

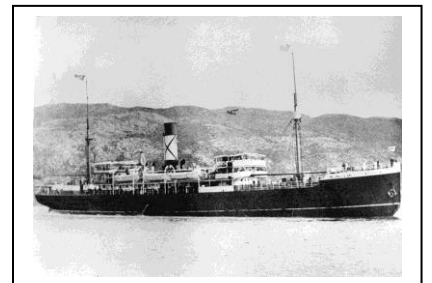


Private John Joseph Bryan (elsewhere *Brien*) (Regimental Number 3109) lies in Marcoing British Cemetery – Grave reference II. G. 13.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, John Joseph Bryan was a recruit of the Twelfth Draft. Prior to this he had also been a Royal (Newfoundland) Naval Reservist – Number 1487x*. He presented himself for medical examination and also enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – *for the duration of the war* and engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – on September 12, 1916. He then attested on that same day.

**Based on a single document in his file.*

Private Bryan 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.



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 Bryan embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Ausonia* (right), one of three ships carrying the Newfoundlanders to sail on the next day in a convoy from Halifax. The vessels were also carrying Canadian reinforcements to the English west-coast port of Liverpool, where the ships docked on April 29.



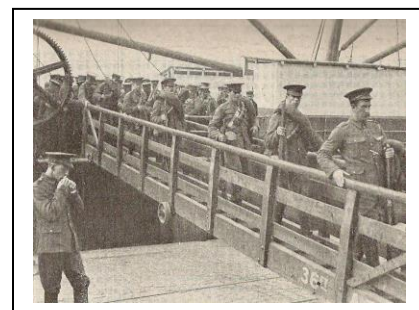
Arriving in England the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence to serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until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



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

(Right above: *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 Bryan in 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.

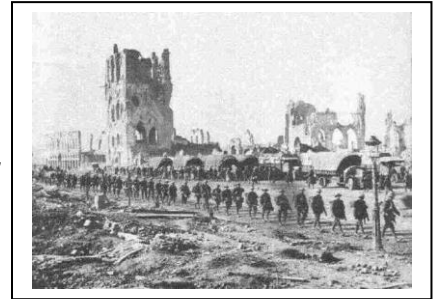


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

**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, Étapes, 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 Bryan'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.

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 *the Ypres Salient*. This had been selected by the High Command to be 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*, 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*)

1st Battalion remained 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*)

Only two weeks after 1st Battalion arrived in Belgium, on July 13, nothing at all is recorded in the *Regimental War Diary*. However, on the preceding day and, in some cases, well into the night of the 12-13, work parties from 1st Battalion had been busy in the area of the front repairing trenches before being withdrawn. During that period, the reported casualties were... *ten killed & twenty-three wounded*.



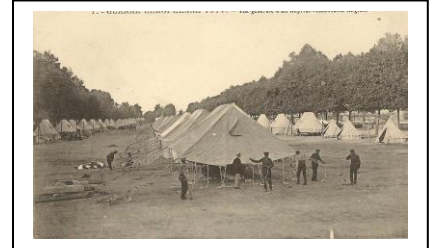
(Right above: *the Yser Canal to the north of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) – On July 10 of 1917, 1st Battalion withdrew just to the west of the canal (left-hand side of the picture). To the east (right-hand side) was the front line, a few kilometres distant, where many of them, back on the east bank, were busy on trench-works on July 12-13. – photograph from 2013*)

Almost certainly it was at this time that Private Bryan was wounded. Suffering *mild* shrapnel wounds to his left leg, he was evacuated to the 47th Casualty Clearing Station at Lozinghem*.

(continued)

(Right below: 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)

Two days later, on the 16th, he was transferred and admitted into the 8th British Red Cross Hospital at Paris-Page – in the peace-time coastal resort of Le Touquet - for further treatment. Discharged *to duty* at the 29th Division Base Depot at Rouen on August 30, he reported back to 1st Battalion *in the field* at *Penton Camp*, this close to the town of Poperinghe, on September 9, one of a contingent of twenty-three *other ranks* to arrive on that day.



**Several names such as Mendinghem, Bandaghem 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 – in northern France - 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.*

A week after the encounter of October 9 at the *Broembek*, 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 even being granted 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.



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)

(continued)

The son of William Patrick Bryan (also *Brien*) and Mary Bryan (née *Ryan*) of Ferryland, he also was brother to Michael.

Private Bryan was reported as having been *killed in action* on November 20, 1917, the first day of the fighting near the French villages of Marcoing and Masnières. At home it was the Reverend L.K. Vereker of Ferryland who was requested to bear the news to his family.

John Joseph Bryan had enlisted at the age of twenty-two years and eleven months: date of birth, October 18, 1893.

(Right: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether this was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012*)



Private John Joseph Bryan was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

