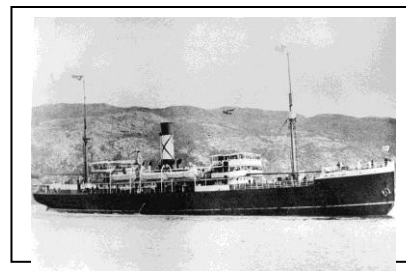




Private Peter Benoit (Regimental Number 3535) is interred in Oxford Road Cemetery – Grave reference V. H. 3.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a furrier/ trapper earning an annual \$400.00, Peter Benoit was a recruit of the Fourteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination on March 12 of 1917 at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's, he also enlisted - engaged *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on that same day.

Private Benoit was not to depart from Newfoundland for overseas service 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.



**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.*



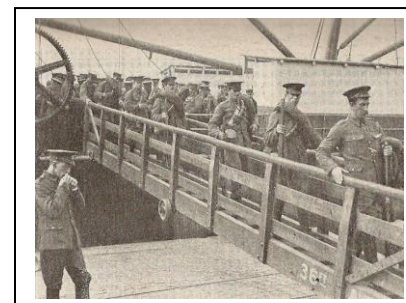
Arriving in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on June 9 the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr* had already been in existence as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here – 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.*

It was not to be until November 6, 1917, that Private Benoit took ship again; on this occasion he was on his way to the Continent, passing through the English south-coast port of Southampton as one of the one-hundred eleven *other ranks* of the 32nd Draft from Ayr. The Newfoundlanders disembarked in Rouen on the following day and made their way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot there for a few days of final training and organizing* before making their way to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



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

By that time, 1st Battalion had been withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign, on October 17, in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: *Cambrai*. It had been ordered back south from Belgium into northern France to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of Berles-au-Bois, a rural community a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of Arras.

It was there that, on November 14, four officers and one-hundred forty-one *other ranks* – one of them Private Benoit – reported from Rouen *to duty* with 1st Battalion.

That new offensive, the so-called *Battle of Cambrai*, was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle began well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered and by its close the British had relinquished as much territory as they had gained. 1st Battalion was again dealt with severely, at Marcoing and at Masnières - where a Caribou stands today: of the total of five-hundred fifty-eight officers and men who went into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of the second day.



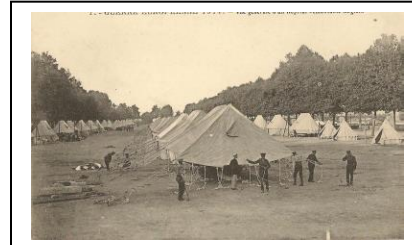
(Above right: *the Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai* – photograph from 2009)

On the first day of the fighting, in or in the close vicinity of Masnières, Private Benoit was wounded. At first evacuated to the 89th Field Ambulance, he was from there transferred by the following day, November 21, to the 48th Casualty Clearing Station at Ytres, for further treatment to severe gun-shot injuries to the neck and shoulder.



(Right: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power* – from a vintage post-card)

(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)



From there, it was apparently not until November 27 that Private Benoit was forwarded to the 4th General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers from where, on that same November 27, he was sent to the 6th Convalescent Depot, and thence to the 13th Convalescent Depot on December 2.



He was finally released *to duty* at Base Depot and to the Re-enforcement Camp there in Rouen, on January 27 of the New Year, 1918.

(Right above: *the railway station of the conjoint centres of Dannes and Camiers, though which many thousands of sick or wounded – or convalescing – military personnel passed during the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

Private Benoit is recorded as having re-joined 1st Battalion on February 15. On that day a detachment of one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Rouen – Private Benoit among that number - reported for duty with 1st Battalion at Steenvoorde, just on the French side of the frontier. It was the day before an inspection by Major-General Beauvoir de Lisle, Officer Commanding 29th Division, a parade complete with presentation of decorations, and the announcement that the *Newfoundland Regiment* was to be designated the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment*.

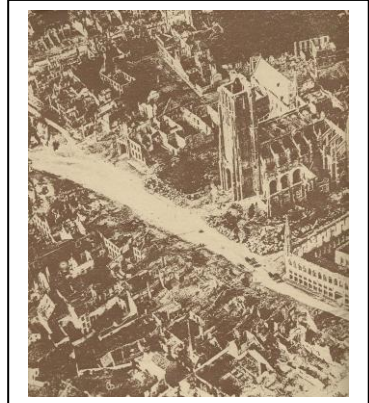
At the termination of the Battle of Cambrai, on December 4, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had left behind them the theatre and the exertions of the *Battle of Cambrai*. The unit was subsequently billeted in the vicinity of the community of Humbercourt, a number of kilometres just to the south-west 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, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences. It was during one of the periods when 1st Battalion had been temporarily relieved that Private Benoit reported *to duty*.

(Right: *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 stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

(continued)

On March 26 the Regimental War Diary exhibits the single entry which notes that the ... *Battalion moved to Line relieving 2nd. Hampshire Regt. in Right Battalion Sector.* On March 31, the Newfoundlanders were still in those same positions at the front; on this day the Regimental Diarist saw fit to note... *Total Casualties to-date:- Killed in Action = 5 Other Ranks. Missing b. Killed 2 do. Wounded = 1 Officer, 11 Other Ranks.*

The son of George Benoit, labourer, and Jane Drew Benoit (she later *Mrs. Jeannie Hinks*) of Conn River, Bay d'Espoir, he, also of Conn River, was brother to at least George and Andrew. He was also father to son Matthew*, born in November of 1912, to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay.



Private Benoit was reported as having been *killed in action* while serving with 'A' Company on March 29, 1918 (but see below).

Peter Benoit had enlisted at the age of twenty-eight years.

**There seems to be no mention of a marriage or relationship in the files; however the 1921 Census counts him as the adopted son of Matthew and Katherine Burke (she née Benoit).*

(Right above: *Oxford Road Cemetery is adjacent to the community of Wieltje, where 1st Battalion detained en route to the posting of the last days of March, 1918. The spires of Ypres may be perceived on the western horizon. – photograph from 2013*)

Private Peter Benoit was eligible for the British War Medal (on left) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The following is from a report in the file of Regimental Number 3560, Private James Whelan:

**In arrest awaiting trial, 29-3-18. Tried by F.G.C.M. 26-6-18 and found Guilty of:-
“When on Active Service, committing the offence of manslaughter, in that, he when in the trenches on 29-3-18 shot Pte. P. Benoit and therefore unlawfully killed him.” Sentenced to 6 months I.H.L.**

Auth. Col. B. Dunsterville, Comdg. G.H.Q. Troops 26-3-18