



Private James Bennett (Regimental Number 2866) lies in Grove Town British Cemetery, Meaulté – Grave reference III. C. 18.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a farmer earning an annual \$3000.00 (*sic* – according to the record), James Bennett was a recruit of the Tenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road in St. John’s on June 8, 1916, he then enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier’s rate of \$1.10 – on the following day, June 9, attesting at the same time.

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It was the 28th of August when Private Bennett 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.



This was the third such voyage that the ship was to make in 1916, the Newfoundlanders likely sharing the vessel with Canadian personnel**. Private Bennett was a soldier of Section 10, Platoon 11, 'C' (Reserve) Company of 3rd 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.*

****3rd Battalion was based in St. John's, whereas 2nd (Reserve) Battalion – 'E', 'F', 'G' and 'H' Companies - was stationed in the United Kingdom. 1st 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 2nd (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 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*)

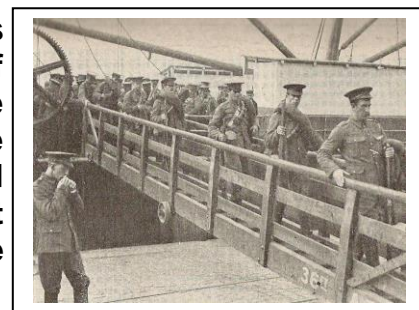
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During the winter of 1915-1916 the men of the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been lodged in several venues, at a nearby military camp at Gales, but also as far afield as Paisley Barracks, some sixty-five kilometres distant. However, by the spring of 1916 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*)

The 14th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Bennett among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on November 30 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front. It disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, December 1, and spent time at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, in final training and organization*, before making its way to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.

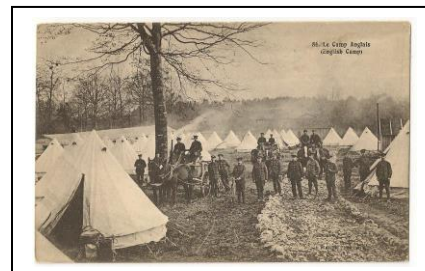


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

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

When that rendezvous was effected it was late in the day of December 11 – which is likely why it is recorded in the Regimental War Diary as occurring on the 12th. The parent unit had retired from the front on December 8, but many of the men had been seconded for work at Carnoy and Fricourt.

Those spared had marched on to Méricourt l'Abbé which is where the one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Base Depot – Private Bennett among that number - reported to *duty*. The newcomers were just in time for the six-week Christmas period to be spent well behind the lines in *Corps Reserve*, encamped near the city of Amiens.



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

After that Christmas respite, 1st Battalion *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23 of the New Year, 1917, although they had already been back in the trenches for several days and had suffered their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

The next five weeks were little different from those before Christmas: in and out of the trenches, the occasional dead, wounded and ill, and the occasional cold winter's day with its snow and ice - which did not seem to bother the Newfoundlanders. Anything was better than rain and mud.

The only infantry activity involving 1st Battalion during that entire period – from the action in mid-October of 1916 at Gueudecourt, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action which brought this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.



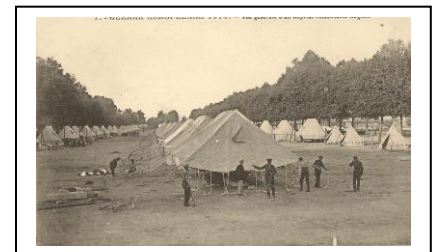
(Above right: *The fighting during the time of the Battalion's posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time. - photograph from 2009(?)*)

(Right: *A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers stands in the cold of the trenches at Sailly-Saillisel apparently enjoying a cigarette, during the late winter of 1916-1917, just prior to the arrival there of the Newfoundlanders who relieved them. – from Illustration*)



On March 1, 1st Battalion was in the process of taking over some newly-captured positions, relieving units of the Dublin Fusiliers and the Lancashire Fusiliers. Excerpts from the Regimental War Diary record... *D Co: 2 platoons in left of NEW COMMUNICATION TRENCH & 2 platoons in CHEESE SUPPORT (trench)... Enemy artillery & snipers active during relief. Casualties: 1 O R killed, 2 officers & 6 OR wounded.*

One of those wounded on that day was Private Bennett who incurred injuries to the thigh, leg and hand while serving with 'D' Company. He was immediately evacuated from the field to the 55th (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown where he was deemed as being *dangerously ill*.



(Right above: *a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card*)

The son of William Bennett (farmer and property owner, deceased August 31 of 1919) and Mary Bennett (née *Hiscock*, perhaps of Carbonear) – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Bell Island, Conception Bay, he was also brother to Hiram, to Leonard, to William, to Frank, to Lydia, to Louisa, to Catherine, to George, to Elizabeth, to John-Henry and to Mary-Ann.

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Private Bennett was reported as having *died of wounds* on March 2, 1917. Buried by the Reverend C. V. Camplin Cogan, chaplain attached to the 55th (2/2 London) CCS, at home it was the Reverend John Stead of Bell Island who was requested to bear the news to Private Bennett's family.

James Bennett had enlisted at the age of twenty-four years and eight months.

(Right above: A Calvaire at a crossroads not far distant from Sailly-Saillisel is to this day a collecting point for munitions – seen at its base – still being ploughed up almost a century later. - photograph from 2007)

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

