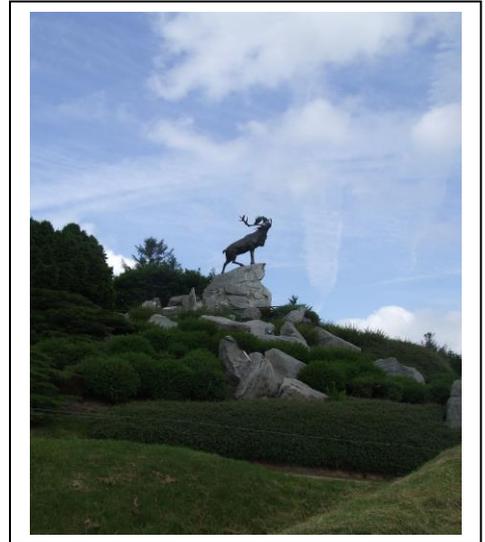




Sergeant Patrick Beson (Regimental Number 2232), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a mill-worker, employed by the *Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company* in Grand Falls, Patrick Beson was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on March 4, 1916, he then enlisted two days later – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on March 6, and *for the duration of the war*, attesting two days later again, on March 8.



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

By the time that he sailed for the United Kingdom, Private Beson had already been promoted on two occasions: on May 9 to the rank of acting corporal; and a month later, on June 9, to that of acting sergeant.

Sergeant Beson sailed from St. John's on July 19 on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian** (right). The ship - refitted some ten years previously to carry well over one thousand passengers - had left the Canadian port of Montreal on July 16, carrying Canadian military personnel.



It is likely that the troops disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool; however, it is *certain* that upon disembarkation the contingent journeyed north by train to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot.

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

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 the 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.



(continued)

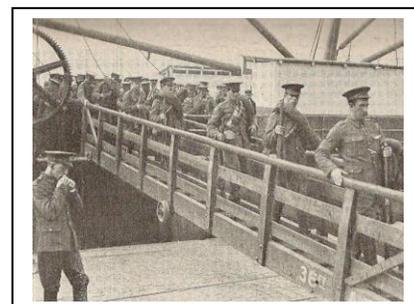
(Preceding page: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been billeted at Newton Park School and either in the grandstand or in a tented camp at the racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr.



(Right above: *the new race-course at Newton-upon-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 – photograph from 2012*)

The 12th Re-enforcement Draft – Sergeant Beson one of its non-commissioned officers - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 11 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front. The contingent disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, October 12, 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.*

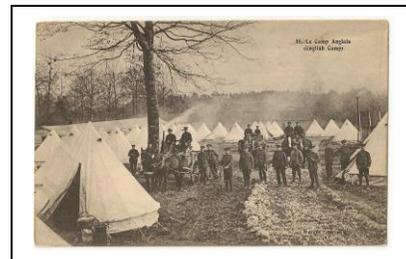
Sergeant Beson's contingent comprised a single officer and two-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* by the time it reported for duty at the Bernafay Wood Camp on October 22. Still in the area of Gueudecourt, 1st Battalion had been relieved in the front line three days before, on the 19th.



(Right: *Bernafay Wood a century later – not being close to the front lines, it may well have resembled what is seen here – photograph from 2014*)

(continued)

After the episode of October 12 at Gueudecourt, 1st Battalion had then remained in the same area of *the Somme* and from there on was to be regularly into and out of the trenches. There were no infantry engagements, but the incessant artillery action ensured a steady stream of casualties. The Newfoundlanders were to be withdrawn from *active service* on or about December 12 and would spend the following six weeks or so well behind the lines, encamped close to the city of Amiens.



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

Sergeant Beson, however, was not to enjoy any of those Christmas festivities with his comrades-in-arms.

A week prior to 1st Battalion's retirement, on December 5, he incurred a slight gun-shot wound to the head, likely during 1st Battalion's move of that day from the rear to the front-line trenches in the vicinity of the village of LesBoeufs.

He was sent to the 14th CC Post on that same day and thence to the 34th Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown. On the 8th he was once again transferred, by ambulance train, to the 10th General Hospital in Rouen – arriving there on the 9th - where he was treated until *discharged to duty* to Base Depot on January 5 of the New Year 1917.



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

Sergeant Beson was *back to duty* with his unit a month later, on February 5. His small contingent of twelve *other ranks* from Rouen reported in the area of Carnoy on a day when 1st Battalion was about to withdraw further from the front towards Coisy, a move which was effected on the following day.

In the meantime, after that welcome six-week Christmas-time respite away from the front lines, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

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.



(Previous page: *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(?)*)

After 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 that 1st 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, its march to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right adjacent: *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.



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

1st 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 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*)

(continued)

The son of James Beson* (blacksmith, he himself signed *Bessant*) and Mary Beson (*Beeson* on her headstone, deceased April, 1912) of Joe Batt's Arm, he was also brother of Esther – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of fifty cents from his pay – and to Francis, George, John, Lambert(?), Pierce and to Ronald.



Sergeant Beson was reported as *missing in action* on April 14, 1917, while serving with 'D' Company during the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux. Some thirty weeks later, on November 17, 1917, he was officially *presumed dead*.



Patrick Beson had enlisted at the age of twenty-nine years and eleven months.

(Right top: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the remains of a German strongpoint in the centre of the reconstructed village.* – photograph from 2009(?))

(Right above: *The sacrifice of Sergeant Beson is honoured on the War Memorial in Grand Falls.* - photograph from 2010)



(Right: *He is also honoured on the War Memorial in Joe Batt's Arm* – photograph from 2013)

**James the father married a second time, to Maggie; the couple had seven children: Lambert(?), Leonard, Allan, Walter, Theobald, James and Rita.*

Sergeant Patrick Beson was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

