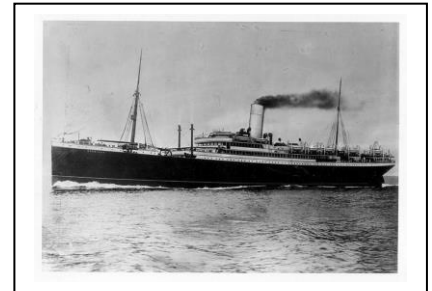
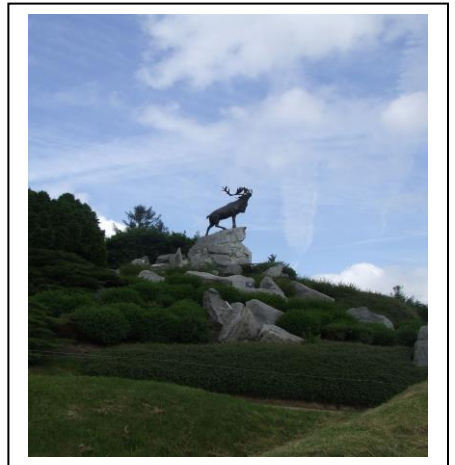




Corporal Leo Joseph Christopher (Regimental Number 1783), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Leo Joseph Christopher was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on August 20, 1915, he then both enlisted – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – and attested three days later, on August 23.

Private Christopher and the other personnel of 'G' Company – apparently in the company of several naval reservists and also some German prisoners (these latter presumably to remain in Canada) - left St. John's by train on October 27, to cross the island to Port aux Basques. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry, and proceeded by train from North Sydney to Quebec City.



At Québec the Newfoundlanders boarded His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* (above) for the trans-Atlantic passage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9.

By the morning of the 10th the new arrivals had travelled by train and had gone north to Scotland. There they had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gailles, not far removed from the new Regimental Depot where accommodation for the contingent was as yet not available.

That new Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland to serve as a 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 sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.

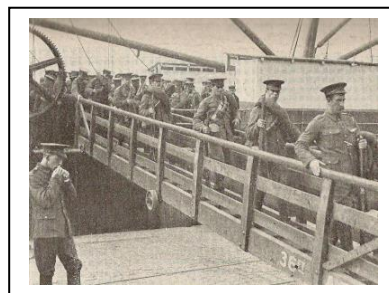
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

(continued)

It was at Newton-on-Ayr where many of the *other ranks* were billeted that Private Christopher re-enlisted *for the duration of the War** – twice! For some unspecified reason he signed a first document on April 4, 1916, seven weeks before his departure from Scotland... then repeated the exercise on June 20 only five days before leaving *on active service*. It was also during this time that he received a first promotion, to the rank of lance corporal, on March 15.

**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

On June 25, the 7th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, Lance Corporal Christopher among its non-commissioned officers, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent. On the morrow, the 26th, the detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot which had been established there. There the draft spent time in final training and organization* before proceeding on to its 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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

This meeting was effected on July 11 (recorded elsewhere as the 12th) while the parent unit was just behind the line, being quartered in huts in the remnants of the village of Mailly-Maillet. It was here that Lance Corporal Christopher and a further one-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen reported *to duty*.



Even with this additional man-power, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1st Battalion still numbered only *11 officers and 260 rifles* after the disaster of Beaumont-Hamel, a quarter of regulation battalion strength.

(Right above: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John's East. – photograph from 2009*)

(continued)

The only infantry activity directly involving 1st Battalion during the entire period from the action at Gueudecourt in mid-October of 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917, was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and 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(?))

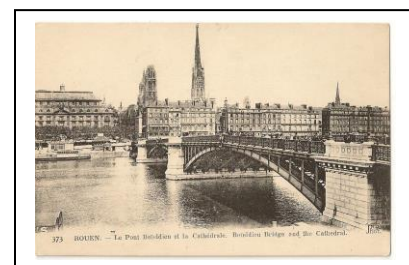
After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March was a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris (right), the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



And three days before Sir Edward's visit, on March 14, Lance Corporal Christopher was awarded a second promotion and put up his second stripe.

