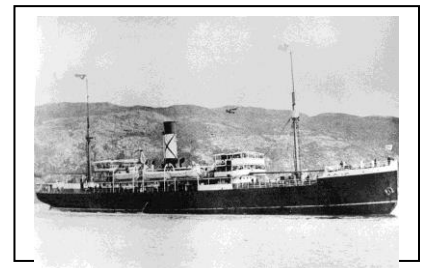




Private Thomas Blagdon (Regimental Number 3298) is interred in Tyne Cot Cemetery – Grave reference L111. H. 7.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a sailor, Thomas Blagdon was a recruit of the Twelfth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on December 4 of 1916, he also enlisted – engaged *for the duration of the war* at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested, all on that same day.

Private Blagdon was one of the approximately three hundred twenty *all ranks* to leave St. John's for overseas service on the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right), bound for Halifax, on January 31, 1917, from there to take ship to the United Kingdom.

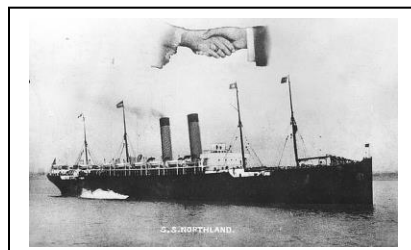


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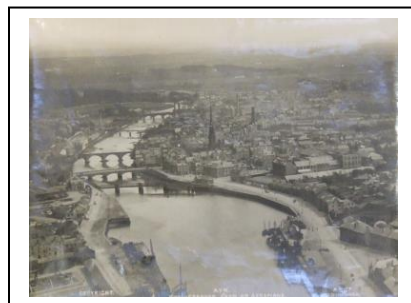
Immediately upon its arrival in Nova Scotia, however, this detachment was forwarded to accommodation in the town of Windsor where it was soon to be quarantined because of an epidemic of measles and mumps.

It was not before a lapse of some two-and-a-half months after its arrival that transport could be arranged for the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom for the so-called *Windsor Draft* – minus the twenty-five or so personnel still unable to travel.

On April 17, Private Blagdon embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Northland* – originally the *Zeeland* - (right), one of three ships carrying the Newfoundlanders to sail on the next day in a convoy from Halifax. The vessels were carrying Canadian re-enforcements to the English west-coast port of Liverpool, where the ships docked on April 29.



Arriving in England the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence to serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from Newfoundland were to be 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*)

By the time that the Windsor Draft arrived at the Regimental Depot, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was becoming critically short of personnel.



(Right: *the new race-course at Ayr – opened in 1907 – where men of the Regiment were billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photo from 2012*)

On June 11, 1917, the 25th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Blagdon among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to France. On the following day, June 12, the contingent disembarked in the Norman capital, Rouen, where time was spent at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, to be organized and to undergo final training* before moving onward to its eventual rendezvous with 1st Battalion.

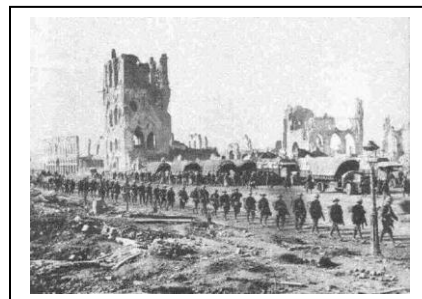


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

**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.*

The records show that it was on July 2 – the *Regimental War Diary* says, in fact, on the day before - that Private Blagdon's contingent of two-hundred fifty *other ranks* reported to duty at Caribou Camp, behind the lines near Woesten in Belgium. For the next few days – and nights – 1st Battalion supplied working parties for road-mending and for the construction of infantry tracks. For that purpose, several of the Newfoundlanders were attached temporarily until July 20 to the 173rd Company of the Royal Engineers.

Only days before, at the end of June, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had once again moved north into Belgium and once again to the area of Ypres. This had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917. Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right above: Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration)

The Newfoundlanders were to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army which floundered its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders. By that date, 1st Battalion had fought in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and then at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



(Right: an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration)

A week after the encounter of October 9 at the *Broembeek*, the Newfoundlanders were withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: *Cambrai*. They were ordered back south from Belgium into northern France on October 17 to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of Berles-au-Bois, a small rural community a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of Arras – some personnel even having been granted at the time a ten-day furlough back to the United Kingdom.

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.

