



Private George S. Clarke (Regimental Number 2541), 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 clerk earning an annual \$300.00, George Clarke was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination on April 15, 1916, he also enlisted *for the duration of the war* at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on that same date, before attesting four days later, on April 19.



*\*A second document records him attesting on the day of his enlistment.*

Private Clarke 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 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)

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 12<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Clarke 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Clarke'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, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been relieved in the front line three days before, on the 19<sup>th</sup>.



(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, 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 no infantry engagements, but the incessant artillery action ensured a steady stream of casualties.

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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*)



The records next show that Private Clarke was admitted into the 39<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Allonville on January 20 of the New Year, 1917, suffering from a case of diphtheria. He is then reported as having been transported to the 14<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital at Wimereux on the French coast at the latest by January 28 for further treatment.



(Right above: *the French coastal-resort community of Wimereux just before the period of the Great War when it became part of a major medical complex – from a vintage post-card*)

Some two weeks later again, on February 14, his father had been advised – apparently by cable - by a nurse at the casualty clearing station (his father says the 29<sup>th</sup> CCS) that Private Clarke was *very ill of disease* in throat. It was almost three weeks later again before he was deemed fit enough to be embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. Andrew* (right) – on March 5 - for the short crossing back to the United Kingdom.



Upon arrival in England on the same day, Private Clarke was admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. Three days later the medical staff there reported that he had also a *Disordered Action Heart*.

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



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

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Exactly for how long he remained at Wandsworth seems uncertain, but a letter written by him on March 22 was sent from the Esher Red Cross Hospital in Surrey, suggesting that he was by then in convalescence. On April 12 another correspondence, sent from the same place by Private Clarke to his father asking for money, also adds that he was expecting to soon be released.

The anticipated discharge occurred on April 16 when he was then granted the customary ten-day furlough allowed those military personnel who released from medical care in the United Kingdom. After this short period of leave Private Clarke was posted to the Regimental Depot in Scotland where he reported for duty on or about April 25.



*(Right above: the High Street in Ayr, dominated then as it still is today by the imposing Wallace Tower, as shown on a postcard of the time sent home by a Newfoundland soldier – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo)*

Whether the 28<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from the temporary Regimental Depot at Barry\* passed through Folkestone then Boulogne or through Southampton before disembarking in Rouen is not clear – the most likely appears to be Folkestone then Rouen – but whatever the case, Private Clarke left the United Kingdom on August 5 en route back to the Continent, disembarking there on the 7<sup>th</sup> and reporting, inevitably, to the Base Depot. There he underwent those final days of preparation which, in Private Clarke's case, added up to almost three weeks, before seeking out 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

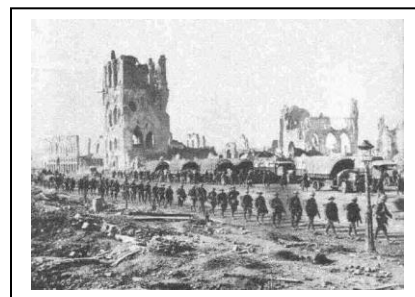
*\*During the summer months of 1917, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

Private Clarke was a soldier of one of the two drafts totalling one-hundred sixty-six personnel which arrived at Penton Camp, on the outskirts of Poperinghe, on August 28. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had quit the line on the 24<sup>th</sup> 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.

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

It was to come about two weeks later at the *Broembeek*.

Some two months previous to Private Clarke's return to *active service*, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had once again been 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.

(Page preceding: *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*)

1<sup>st</sup> 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, by that time it had fought in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



While not at the former, Private Clarke undeniably served at the latter.

The son of George William Clarke (sawmill operator and ship-builder) and Rosanna Clarke (née *Smith*) – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Springdale (formerly *Wolf Cove*), he was apparently also brother to at least nine siblings: Annie-Mabel, Jessie, Rowena, Marjorie, Blanche, Chesley, Selina, Frederick, Walter-James (see below) and Arthur-Hedley who died at the age of six weeks.

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

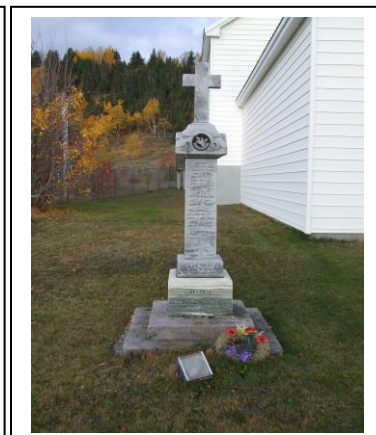
George Clarke had enlisted at the age of nineteen years and two months.

(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*)



(Right: *The sacrifice of Privates George and Walter Clarke is honoured on a family monument in the United Church Cemetery and on the Springdale War Memorial. – photograph from 2014*)

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



Esher Red Cross Hospital  
Esher Surrey  
March 22/ 17

Dear Sir:-

As I am anxious to know the whereabouts of my brother whom I left in France on the 20<sup>th</sup> January could you let me know if he is still alive and if wounded. I have written him four letters and have rec'd no answer. I wrote him February 2<sup>nd</sup> in Boulogne\* hospital when I was there and should have received an answer by this time. His name and Number is: No 2574

Private Walter J. Clarke  
"A" Company

He was in "B" Company before he was draughted to France. By doing so you would oblige

Yours faithfully  
2541 Pte George S. Clarke  
1/1 Newfoundland regiment  
"D" Company

**Private Walter James Clarke (Regimental Number 2574) was to die at Monchy-le-Preux on April 14, 1917. He has no known grave.**

**\*This would have been the 14<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital at Wimereux.**