



Lance Corporal John W. Brown (Regimental Number 2564) lies in Cabaret-Rouge\* British Cemetery – Grave reference XVI. G. 11.

*\*It was from Caberet-Rouge Cemetery, not far distant from Vimy Ridge that were chosen and exhumed the unidentified remains which today lie in the memorial tomb of Canada's Unknown Soldier in the nation's capital.*

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a carpenter, John Brown was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Although the records seem to give no details, they *do* suggest that he had spent time in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve. Having presented himself for medical examination - likely at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St John's - on April 12, 1916, he then enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – ten days afterwards, on April 22, before attesting\* two days later again, on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

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

Private Brown 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.

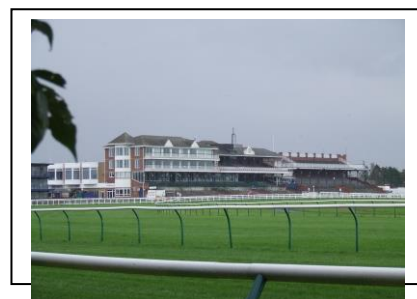
*\*Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched - the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport during another conflict, carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War.*

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 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)

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.



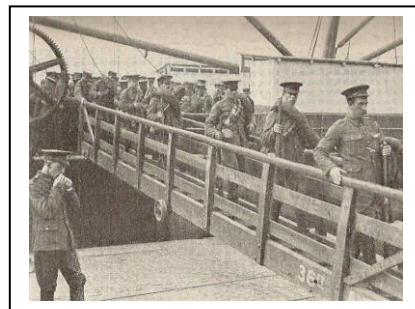
(Right above: *the new race-course at Newton-upon-Ayr - opened in 1907 - where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original - photograph from 2012*)

The 12<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft - Private Brown among its ranks - 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.

(continued)



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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



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

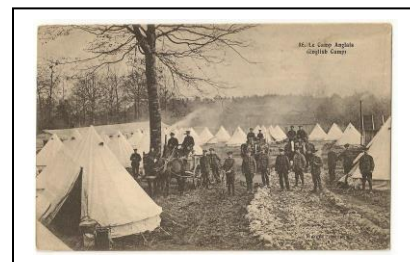
Private Brown's contingent comprised a single officer and two-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* by the time it reported to *duty* at the Bernafay Wood Camp on October 22. Still in the area of Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been relieved in the front line three days before, on the 19<sup>th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



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

After the episode of October 12 at Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had remained in the same area of *the Somme* and was 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 would be withdrawn from active service on or about December 12 and were to spend the following six weeks or so encamped well behind the lines and close to the city of Amiens.



(Right: *a British encampment somewhere on the Continent, apparently during the winter season – from a vintage post-card*)

After that welcome six-week Christmas-time respite away from the front lines, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Sully-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.



(Preceding 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 the efforts at Sailly-Saillisel, the month of March was to be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they 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.



However, likely one of the more memorable occasions during that month of March for Private Brown would have been his promotion to the rank of lance corporal with its five-cents-per-day raise in pay. It occurred on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month, only three days before the arrival of the Prime Minister.

It was on March 29 that 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)

1<sup>st</sup> 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 to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 alone.



(Previous page: *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, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

Private Brown was reported as *missing in action* on April 14 while serving with ‘C’ Company at Monchy-le-Preux. However, an official German report – dated June 23, 1917 - received in London through the offices of the *Geneva Red Cross*, named Lance Corporal Brown as being a prisoner-of-war held in a camp in – or under the jurisdiction of – the Military District of Limburg.

The son of James Brown, fisherman, and Jane Brown – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Mussel Harbour Arm (today *Kingwell*), Placentia Bay, he was apparently brother to at least Cecelia, to Wilson, to Ella and to James Jr..



Lance Corporal Brown, in a subsequent report of December 11, 1917, was then reported as having been killed in an air-raid on November 26, 1917\*, by *friendly* forces (see below). After the War his remains were exhumed and brought to where they repose today.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the vestiges of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed community. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

John Brown had enlisted at thirty-four years of age: date of birth, April 16, 1883).

*\*This date from CWGC and other records. The Regimental Honour Roll and the Daily News have April 28-29, 1918, as being the date.*

Lance Corporal John W. Brown was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

(continued on following page)



**Aug 6, 1920**

**Sergt. Moakler (1766) has given the following statement:**

**Brown was taken prisoner on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1917. On November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1917, the Germans were occupying Bouchain where Brown was a prisoner of war in their hands. On that day British planes came over and dropped bombs one of which killed him and two or three Germans. His body was taken and was left in the old military barracks in Bouchain. On the following day, Nov. 27<sup>th</sup>, the Germans moved out. Moakler states that there were two Air Force officers named Sutcliffe and McKenna buried side by side in the cemetery just outside the village towards Arras, and he is pretty sure that Brown was placed in a grave immediately next to these two officers: it is possible that the grave is not marked. Moakler suggests that he was probably buried by the French; and if you were to see the Mayor of Bouchain or any of the residents who were there at the time, they would be sure to know of the graves of Sutcliffe and McKenna, and would very likely remember the circumstances of Brown's body being left in the old Military Barracks the day before they moved out.**

**xxxxxxx Lieut.-Col.  
Chief Staff Officer**

*(Right: a vintage post-card of Bouchain)*

