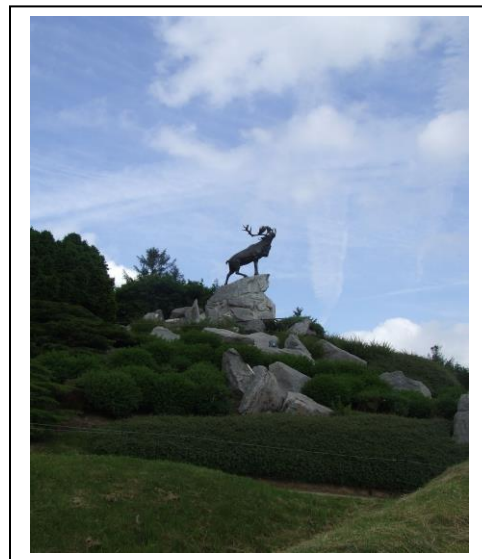


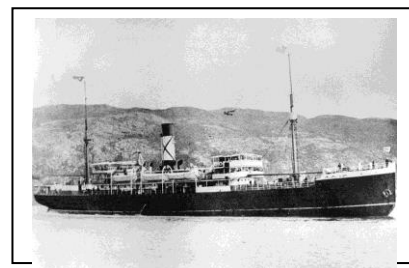


Private Thomas Clarke (Regimental Number 3311), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman and farmer and earning a monthly thirty-two dollars, Thomas Clarke was a recruit of the Twelfth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's, he also enlisted – engaged *for the duration of the war* at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested, all on the same December 9, 1916.



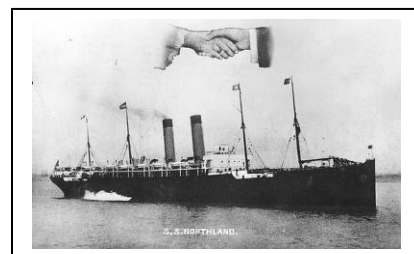
Private Clarke was one of the approximately three hundred twenty *all ranks* to leave St. John's for *overseas service* on the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right), bound for Halifax, on January 31, 1917, from there to take ship to the United Kingdom.



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 Clarke 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. The vessels were carrying Canadian re-enforcements 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 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



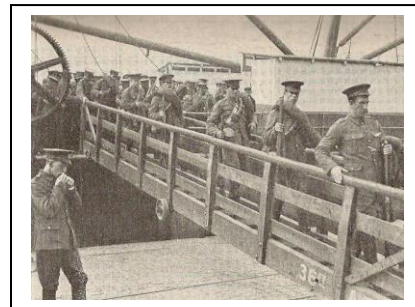
(Preceding page: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

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

(Right: *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 25<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Clarke among 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

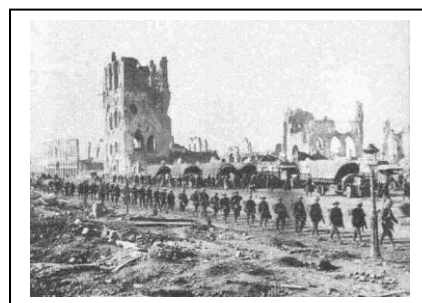


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

\*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, Étapes, 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 Clarke'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 – 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion supplied working parties for road-mending and for the construction of infantry tracks. For that purpose, several of the Newfoundlanders were attached temporarily until July 20 to the 173<sup>rd</sup> Company of the Royal Engineers.

Only days before, at the end of June, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> 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 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 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*)

The Newfoundlanders were 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. By that date, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had fought in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and then at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



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

The Regimental War Diary for the period September 25 to 29 inclusive makes the following mention: *Battalion moved up into the line for four days and relieved the 4/ Worcester Regt. in left Sub-sector... During tour in line there were 34 Casualties viz 7 Killed & 27 wounded – all other Ranks. Enemy aircraft were very active all the time & flew very low. Gas shells were used by enemy frequently...*

The son of John Clarke, fisherman and farmer, and Bridget Clarke – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Bay Bulls Road in The Goulds, he was also brother to at least Simon, Annie, John, Michael, Mary, Frank and Patrick.



Private Clarke was reported as having been *killed in action* on September 28, 1917, while serving with 'B' Company in the trenches near the Belgian town of Wijndendrift.

At home, it was the Reverend Father Tierney of Petty Harbour who was requested to bear the news to his family.

The remains of Private Clarke were originally buried just to the north-west of the village of Langemarck. However, either its location was later forgotten or the grave destroyed in the subsequent fighting of 1917 and 1918.

Henry Thomas Clarke had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and five months.

(Above right: *Also just to the north-west of Langemarck is this German cemetery – part of the battlefield of August 16, 1917 - in which lie more than forty-four thousand dead; the site also marks one of the objectives of 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade in which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was serving, on October 9 - photograph from 2010*)

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

