



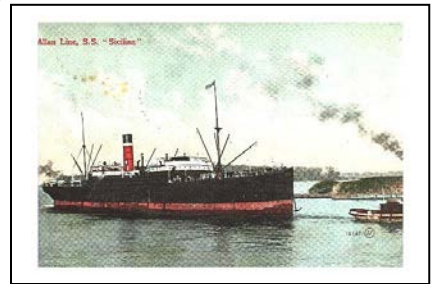
Lance Corporal Augustus Bulgin, MM, (Regimental Number 2427), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Augustus Bulgin was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on April 3, 1916, he then enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10\* – and also attested two days later, on the same April 5.



*\*The private soldier earned a daily dollar to which was added a ten-cent field allowance.*

Private Bulgin sailed from St. John's on July 19 on board the *Anchor Line* steamship *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, but whether she was carrying military or civilian passengers is not certain as the vessel was not a requisitioned troop transport\*\*.



*\*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.*

*\*\*Apparently Sicilian was not a requisitioned troop-carrier: she ran the commercial routes from Great Britain to Canada, only occasionally accommodating military units.*

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.

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 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(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*)

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: A part of the present grandstand is original. – photograph from 2012*)

The 11<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Bulgin among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 3 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front.

The contingent disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, October 4, 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 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.



(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.*

The contingent with which Private Bulgin reported *for duty in the field* was a large detachment of two-hundred sixty-six *other ranks* which arrived from Rouen at the Battalion transport lines on October 12. This was also the day on which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion made its attack on the enemy positions at Gueudecourt, again sustaining heavy casualties – two-hundred thirty-nine all told - and gaining little.

Thus it was that the new-comers remained behind the lines until the 14<sup>th</sup>, two days later, when they were moved up to *Switch Trench* and parcelled out to the Battalion's four depleted fighting companies. Consequently, the date of their arrival is often recorded not as October 12 but as October 14.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *This is the ground over which 1<sup>st</sup> 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. This is also the area of the positions into which the re-enforcements of October 12-14 were posted.* – photograph from 2007)

After the confrontation of October 12 at Gueudecourt, the 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 to be no further 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 above: *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 the 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.



(Right: *The great gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the Newfoundlanders may well have visited during the Christmas period of 1916* – *The edifice houses a flag and other commemorations of the sacrifice of the Dominion of Newfoundland* – photograph from 2007(?))

The only infantry activity involving the 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 Sailly-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.



(Right above: *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 Sailly-Saillisel the month of March was a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now 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, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.

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: *Sir Edward Morris visiting the Newfoundland encampment on Saint Patrick's Day – from The War Illustrated*)



(Right: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'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.

While the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, the French offensive was to be a disaster.

(Right: *The Canadian National Memorial which since 1936 has stood 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.



(Above 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, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

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, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was withdrawn from the *Battle* and marched again 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 2007*)

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



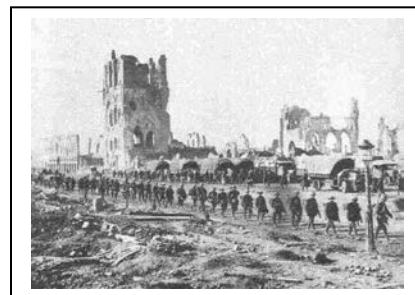
In contrast to the hard fighting at Monchy-le-Preux in April, May of 1917 was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders were moved hither and thither on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches. Apart from the ever-present artillery, there was little infantry activity – except for the marching.

**(Right: Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville in early May – perhaps on the 7<sup>th</sup> - of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated*)**



At the beginning of June, 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

At the end of June, 1917, the Newfoundlanders of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were once again ordered north into Belgium and once again into 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 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 – ostensibly - was one to be 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment 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.



It was at the latter action that Private Bulgin was to distinguish himself.

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

Private (later Lance Corporal) Bulgin was a recipient of the Military Medal: 'Action Date, October 10th, 1917. As company runner he took a message from the second objective to Battalion Headquarters through a heavy enemy barrage and reported back after having delivered the message.' - London Gazette, January 14th, 1918



(Right: A narrow, placid stream pictured here, in October of 1917 the Broembeek had burst its banks, transforming the surrounding area into a quagmire. – photograph from 2009)

A week after the encounter of October 9 at the *Broembeek*, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: *Cambrai*.

The Newfoundlanders were ordered back south from Belgium into northern France to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of the rural community of *Berles-au-Bois*, a dozen kilometres or so to the south-west of *Arras*.

