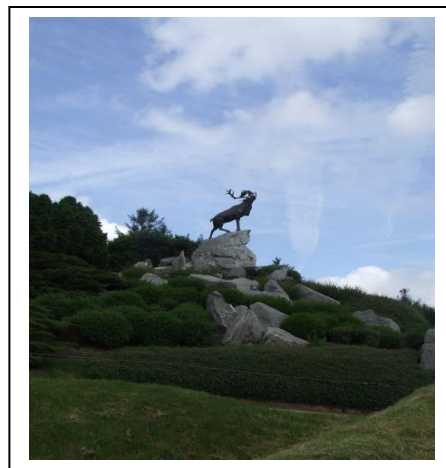




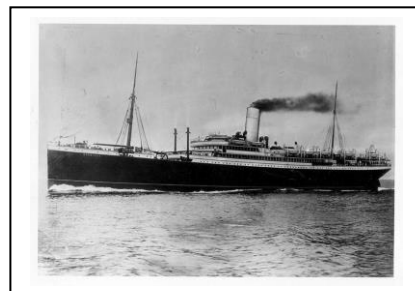
Private George Brinston (Regimental Number 1772), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of both lumberman and fisherman, George Brinston was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road in St. John's on August 9, 1915 – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – before then presenting himself for medical examination on the following day, August 10. He attested two days later again, on August 12.



**A second source has him being medically examined and also enlisting on August 10 – perhaps more likely.*

Private Brinston and the other personnel of 'G' Company – apparently in the company of several naval reservists and also some German prisoners (these latter presumably to remain in Canada) - left St. John's by train on October 27, to cross the island to Port aux Basques. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry, and proceeded by train from North Sydney to Quebec City.



At Québec the Newfoundlanders boarded His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* (above) for the trans-Atlantic passage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9.

By the morning of the 10th the new arrivals had travelled by train and had gone north to Scotland. There they had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gales, not far removed from the new Regimental Depot where accommodation for the contingent was as yet not available.

That new Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland 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 sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.



(continued)

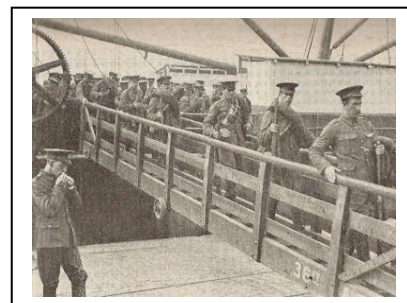
(Preceding page: an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)

It was at Ayr that Private Brinston became one of a number of Regiment personnel who suffered – some dying - during an epidemic of German measles. He was hospitalized there at Gales Camp from January 18 until April 4, the date on which he was further diagnosed as having a chest infection, tonsillitis and infections in both ears. The subsequent treatment in the 3rd Scottish General Hospital lasted until June 16.

It was also during this posting to the Regimental Depot that, at some time before his departure to France on *active service*, Private Brinston was prevailed upon to re-enlist for the duration of the War*.

****At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.***

It was not until almost a year after his arrival there that Private Brinston left the Regimental Depot as a soldier of the 11th Re-enforcement Draft. The contingent embarked through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 3, 1916, and disembarked in the Norman capital city of Rouen on the 4th, the following day. There the Newfoundlanders made their way to the large British Expeditionary Force base Depot where they received final training and organization*, and prepared to move on to their 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.***

The union was achieved on October 14*, three days after the action at Gueudecourt where the Regiment had incurred serious losses – two-hundred thirty-nine in all - for very little gain. As the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had remained holding their lines in the days following October 12, the newcomers were ushered forward from the *Transport Section* into *Switch Trench* and from there parcelled out among the four depleted companies.



The Germans welcomed them on the following two days with artillery bombardments, shelling the positions in which they remained until they were relieved on the 20th.

(Page preceding: *This is the ground over which 1st Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)

**In fact, Private Brinston's draft of two-hundred sixty-six other ranks had arrived on the 12th, the day of the attack, but had been obliged to remain to the rear in the transport lines. It was not until the 14th that its presence was officially recorded – on Lance Corporal Brinston's personal file, for example – although the Regimental War Diarist had found time to note the draft's arrival on the 12th.*

On November 19, Private Brinston was evacuated into the 5th Australian Field Ambulance and diagnosed as suffering from influenza. On the 21st he was transferred to an unspecified general hospital in Rouen from where, on December 6, he was embarked for the crossing back to the United Kingdom on board His Majesty's Australian Hospital Ship *Wandilla* (right – being used as a troop transport ship earlier in 1916).



Upon arrival on the 7th, Private Brinston was admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth, the diagnosis now having been amended to that of bronchitis.

(Right: *The main building of what became 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War was opened, on July 1st, 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010*)



(Above far right: *Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing at 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

The customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel subsequent to treatment and convalescence in the United Kingdom was granted to Private Brinston from January 6 of the New Year, 1917, until the 15th, after which period of leave he received the almost-inevitable posting to the Regimental Depot in Scotland.



(Right above: *the High Street in Ayre, dominated then as it still is today by the imposing Wallace Tower, as shown on a postcard of the time sent home by a Newfoundland soldier – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo*)

(continued)

Yet it was not long before he was returning to the Continent. The 22nd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, Private Brinston among its ranks, made its way through Southampton on March 26, crossed the Channel, and arrived in Rouen on March 26. The Draft proceeded to the Base Depot for those days of final preparation.

It was a detachment of thirty-nine *other ranks*, Private Brinston among that number, which reported from Rouen *to duty* to 1st Battalion, at the time withdrawn to Arras, on April 18, four days following the shambles of Monchy-le-Preux.

