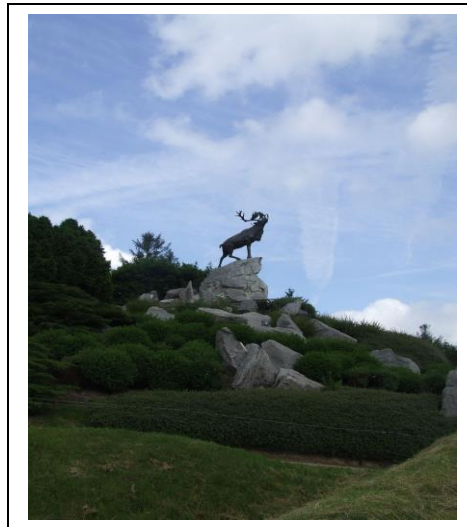




Private Charles Augustus Canning (Regimental Number 3466), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Charles Augustus Canning was a recruit of the Eleventh Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on February 8 of 1917, he also enlisted – *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on that same February 8.



Private Canning was one of the contingent of one-hundred four *other ranks* to leave St. John's on March 17, St. Patrick's Day of 1917, for the journey to Halifax. The means of their departure, however, is not clear: in one source, *The Fighting Newfoundlander*, the claim is that it was on board the Bowring Brothers vessel *Florizel*; the files of the soldiers themselves record that it was... *Embarked S.S. Train to Halifax 17/3/17...* presumably via Port-aux-Basques and thence by ferry and train again to Halifax. Other sources have not proved helpful.

It was from Halifax that the detachment made its trans-Atlantic crossing in the company of Canadian troops on board His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right), sailing from Nova Scotia on March 28. Thus this draft was to reach the United Kingdom two weeks or so before the ill-fated *Windsor Draft** which had left Newfoundland at the end of January, some ten weeks earlier.



**This was the name given to the draft of about three-hundred twenty all ranks which had left St. John's on January 31, 1917, en route to Halifax from where they were to sail to the United Kingdom. This contingent would eventually make that voyage, but about thirteen weeks later than envisaged. They were quarantined at Windsor as the result of a measles and mumps epidemic that claimed two of their number – and maybe a later third. In the meantime, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was running low on man-power.*

Missanabie having docked in Liverpool on April 6, the Newfoundland 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.

(continued)

It was from Ayr – 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.

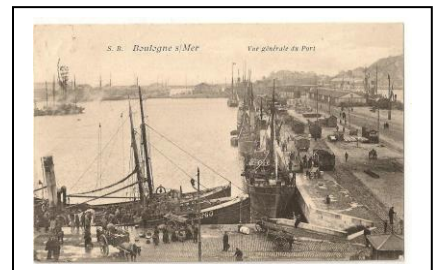


By the time that the Windsor Draft arrived at the Regimental Depot, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was becoming critically short of personnel.

(Right above: *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)

On June 3, the 24th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Private Canning one of its number - passed through the English Channel port of Folkestone for the short sea-crossing to Boulogne on the French coast opposite.

From there the Newfoundlanders entrained to travel south to Rouen and to the large British Expeditionary Force Base established there, for final organization and training* before leaving to seek out 1st Battalion.



(Right: *a view of the French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right: *the centre of the French city of Rouen with its venerable gothic cathedral at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



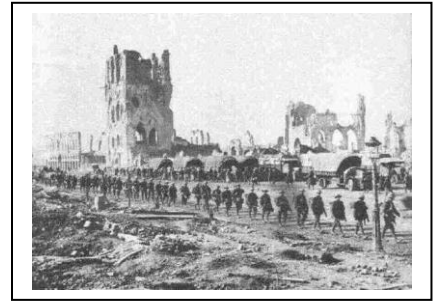
**Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Private Canning, one of a contingent of one-hundred eighteen *other ranks* from Rouen, reported *to duty* to the parent unit on June 19, in the community of Bonneville. At the beginning of June, 1st Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville and was to spend much of that month 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 the month of June, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion were once again ordered 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.

(continued)

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 was one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right: *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.



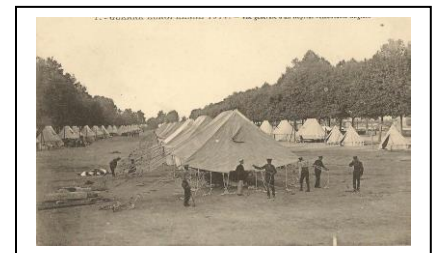
(Right: *an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

On August 16, during the fighting at the *Steenbeek*, Private Canning was wounded and evacuated from the field to reach the 3rd Field Ambulance. By the 18th, two days later, he had been forwarded to the 62nd Casualty Clearing Station at *Bandagehem**.