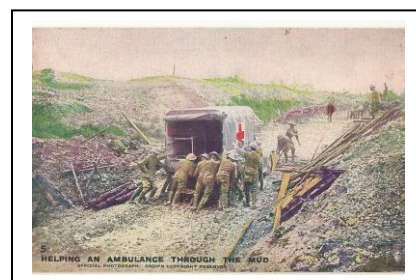
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The battle began well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered and by its close the British had relinquished as much territory as they had gained. 1st Battalion was again dealt with severely, 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.



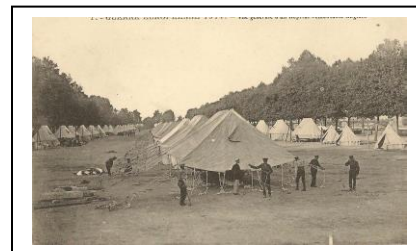
(Right above: *the Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

It was on the first day of the *Cambrai* offensive, November 20, that Private Blagdon was wounded. Admitted to the 37th Field Ambulance with *mild* shrapnel wounds to his left hand and to a calf, it was on the 21st that he was forwarded to the 55th Casualty Clearing Station from where he was then evacuated to the 24th General Hospital at Étaples some twenty-four hours later again.



(Right above: *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: *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*)



One week later Private Blagdon was on board an un-named hospital ship en route back to the United Kingdom. On the same day, November 29, having arrived in England, he was transported to the Fulham Military Hospital in Hammersmith from where, after treatment, he was sent to Hanworth Park Red Cross Hospital to convalesce. January 16 saw him released from care and granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded to service personnel upon discharge from hospital in the United Kingdom.

In the New Year of 1918, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was to move quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918.

It was most likely for this reason that Private Blagdon was temporarily posted *to duty* at the Command Depot at Ripon upon completion of his furlough on January 25. He joined 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Hazely Down Camp on March 5.



(continued)

(Previous page: a bleak-looking *Hazely Down Camp* at some time during the winter of 1918 – from *The War Illustrated*)

On April 6 the 42nd or 43rd Re-enforcement Draft left Hazely Down en route to the Continent via Southampton. Arriving in Rouen on April 10, Private Blagdon was almost immediately admitted into the 11th Stationary hospital – April 11 - then was forwarded on to the 2nd Convalescent Depot – April 12 – for attention to an apparently undocumented medical problem. He was subsequently released to the Re-enforcement Depot on May 11 and reported *to duty* to 1st Battalion – one of a small draft of seven other ranks to do so - *in the field* on May 19.

Meanwhile, just days after the crisis of the German spring offensive had passed, on April 24 – and almost four weeks before Private Blagdon's arrival at Équiheun - the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion officially had said farewell to their comrades-in-arms of 88th Brigade and 29th Division and on the morrow had participated in a recessional parade attended by the officer commanding 88th Brigade, Brigadier Freyberg.

They would later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 1st Battalion was to move a world away from Flanders where it had just fought, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

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. This, of course was both the time and place of Private Blagdon's return to duty.



(Right: *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.*

(continued)

Private Blagdon's medical problems continued, even in the pleasant environment of the French west coast. Sent to the 20th General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers on June 29 for treatment to a case of scabies, it was almost a week before he was back *to duty* - on July 4 - and *in the field* on the 7th.



(Right above: *the railway-station at Dannes-Camiers through which passed thousands of sick and wounded – into and out of hospital - during the War – from a vintage post-card*)

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



Re-enforced, 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 would finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (*Ingooigem*).



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.

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

**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.*

The son of Philip Blagdon, farmer, and Mary Ann Blagdon of Fortune, Private Blagdon was in fact raised by foster-father John Spurdle, also of Fortune – to whom he had allotted a daily forty cents from his pay – and by a Mrs. Emily Snook, his sister, who is also mentioned in the files as later receiving his medals and Memorial Plaque. He was likely also brother to George-Charles, to William, Emma (Emily?), Mary-Elizabeth, Jonathan, Samuel-Philip and to Jacob-Forsey*.

Private Blagdon was reported as having been *killed in action* in Belgium, on September 30, 1918, during fighting in the area of Dadizeele.

Thomas Blagdon had enlisted at the age of nineteen years and six months.

**This is not confirmed but seems almost to be certain.*



(Right above: *the re-constructed village of Dadizeele (Dadizele) just to the north of which the Newfoundlanders dug in on the evening of September 29, 1918, and where Private Blagdon died on the morrow – photograph from 2013*)

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

