



Sergeant Charles Burt (Regimental Number 2647), 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, Charles Burt 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 28 of 1916, he then enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – and also attested on the following day, April 29.

Private Burt 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 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 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*)

(continued)



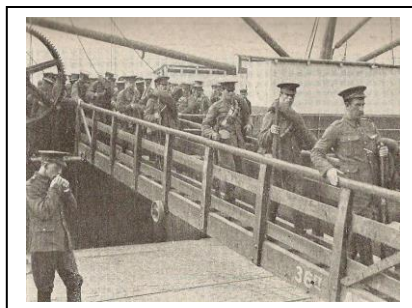
At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been 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 12th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Burt 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.

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 1st 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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Private Burt'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, 1st Battalion had been relieved in the front line three days before, on the 19th.



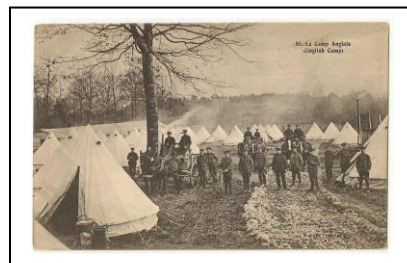
(Right: *Bernafay Wood a century later – not being close to the front lines, the wood may well have resembled what is seen here – photograph from 2014*)

After the episode of October 12 at Gueudecourt, 1st 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.

(continued)

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 1st 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 1st 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 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.



Just three days prior to the arrival of the Prime Minister, Private Burt received promotion, on March 14, and was appointed to the rank of lance corporal.

It was on March 29 that 1st 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*)



(continued)

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)

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 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)

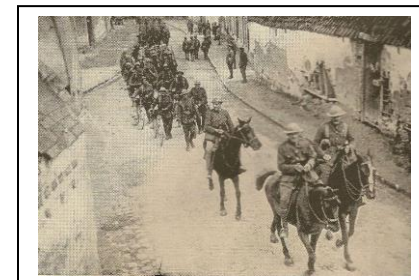
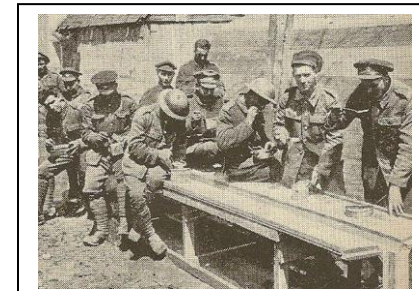
The Newfoundlanders' final engagement during the *Battle of Arras* took place at *Les Fosses Farm*, on the main road between Arras and Cambrai. There were numerous casualties of which many, as ever, were the result of artillery fire. On the following day, April 24, 1st Battalion was withdrawn from the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

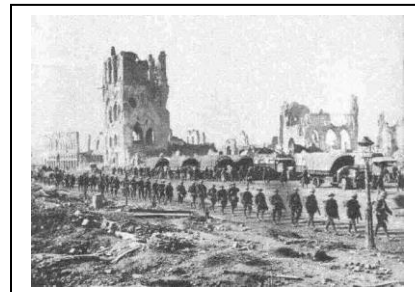
(continued)



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

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.

The Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion were once again ordered north into Belgium – at the end of June - 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 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*)

A week after the encounter of October 9 at the *Broembeek*, 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.

During this period, Lance Corporal Burt was promoted for a second time, on November 1, and put up his corporal's stripe.

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 particularly 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.

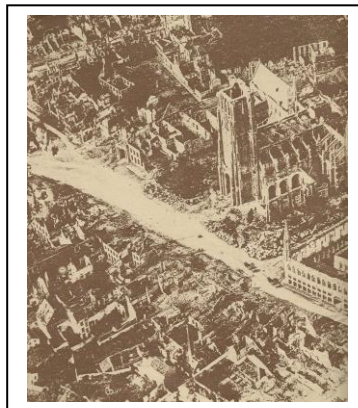
(continued)

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: *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*)

At the close of the Battle of Cambrai, 1st Battalion – once again badly under-strength due to the heavy casualties incurred - was withdrawn from the area of the front lines to re-enforce and to re-organize. The following weeks were spent at first to the south-west of the city of Arras, at Humbercourt and then at some distance to the north-west, at Fressin. The weather obliged and allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow, a bit too much at times, apparently.



At the beginning of January of 1918, and after that snowy Christmas period spent to the west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion 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 above: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

In the meantime, the Germans were preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking manpower 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.

In the mean-time, Corporal Burt was further promoted, on this occasion to the rank of (acting) sergeant. This advancement came on February 2, while 1st Battalion was out of the line at *Brake Camp*.

(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*)

(continued)

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.



(Right above: *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 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 1st Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

What exact role Sergeant Burt played is not known - it is only recorded that he was a non-commissioned officer of 'C' Company and that 'C' Company was heavily involved (see following paragraph) - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult – even critical - eleven days for all of 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.

(continued)

The *Regimental War Diary* cites ...the remainder of 'C' Coy. under Capt. Paterson, M.C. and Hqrs. took up a position along a light railway line and prepared to fight to a finish. ...there can be no doubt that it was Hqrs., 'A' & 'C' Coys. that by their resistance saved what would have been at least a very serious position for the whole 34th Division*.

*1st Battalion was at this time temporarily seconded from 29th Division to the 34th Division.

The son of Andrew Burt, fisherman, and Kate Burt (née *Dollymount*) of Rose Blanche – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay and to whom he had willed his all - in the District of Burgeo and La Poile, he also had a single brother.



Sergeant Burt was reported as *missing in action* on April 13, 1918, while serving with 'C' Company in fighting near the Belgian town of Neuve-Église during *Georgette*, the German spring offensive.

Some thirty weeks later, on November 9, he was officially *presumed dead*.

Charles Burt had enlisted at the age of twenty-three years and ten months.

(Right above: *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(?)*)

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

(continued on following page)



To Newfoundland Record Office
58 Victoria Street
London

28th November

Dear Sir or Madam,

Would you be as kind as to let me know if you have received any further news about Sgt. Charles Burt, No 2647 who was reported Wounded & Missing on 13th April 1918. Any news you have at hand will be greatfully received.

& Oblige
Louisa M'Creath
49 1/2 Wellington St.
Ayr
Scotland