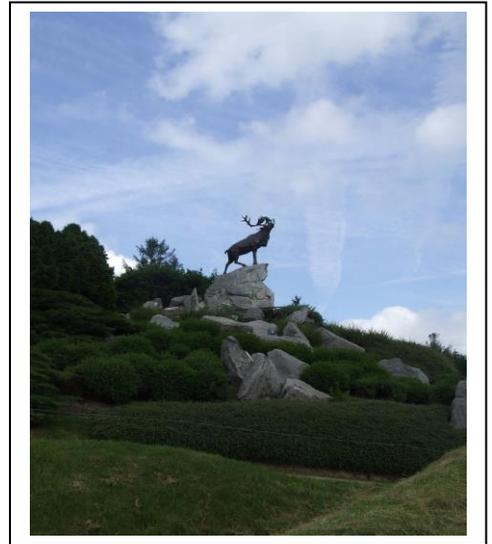


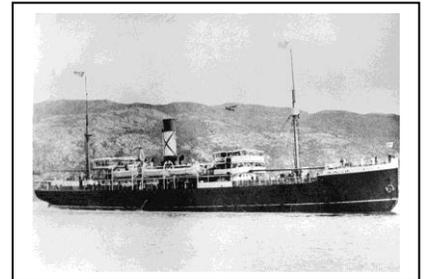


Private George Chafe (Regimental Number 3236), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer earning a weekly \$9.60, George Chafe was a recruit of the Twelfth Draft. He enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldiers rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attested, both on the same day, November 13, 1916. It was apparently not until the following day that he presented himself for medical examination.



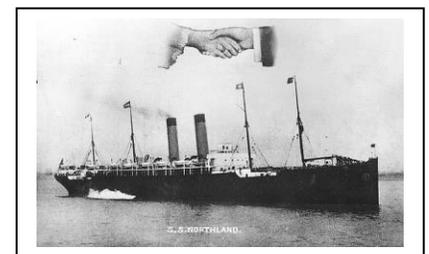
Private Chafe was one of the approximately three hundred twenty *all ranks* to leave St. John's for *overseas service* on the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right), bound for Halifax, on January 31, 1917, from there to take ship to the United Kingdom.



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 Chafe embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Northland* – originally the *Zeeland* - (right), one of three ships carrying the Newfoundlanders to sail on the next day in a convoy from Halifax, 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.

(Page preceding: *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 Chafe 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.

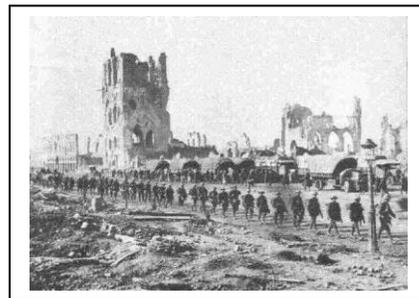


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

*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, Étaples, 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 Chafe'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. For that purpose, several of the Newfoundlanders were attached temporarily, including Private Chafe – until July 20 - to the 173rd Company of the Royal Engineers.

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 Ypres. 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*)

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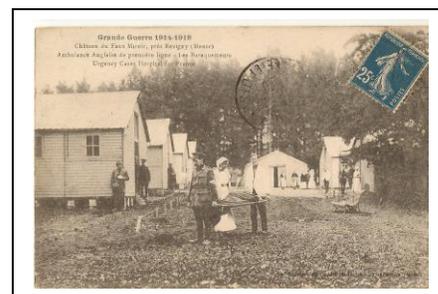
1st Battalion remained in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army which floundered its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders. Notably it fought in two major engagements, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



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

Only days after the infantry action at the *Steenbeek*, on or about August 24, the Newfoundlanders withdrew to the rear for a month of re-enforcing and re-organization in preparation for the next phase of *Passchendaele*.

Private Chafe reported sick into the 89th Field Ambulance, on September 21, there to be diagnosed as suffering from myalgia, and to be immediately transferred to the 14th *Corps Rest Station*. He was released back to duty with 1st Battalion in the field only a week later, on the 28th, a day when the Newfoundlanders about to be relieved after a four-day tour in the trenches.



Ten days later again, the Newfoundlanders were to fight that second infantry action, at the *Broembeek*.

(Right above: a *British field ambulance* – the one pictured here of a more permanent nature than many – somewhere in northern France in the later years of the *Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

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 of the personnel even being granted a ten-day furlough back to the United Kingdom.

