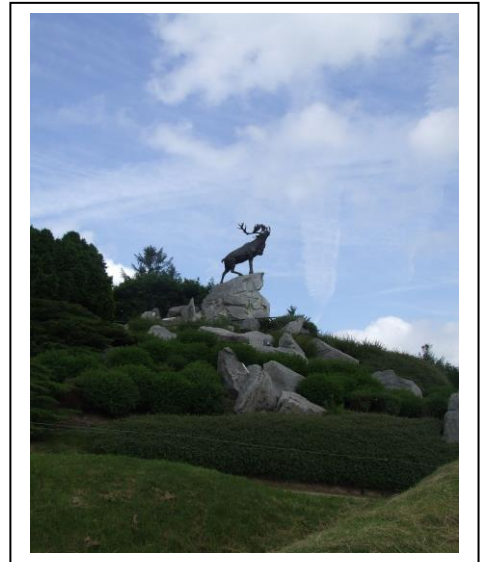


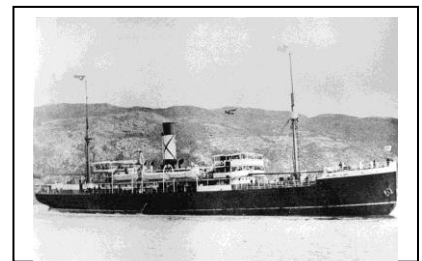


Private Charles Bryant (Regimental Number 3623), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman earning a monthly \$30.00, Charles Bryant was a recruit of the Fourteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on April 18, 1917, he then enlisted - engaged for the duration of the war and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem - and also attested on that same day.



Private Bryant was not to depart from Newfoundland for overseas service until May 19, when the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) left en route to Halifax. His contingent of three officers and one-hundred eighty-two *other ranks*, and also ninety-nine recruits of the newly-formed Newfoundland Forestry Unit, then left Nova Scotia for the United Kingdom on board an unspecified* vessel, on May 29.



**The ship in question may well have been the White Star liner Olympic (right) - sister ship to Titanic - requisitioned as a troop transport during the war, which sailed on June 2 from Halifax with Canadian military personnel as well - there are no other departures on or about this date. May 29 may have been the date of embarkation by the Newfoundland contingent.*



Arriving in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on June 9 the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr* had already been in existence as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here - since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 - that the new-comers from home were being 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)

**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

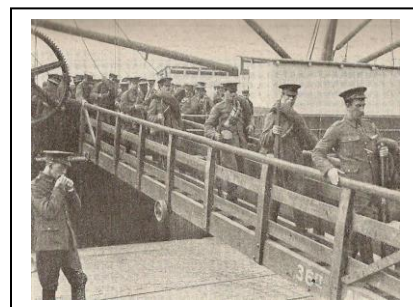
There being no evidence to the contrary, it must be assumed that Private Bryant spent the following seven months in Scotland. In fact, he was to spend the Hogmanay (the Scottish New Year) there – in hospital: from December 20 until January 4 he was receiving medical attention in Heathfield Hospital for a case of diphtheria.

Then in January of the New Year, 1918, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion moved its quarters definitively from the Royal Borough of Ayr to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester. It was from there that Private Bryant was to travel when he received his orders to join the British Expeditionary Force.



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

It was on the 27th of March that the 40th Re-enforcement Draft of eighty *other ranks* – Private Bryant among that number - passed through the English south-coast port-city of Southampton to board ship for the Continent. The contingent disembarked on the 29th in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, but was to spend little time there in final training and organization* before moving on to its rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from *Illustration**)

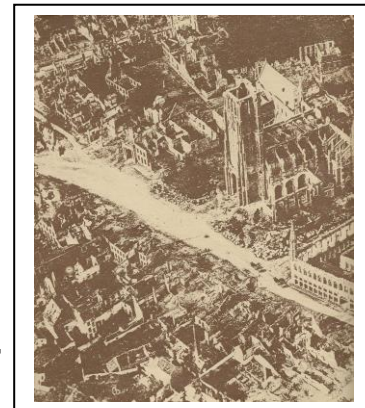
**Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Private Bryant reported *to duty* with 1st Battalion on April 4 while it was out of the line at Hasler (Haslar) Camp near St-Jan, just north-east of Ypres. However, by the evening of the next day the Newfoundlanders were back *in* the line, by then having relieved the 2nd Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment, and having taken over positions near the remnants of the village of Passchendaele.

(continued)

In the meantime, some four months previously, at the beginning of January of 1918, after a snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had returned to Belgium, to the Ypres Salient, for a third time. Once there, as with the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.

(Right: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)



In the meantime, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them. It was expected that they would launch a spring offensive.



In the mean-time, while they waited, the Newfoundlanders dug.

(Right above: *countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

Private Bryant had arrived just in time for the onslaught.

Then the Germans did as was expected of them. Ludendorff's armies had already launched a powerful thrust on March 21, striking at first in the area of *the Somme*, overrunning the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while the advance seemed unstoppable. Then a second offensive, *Georgette*, was launched in the northern sector of the front, in Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders were stationed: the date was April 9. Within two days the situation of the Allies was desperate.



(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

On the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due to come out of the line and move back to the Somme, boarded buses at three o'clock in the afternoon and were suddenly directed southward, towards Nieppe. They were in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, three hours later.



(Previous page: *the area of La Crêche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station – photograph from 2010.*)

The British were pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12th of April 1st Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

On April 13, during the defensive action near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening - were equally heavily involved.



(Right above: *ground just to the east of Bailleul where 1st Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

What exact role Private Bryant played during this time is not known - it is only recorded that he was a soldier of 'D' Company - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.



(Previous page: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, the scene of fierce fighting involving 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

The son of Herbert (Bryant) and Drucilla (1911 census records *Priscilla*; 1921 census has *Wacusella*) Bryant – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Hickman's Harbour – he was also brother to Bertha, to William, to Neaman (in 1911 census, or to *Edmond* in that of 1921), to Adolphus and to Haneel (1911 or to *Stephen* in 1921).



Private Bryant was at first reported as *missing in action* while serving with 'D' Company on April 12*, 1918, on the Franco-Belgian frontier near the town of Nieppe.

**Perhaps on the 13th; the dates even in the Regimental War Diary are at times not clear.*

However, a subsequent report (see below, on following page) resulted to his file being amended on so as to read *killed in action*.

Charles Bryant had enlisted at the age of eighteen years (only seventeen if the birth date, October of 1900, recorded in the 1911 Census, is correct).

(Preceding page: *the re-constructed northern French town of Bailleul a century later* – photograph from 2010)

**Mr. Herbert Bryant,
Hickman's Harbor, T. B.**

August 17th, 1918

Dear Mr. Bryant:-

We have received information from our Record office, London, who have received information from a German List dated 1-7-18 forwarded to the Newfoundland War Contingent Association by the Canadian Red Cross Society on the 22-7-18, stating that your son, the late No. 3623 Pte. Charles Bryant, of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was buried by the enemy in the vicinity of Bailleul near Nieppe 20-4-18.

Assuring you of my deepest sympathy in your bereavement,

**I am
Yours faithfully
WVW
Lieut
Casualty Officer**

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