Almost three weeks previously, on March 29, 1st Battalion had begun to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, their march to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.



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

On April 9 the British Army had 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 to be 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: *the Canadian National Memorial standing 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: *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*)



For many of those newcomers, their first task, as part of a composite battalion with men of the Essex Regiment, was to move up into reserve trenches. For others it was, on the next morning, to salvage equipment and to bury the dead.

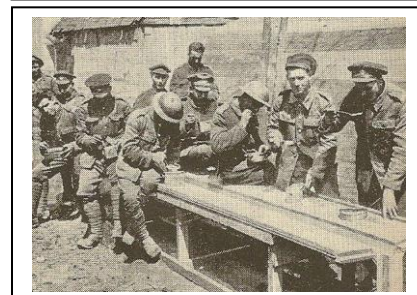
(continued)

The Newfoundlanders final engagement during the *Battle of Arras* took place at *Les Fosses Farm*, on the main road between Arras and Cambrai. There were numerous casualties of which many, as ever, were the result of artillery fire. On the following day, April 24, 1st Battalion again withdrew towards Arras.

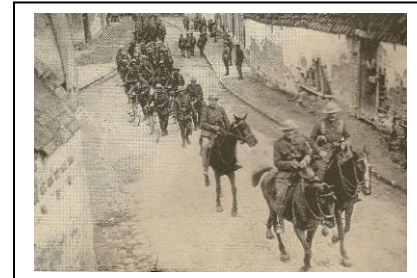


(Right above: *Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras. – photograph from 2009*)

(Right: *Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from *The War Illustrated**)

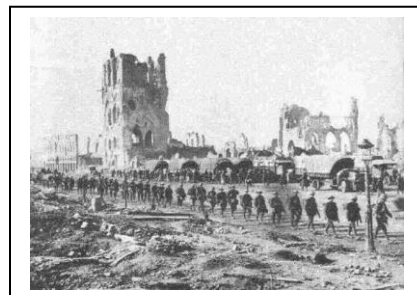


May of 1917 was a period when the Newfoundlanders were moving hither and thither on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches. Apart from the ever-present artillery, there was little infantry activity – except for the marching. At the beginning of June, 1st Battalion retired from the line to Bonneville and spent its time re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.



(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville in early May of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)

The Newfoundlanders once again moved north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again to the area of Ypres. This had been selected by the High Command as the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, borrowing 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**)

1st Battalion was 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. Notably it fought in two major engagements, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



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

But Private Brinston was *hors de combat* for six weeks during that period. At the end of the third week of July, on the 23rd, in need of medical attention, he was evacuated into the 64th Casualty Clearing Station at Mendinghem*, in the proximity of Poperinghe. Suffering from diarrhoea, he was transferred south on July 28 to the 22nd General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers. He recovered rapidly, being sent to Base Details, Rouen, on August 5, and reporting back to *duty in the field* on September 3.

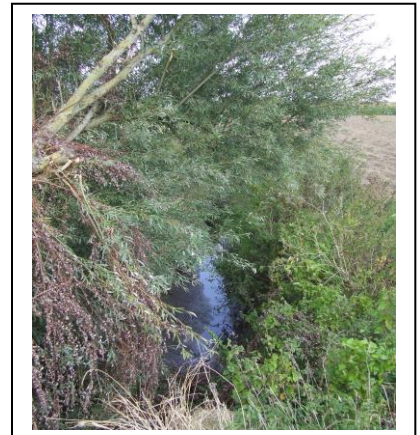


(Right above: *the railway station at Dannes-Camiers through which many thousands of sick, wounded and convalescent military personnel passed during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

**Several names such as Mendinghem, Bandagehem and Dozinghem were invented by the British troops as they resembled the Belgian and northern-French fashion of naming villages. These sites were occupied by medical facilities only – and the inevitable cemeteries which today remain. But Lozinghem seems to be an exception in that it is a real place – however much the name lends itself to the morbid spirit of the British soldier.*

In fact, 1st Battalion had just withdrawn *from* the field. It was the time of a lull in the fighting, a respite which lasted another three weeks while the British Army re-enforced and re-organized. The Newfoundlanders moved back up to the line on September 25.

The son of Robert William Brinston and Amelia Jane Brinston (née *Giles*) - to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of eighty cents from his pay - of North Harbour, Placentia Bay, he was also brother to at least three siblings: Leslie-Atheling*, Reginald-Alson, and Erelena-Blanche.



Private Brinston was reported as *missing in action* on October 9, 1917, while fighting at the *Broembeek*, Belgium. Some thirty weeks later, on May 7, 1918, he was *officially presumed dead*.

George Brinston is recorded as having enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years and eleven months. (A second source has him only seventeen at the time of his death.) His age is not recorded in vital statistics**.

**Leslie Atheling Brinston, Seaman 305x, Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve, died on HMS Laurentic (right) on January 25, 1917.*



***In fact, his father addressed a letter the Colonial Secretary requesting that his son be sent home on account of his young age. The Colonial Secretary's Office declined to intervene in matters such as furlough after sickness!*

(Previous page above *Laurentic: The Broembeek*, a placid, innocuous water course shown here, was an overflowing torrent in October of 1917, transforming its surrounds into a swamp. – photograph from 2009)

(Right: A family memorial which stands in the United Church Cemetery in North Harbour commemorates the sacrifice of Private George Brinston and Seaman Leslie Brinston. – photograph from 2015 with thanks to Cyril Bennett)

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