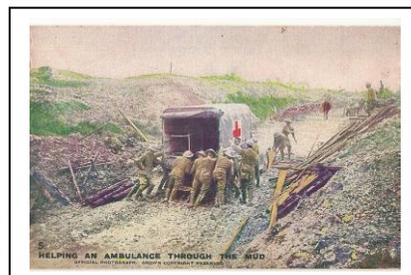
The so-called *Battle of Cambrai* was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders directly involved at all times during that period.

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.



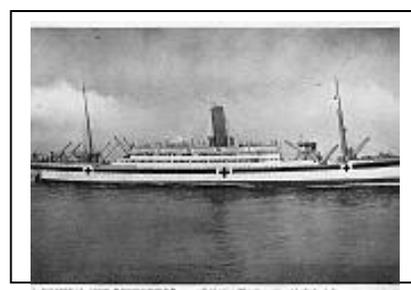
(Page preceding: *the Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

It was on that last day of the battle, December 4, after a desperate fighting retreat, that Private Chafe was wounded and evacuated on the following day to the 3rd Corps Dressing Station. He had suffered gun-shot wounds to the left foot, right hand and right forearm.



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

Following preliminary treatment, he was forwarded to the 5th Casualty Clearing Station at Tincourt. Transferred two days later again, he was admitted into the 8th General Hospital, Rouen, before being embarked on the morrow, December 9, onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship, *Essequibo* (right).



Once having made the cross-Channel journey back to the United Kingdom, Private Chafe was transferred to the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth, being admitted there on the 11th.

(Right: *The main building of what became 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War was opened, on July 1st, 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010*)



(Above far right: *Newfoundland patients convalescing at 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

After treatment and convalescence, Private Chafe was released on January 19 and granted the customary ten-day furlough granted military personnel upon discharge from hospital in the United Kingdom. After this period of leave he was ordered posted to the new Regimental Depot, now in the south of England.

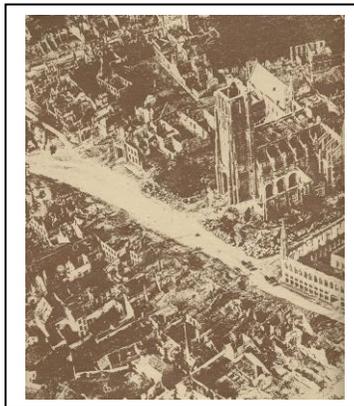
2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was at this time transferring its quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the venerable cathedral city of Winchester. This move was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was to there that Private Chafe next reported *to duty*, on January 28.



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

On March 1, the 39th Re-enforcement Draft, from Hazely Down, passed through the ports of Southampton and Rouen on its return to the Western Front. After the inevitable days to be spent at the Base Depot, Rouen, Private Chafe reported *to duty* with 1st Battalion on March 18, at a time when the Newfoundlanders were working on strengthening defences near Wieltje, to the north-east of Ypres.

Some eleven weeks previously, at the close of the *Battle of Cambrai*, 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 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 were ordered 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*)

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

(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.

(continued)

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 bombardments, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due at the time to come out of the line and move back to *the Somme* to stem the German flow there, boarded buses at three o'clock in the afternoon but then 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.



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

On April 13, during the defensive confrontation 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: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving 1st Battalion on April 12 -14, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

What exact role Private Chafe played is not known - it seems not even to be recorded with which Company he served - 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.

The son of Philip Chafe and Jane W. Chafe of 36, Convent Square, St. John's, and husband of Jane (née *Fitzgerald*) Chafe – the couple married in May, 1911 - of the same address, he had allotted to her a daily seventy cents from his pay. He was also father to young Bessie, born in 1912.

Private Chafe was at first reported as *wounded* then *wounded and missing in action* on April 13, 1918. However a subsequent memo in his files reads... **is now reported in an official German list as *found dead on the battlefield***. The report* continues to state that Private Chafe had been buried by the Germans in the vicinity of Bailleul on or about April 20 of 1918. His personal record was thus amended so as to read *killed in action or died of wounds on or shortly after 13/4/18***.

George Chafe had enlisted at the age of thirty-one years and seven months.

**Reports such as this were for the most part relayed by the Geneva Red Cross.*

***It was on or about July 24 that his family received the news, sent from the Pay & Record Office in London.*

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