(Right: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the trees - and also close to where 1st Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *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*)



**Several names such as Mendinghem, Bandagehem 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 by the inevitable cemeteries which today remain. Lozinghem 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.*

The following excerpt is from a form filled in by the Commanding Officer of the 62nd Casualty Clearing Station a propos Private Canning:

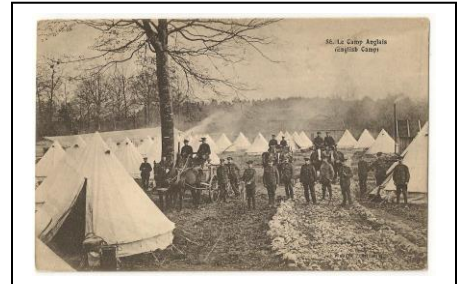
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At Ypres on 16-8-17 buried and struck on back by bursting shell – which also killed his officer. Had just taken objective and were digging in when enemy started to shell position. No previous attack.

- No visible wound

Private Canning was released to the 14th Corps Rest Station on August 25 from where he was reported on September 6 as recovering from shell-shock – only a recently-recognized phenomenon at the time – and then as re-joining his unit, likely on August 28.

Private Canning was a soldier of one of the two drafts totalling one-hundred sixty-six personnel both of which arrived from Rouen at *Penton Camp*, on the outskirts of Poperinghe, on August 28. 1st Battalion had quit the front lines on the 24th and was not to return to the front for an entire month. This period, a planned lull in the fighting, was to allow the entire British Army time to reorganize and re-enforce.



(Right above: a *British camp*, in not particularly clement conditions, somewhere on the Continent during the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

Passchendaele recommenced for the Newfoundlanders in the front line on September 25, although they had suffered four wounded two days prior to that due to long-range artillery fire. In their trenches they prepared for the next offensive action. It came about two weeks later at the *Broembeek*.

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 – some personnel even having been granted at the time 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.



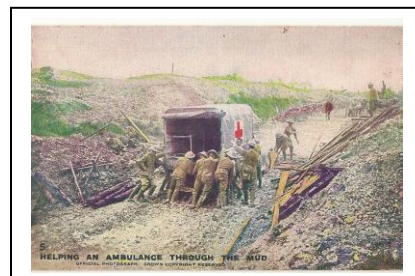
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(Above right: *the Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

At the close of the *Battle of Cambrai* at the beginning of December, 1st Battalion – once again badly under-strength due to the heavy casualties incurred – had been withdrawn from the area of the front lines to re-enforce and to re-organize. The following weeks had been 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 even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow, a bit too much at times apparently.

Just after the turn of the year, he was in need of medical attention once more. On this occasion, January 2, Private Canning was evacuated to the 88th Field Ambulance suffering from a common complaint, PUO (*Pain of Unknown Origin*), from there to be almost immediately transferred on to the 59th Casualty Clearing Station at Hesdin.

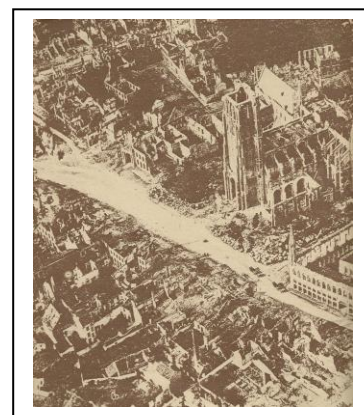


(Right: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and manpower – from a vintage post-card*)

At some later, unspecified, date – his complaint apparently left un-documented - he was admitted into the 5th Convalescent Depot from where he was discharged *to duty* at the Divisional Infantry Base Depot, Rouen, on February 28.

Private Canning returned to 1st Battalion on March 18, at a period when the Newfoundlanders, just after a tour in the trenches, were out of the line at Poperinghe, working locally.

Some ten weeks earlier, at the beginning of January of 1918, after that 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. 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*)

Meanwhile, while the Allies built their defences, by the beginning of 1918 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 victory over the Russians now allowed them.

(continued)

It was expected that the Germans would launch a spring offensive. While they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders continued to dig.

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



On April 10, the day after the first heavy enemy bombardments, 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: *the area of La Crèche - 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 Canning played at this time is not known – even the Company in which he was serving seems not to be recorded among his files - 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.

(Right above: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also 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 eldest son of Alfred Canning and Mary Canning (née *Swain*) – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Caplin Bay, Ferryland, he was also brother to Mary-Valetta (died in infancy), to Leonard-Joseph, to Mary-Evelin (known as *Evelin*), to John and to another Mary (died at age five).

Private Canning was at first reported as *wounded and missing* on April 13. However, a subsequent German official list – almost undoubtedly forwarded to London through the offices of the *Red Cross* in Geneva – reported that he had been *found dead on the battlefield*.



A second report which then passed through the office of the Commanding Officer of 1st Battalion, documented the identification and burial of Private Canning's remains by the Germans *in the vicinity of Bailleul*.

His personal file was thus amended so as to read *killed in action*.

Charles Augustus Canning had enlisted at the declared age of twenty-two years and three months: date of birth, October 18, 1893.

(Right above: *the reconstructed northern French town of Bailleul as it appears almost a century later – photograph from 2010*)

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

