



**Private Josiah Clarke (Regimental Number 1934) lies in Marcoing British Cemetery – Grave reference II. G. 15.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a cooper earning as much as a dollar per day working for *E. H. Simmonds*, Josiah Clarke was a recruit of the Seventh Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on October 21, 1915, he then enlisted – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on the same day. He attested on the morrow, the 22<sup>nd</sup>.**

**Private Clarke was one of the one hundred men who comprised the first contingent of 'H' Company to travel overseas. The draft left St. John's by train for Port aux Basques on December 18, crossing the island and then the Gulf of St. Lawrence en route to Saint John, New Brunswick. The Atlantic voyage was effected from there on His Majesty's Transport *Corinthian* (right) and the draft reached the Regimental Depot at Ayr on January 4 of the New Year, 1916.**



**(continued)**

Transferred to 'G' Company, the new arrivals were quartered in the barracks of the Royal Scots Fusiliers who had not yet vacated the premises, due to an epidemic of measles at the time. It was not long before the disease had also taken its toll on the Newfoundlanders – although Private Clarke was apparently not one of those affected.

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 a 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.

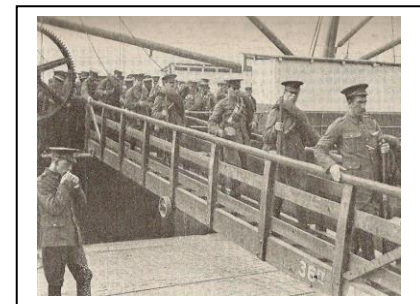


(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on-Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that, on May 24, some three weeks before his departure to France on *active service*, Private Clarke was prevailed upon to re-enlist *for the duration of the War*.\*

*\*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.*

The 6<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Clarke among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to the Continent on June 14, 1916. It arrived in the Norman capital of Rouen on the following day, June 15, whereupon the contingent was received into the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, there to continue final training\* and to organize before moving onwards towards the front and to a rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



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

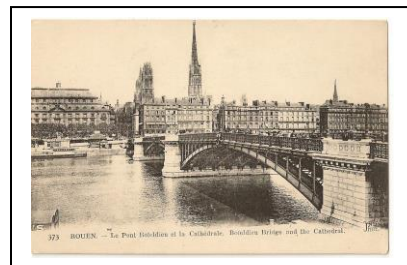
*\*Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

(continued)

The majority of that draft of sixty-six men later departed from Rouen to join the parent unit at Louvencourt on June 30. At 9:15 that evening, most of the Newfoundlanders marched from there to their assigned *forming-up place trenches i.e. rear line of trenches in our usual sector* (Regimental War Diary). On the following morning they went *over the top* at Beaumont-Hamel.

Private Clarke, however, was no longer one of their number as he had been admitted into the 12<sup>th</sup> General hospital in Rouen on June 16, the day after his draft had disembarked in France. A day later again, he was being transferred to the 9<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital in le Havre for medical attention to a case of venereal disease.

Six weeks of treatment followed before he was deemed well enough to be discharged to the Base Depot at Rouen – the date August 2 or 3. But, apparently, on the following day Private Clarke was back in hospital, again in the 12<sup>th</sup> General, before being transferred to the 39<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in le Havre on the morrow, and following on to the 1<sup>st</sup> Stationary Hospital on August 30.

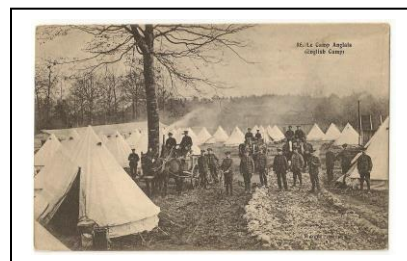


(Right above: *The River Seine flows through the centre of Rouen, the capital city of Normandy – and under the watchful gaze of its venerable gothic cathedral – at or about the time of the Great War. – photograph from 2011*)

October 10 saw Private Clarke released to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convalescent Depot in Rouen and then *discharged to duty* to Base Depot on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

His own records show Private Clarke finally joining 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on November 1 - the Regimental War Diary notes the 3<sup>rd</sup>, when he must surely have been one of the small detachment of six *other ranks* which reported *to duty* at Ville-sous-Corbie, at a time when the parent unit had been withdrawn from the trenches to re-form and re-organize after the offensive – and sacrifices - of October 12 at Gueudecourt. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had again lost heavily, two-hundred thirty-nine casualties in all, and its depleted ranks were once more in dire need of re-enforcement.

After Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall of 1916 and early winter of 1917, a period broken only by the several weeks spent by the unit in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well to the rear and close to the city of Amiens.



(Right above: *a typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card*)

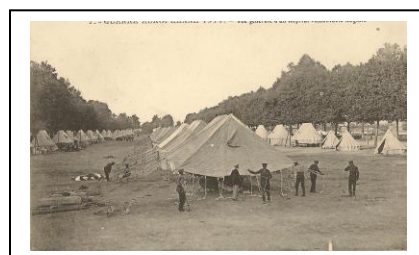
After that welcome six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve*, the Newfoundlanders had *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, 1917, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality - of 1917.