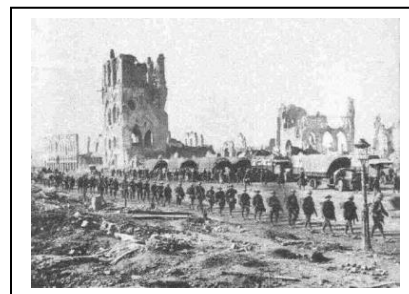
On March 28 the Battalion had been billeted in Camps en Amienois for more than a week. It was the day before the Newfoundlanders were to begin the long march to the front near Arras. The Regimental Band now departed to return to the Regimental Depot in the United Kingdom and Corporal Christopher, suffering from myalgia, left for a stay at the New Zealand Stationary Hospital in nearby Amiens, diagnosed as suffering from Myalgia.

On April 1, he was sent to Rouen, to the 6th General Hospital; on April 7 he was transferred to the 2nd Convalescent Hospital, also in Rouen from where he was forwarded to the 11th Convalescent Depot at Buchy on the 10th of the same month. It was apparently almost a further four months before he was released *to duty* – on August 3 – to Base Depot, and twenty-five more days – August 28 the date - before he returned to his unit, *in the field*. By then, 1st Battalion was in Belgium.



(Right above: *The River Seine flows through the centre of the city of Rouen at or about the time of the Great War.* – from a vintage post-card)

Two months before Corporal Christopher's return, the Newfoundlanders had once again moved north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again to the area of the *Ypres Salient*.



This area had been selected by the High Command as 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*, borrowing that name from a small village on a ridge that was one of the British Army's objectives.

(Preceding page: *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*)

In fact, just prior to Corporal Christopher's return on August 28, 1st Battalion had been withdrawn from the field. It was to be the time of a lull in the fighting, a respite which lasted another four weeks while the British Army re-enforced and re-organized. The Newfoundlanders moved back up to the line on September 25. They were ordered to the attack two weeks later.

The son of Michael Christopher, fisherman (deceased August, 1918), and Catherine (*Kate*) Christopher (née *Bennett*) – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of seventy cents from his pay and to whom he had willed his everything - of St. Joseph's, Salmonier, St. Mary's Bay, he was also brother to Thomas, Mary, Madeline, Katherine-Anne, Leo-Michael, Felix and Clotilda**.

Private Christopher was reported as *missing in action* on October 9, 1917, while serving with 'C' Company during the fighting at the *Broembeek*, Belgium. Some thirty weeks later, on May 7, 1918, he was officially *presumed dead*.



Leo Joseph Christopher had enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years and eleven months. (A second source has him only seventeen at the time of his death.) His age seems not to be recorded in *Vital Statistics*.

**There appears to be no Leo Joseph Christopher in the parish baptismal records; could the name Leo Michael (born November 15, 1899) be in fact a misnomer of Leo Joseph? – his mother on September 24 of 1917 writes that he is not eighteen years old yet.*

***Also to an un-named, born on November 22 of 1894, who died on the day of birth.*

(Right above: *The Broembeek, a placid, innocuous water course shown here, was an overflowing torrent in October of 1917, transforming its surrounds into a swamp. – photograph from 2009*)

(continued)

Corporal Leo Joseph Christopher was eligible for the British War Medal (on left) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



St. Joseph's, Sal.

Sept 24/17

Dear Sir

I received a letter from my son 1783 Corp Leo Christopher saying he was trying for a commission and consequently he would have to withdraw the allotment which I receive from him.

I will not permit this money to be withdrawn as I need it too badly and he is not eighteen years old yet.

He is in France at present and has been there two years, but I am unable to afford the withdrawal of this allotment.

I have the honour to be

Yours very resp'y

Mrs Kate Christopher