Some two weeks after having been withdrawn from *Passchendaele* and while encamped at *Berles-au-Bois*, on October 31, a contingent of men from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was granted a ten-day period of leave to be spent back in the United Kingdom.

Private *Bulgin* was to be one of the lucky recipients.

(Right above: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

However, it was during this leave that while in the British capital, he admitted himself into the Military Hospital, *Rochester Row*, *London*, on November 20, from there to be transferred to the Military Hospital at *Warlingham*, three days later. The complaint was a venereal one.

He was still in the isolation ward at *Warlington* on January 6 of the New Year, 1918, writing a letter to the *Pay & Record Office* worrying if he was to lose pay because of his medical condition – contracting venereal disease could result in being ‘fined’ the cost of one’s treatment\*. Private *Bulgin* was also to take the opportunity of his letter to wonder if the *Office* could send him the wherewithal to purchase a few necessities, particularly tobacco and cigarettes.

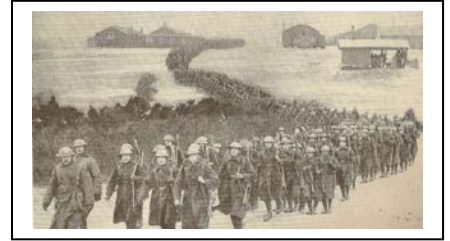
Private *Bulgin* was eventually to forfeit his ten-cent field allowance plus fifty cents per day from his pay while he was in hospital\*.

*\*Venereal disease was often diagnosed as NYD (Not Yet Determined) although one may assume that they had a good idea of the problem. If and when it was later officially identified as VD, the British and Commonwealth Forces could impose this fine upon the unfortunate patient. This policy was not always enforced, less and less as the war progressed, and particularly in the case of officers where the ‘Not Yet Determined’ quite often was allowed to remain ‘undetermined’ on their medical reports.*

On January 19 of the New Year, 1918, Private *Bulgin* was released to *light duty* for a period of seven days and to report to the new Regimental Depot at *Hazely Down* to where the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred after two-and-a-half years in *Scotland*.



2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had transferred its quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to *Hazely Down*, Hampshire, not far distant from the cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was from there that Private Bulgin was ordered to re-join the British Expeditionary Force at the end of January.



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

Private Bulgin apparently – and somewhat unusually for a private soldier - travelled alone on his way back to the Continent, leaving *Hazely Down Camp* on January 25. He was passing through London on his way to re-join his unit when he was arrested at Waterloo Station by a *civil police plain clothes officer*, P.C. Charles Woolette, and was found not to be in possession of the correct documents.

The problem had been sorted out by January 31 – but apparently not before he had appeared before the magistrate at the Tower Bridge Police Court, and had subsequently spent a night or two at the *King George and Queen Mary Club*. However, the crisis passed and Private Bulgin was sent on his way.

Meanwhile, some two months prior, 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 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had returned to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time. There, like 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*)

There seems to be no record of when exactly Private Bulgin reported back to duty with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. There were two presentations of medals made during the month of February but the award of his Military Medal appears not to have figured among them.

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. While they were waiting, 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*)

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 to 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.



(Right above: *The area of La Crêche - those 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 12<sup>th</sup> of April the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

On April 13, during the defensive stand 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 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

What exact role Private Bulgin played is not known; even the Company in which he was serving seems not to be documented, but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for *all* of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.





(Preceding page: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, the scene of fierce fighting involving 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2010*)

The son of John Bulgin, fisherman, and Susan Bulgin – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Farmer's Arm, Twillingate, he was also brother to Joseph, Roland and Ralph.

Lance Corporal Bulgin was at first reported as *wounded and missing in action* on April 13, 1918, in fighting to the south of the Belgian town of Neuve-Église. Some thirty weeks later, on November 9, 1918 – and two days before the *Armistice* ending the *Great War* – he was officially *presumed dead*.

His personal file was amended at a later date so as to read *killed in action*, but the evidence for the change seems not to be among Lance Corporal\* Bulgin's files.

Augustus Bulgin had enlisted at the age of eighteen years.

*\*Nor does there appear to be any date documented for his promotion to the rank of lance corporal. However when recorded as 'wounded and missing in action' in April of 1918, he was referred to as a private. Only on those papers of November, 1918, on which he is 'presumed dead' is he cited as Lance Corporal Bulgin – other correspondence still refers to him as Private Bulgin.*



(Right above: *The photograph of Private Bulgin is from the Royal Canadian Legion publication 'Lest We Forget'.*)

Lance Corporal Augustus Bulgin, MM, was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