The only infantry activity directly involving 1<sup>st</sup> 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 – and just after Private Hickey’s return to the unit - an action which brought this episode in the Newfoundlanders’ War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.



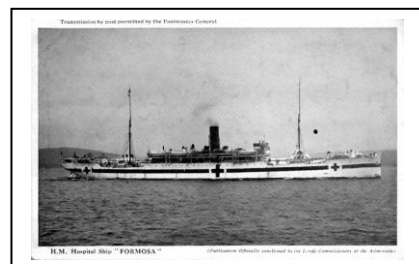
(Right above: *The fighting during the time of the Battalion’s posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time. - photograph from 2009(?)*)

However, Private Clarke was not to serve with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on this occasion for more than two weeks after its return to the front. On February 3 he was admitted into the 2/2 London (55<sup>th</sup>) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown, suffering from pleurisy and influenza.



(Right above: *a British Casualty Clearing Station, this one under canvas to allow for mobility if and when necessary, being established somewhere on the Continent during the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Five days later, on the 8<sup>th</sup> he was forwarded to the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian General Hospital in Rouen and from there, some two weeks afterwards, on February 23, was taken on board His Majesty’s Hospital Ship *Formosa* (right) for the crossing back to the United Kingdom.



The next day again, upon his arrival in England on the 9<sup>th</sup>, Private Clarke was taken to the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth where he remained for treatment and convalescence for some fifty-three days.

(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 the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

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It was on April 19 when Private Clarke was discharged and granted the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel upon release from hospital. This was immediately followed by a posting back to the Regimental Depot at Ayr where he reported *to duty* on April 28.



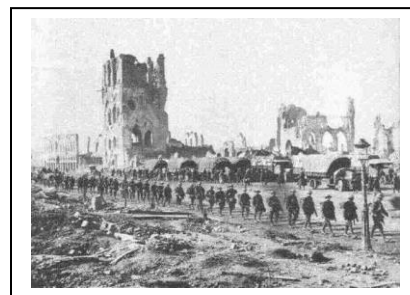
(Right above: *the High Street in Ayr, dominated then as it still is today by the imposing Wallace Tower, as shown on a postcard of the time sent home by a Newfoundland soldier – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo*)

Whether he passed through Southampton or Folkestone on August 5 before disembarking in Rouen on the 7<sup>th</sup> of 1917 is not clear, but in either case Private Clarke - as a soldier of the 28<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft - was back in France on that later date and on his way to the Base Depot there for that inevitable period of last-minute training.

Two detachments of newcomers, re-enforcements from Rouen, are then reported in the Regimental War Diary as arriving at Penton Camp – in the proximity of Poperinghe, Belgium – on August 28. Private Clarke was one of the total of one-hundred sixty-five *other ranks* to be welcomed on that day.

In fact, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had just withdrawn from the area of the front as the British Army was about to take a month's respite to re-enforce and re-organize before continuing a battle which had not lived up to the expectations of the High Command. After a four-week period of fine weather, on September 23, the Newfoundlanders began their return to the fighting. On the day *Passchendaele* officially recommenced, the rains returned.

The Newfoundlanders once again moved north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again to the area of Ypres. This had been selected 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.



(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*)

1<sup>st</sup> 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 *Broembek* on October 9.



(Above 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.

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. 1<sup>st</sup> 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.



(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*)

The son of James Henry Clarke, a labourer, and Emma Jane Clarke – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Whitbourne, Private Clarke was also brother to Selby; Harry (Henry) – Regimental Number 2368, his left hand incapacitated by shell-fire; John William; Alice Maud; Susannah; and Hazel.

Private Clarke was reported as having been *killed in action* while serving with 'B' Company on November 20, 1917, the first day of the fighting near the French villages of Marcoing and Masnières, during the *Battle of Cambrai*.



At home, it was the Reverend J. G. Cragg of Whitbourne who was requested to bear the news to his family.

Originally buried in Marcoing Copse Cemetery, as reported by the Reverend T. Nangle, Chaplain of the Forces to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Private Clarke's remains were later transferred to where they lie today.

Josiah Clarke had enlisted at the age of twenty-three years and four months.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on November 20; however, whether this was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012*)



(continued)

(Previous page: *This family monument to Private Clarke stands in the Anglican Cemetery in Whitbourne. – photograph from 2013*)

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



Mr. Howley

April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1919

Dear Sir

Just a note to ask you what are you going to do. Are you going to give me some thing for my sun that gave his life on the fields of france No. 1934. pte josiph. Clarke he papes is filled in and gone in before before and I thinks his fr life is worth something PS Excuse me if I made any mistakes

Yours truly  
Mrs James Clarke  
W'bourne

(Right: *The Whitbourne War Memorial honours the sacrifice of Private Clarke. – photograph from 2013*)

