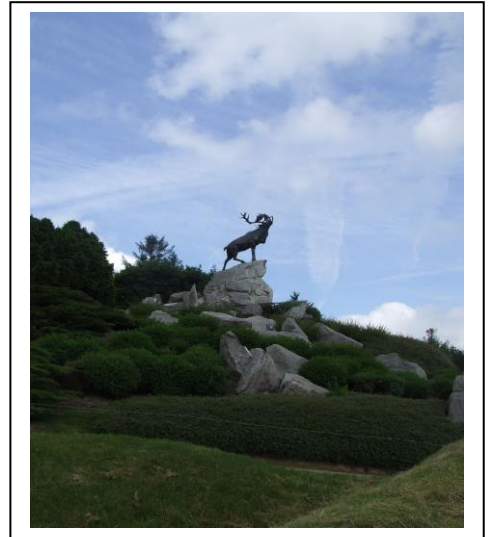


**COLLINS. J.**

Private Leo James Collins (Regimental Number 2952), 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 an express-man earning four-hundred twenty dollars per annum, Leo James Collins was a recruit of the Tenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on July 10 of 1916, he subsequently enlisted – engaged *for the duration of the war* at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – and attested on July 11, the following day.



It was the 28<sup>th</sup> of August before Private Collins embarked for passage to the United Kingdom and it was on His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right) that he was to make the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom. This was the third such voyage that the ship was to make in 1916, the Newfoundlanders likely sharing the vessel with Canadian personnel\*\*. He sailed as a soldier of 12<sup>th</sup> Platoon, Section 14, of 'C' Company of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion\*\*\*.



*\*Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War.*

*\*\*Sicilian had been re-fitted in 1906 to carry just under twelve-hundred passengers, thus her journey to St. John's in March of 1916 was likely followed by the short passage to Halifax to embark Canadian military personnel. Likewise, in July, she had sailed from Montreal on July 16 with Canadians to embark the Newfoundlanders awaiting passage overseas.*

*\*\*\*3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was based in St. John's, whereas 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion – 'E', 'F', 'G' and 'H' Companies - was stationed in the United Kingdom. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was the edge of the sword – 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies – and was posted to the front.*

Upon arrival in the United Kingdom, the ship docked in the south-coast naval port of Devonport from where the Newfoundlanders entrained for the journey north to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot where each newcomer was delegated to one of the four resident companies - and the where the somewhat confusing title of 'C' Company was abandoned.

(continued)

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-upon-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 – photo from 2012*)

It was not to be until almost the following summer that Private Collins received orders to proceed from Ayr to the Continent. In the meantime he was to spend almost five weeks – from February 21 until March 26 – in the 4<sup>th</sup> Scottish General Hospital in Glasgow, for treatment to scabies.

On or about June 3 of 1916 the 24<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr passed through the English-Channel port of Folkestone en route to France. The contingent – Private Collins among its ranks – disembarked in Boulogne only hours later.

From there the Newfoundlanders entrained and travelled south to the outskirts of the French city of Rouen, site of the large Base Depot of the British Expeditionary Force where the 24<sup>th</sup> Draft was to spend several days of training and organization\* before leaving to seek out the parent unit.



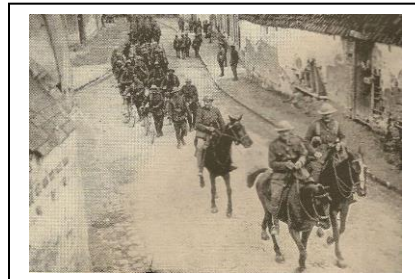
(Right: *the French port of Boulogne on or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

*\*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.*

May of 1917 had been a period when the Newfoundlanders were ordered hither and thither on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches. And while there was the ever-present artillery, there was little infantry activity – except for the marching.

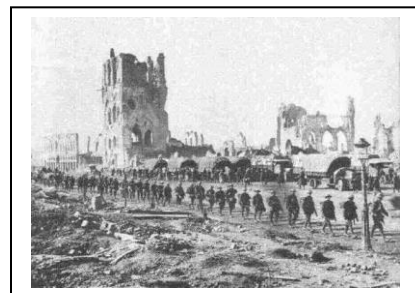
At the beginning of June, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion retired from the line to Bonneville and spent its time re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville in early May, perhaps the 7<sup>th</sup>, of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)



It was on June 19 that a re-enforcement draft of one-hundred eighteen *other ranks* from Base Depot at Rouen arrived in Bonneville to report to *duty* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. Private Collins was one of that number.

The Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion once again moved 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 designated as 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 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**)

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. Private Collins was to play a role at only the former.

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



The son of James Joseph Collins, employee at *Parker & Monroe*, and Bride (*Bridget*) Collins – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of 16, Balsom Street in St. John's, he was also brother to George (see below\*), to Margaret, Catherine, Augustine and to Mary-Margaret.

(continued)



Private Collins was reported at first as *wounded and missing in action* on August 16, 1917, while serving with 'D' Company in the fighting at the *Steenbeek*.

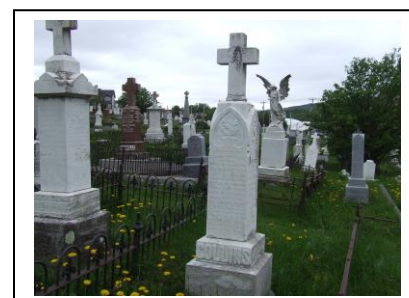


However, his record was later amended, on September 4, 1917, so as to read *killed in action*, perhaps on the strength of a report from the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment, that his remains had been identified and buried near *Denain Farm* on August 22.

The location of Private Collin's grave was either subsequently forgotten or the site was destroyed in later fighting. His remains were never again found.

Leo James Collins had enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years and two months. The memorial in Belvedere Cemetery cites his death at seventeen-and-a-half years of age.

*\*George William Collins, Private, Regimental Number 2448, was reported as missing in action at Monchy-le-Preux on April 14, 1917, and later presumed dead.*



(Right above: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the trees - close to where 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917, and therefore close to where Private Collins was wounded. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele – photograph from 2009*)

(Right above: *A family memorial which stands in Belvedere Cemetery in St. John's commemorates the sacrifice of Private Leo James Collins and that of his brother Private George William Collins. – photograph from 2015*)

Private Leo James Collins was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

