-sur-l'Escaut – in occupied France - on November 16, 1917, from *œdema* (retention of fluids in the body), formerly known as *dropsy*.



(A second source, a Canadian fellow prisoner-of-war's report, has the time and date of death as nine o'clock in the morning of November 11.)

Albert Chesley Bastow had enlisted at the age of twenty years and seven months: date of birth, September 18, 1895 .

(Previous page: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the vestiges of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed community.* – photograph from 2009(?))

Private Albert Chesley Bastow was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

