

COLUMBUS.F.

Private Frank Columbus (Regimental Number 2296), 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 earning an annual two-hundred fifty dollars, Frank Columbus had also served in the Royal Newfoundland Naval Reserve (Number 1477x) for a single year. A recruit of the Ninth Draft, he presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on March 20, 1916, and also enlisted on the same day – engaged *for the duration of the war* at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10. He then attested on March 24.



Private Columbus 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.*

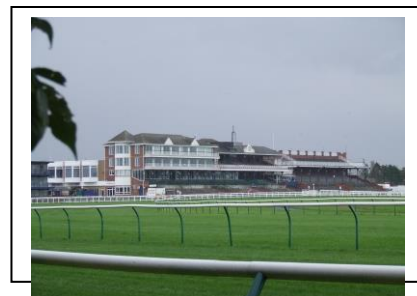
The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later 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*)

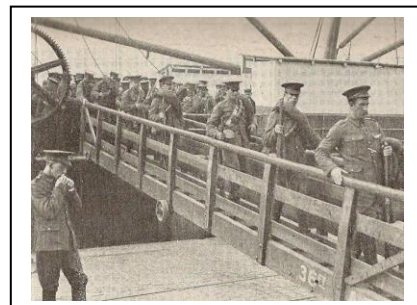
(continued)

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 11th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Columbus one of its number - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 3 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front. It disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, October 4, 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 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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

It was a large detachment of two-hundred sixty-six *other ranks* – a number which included Private Columbus - that reported from Rouen to the 1st Battalion transport lines on October 12. This was also the day on which 1st Battalion made its attack on the enemy positions at Gueudecourt, again sustaining heavy casualties – some two-hundred thirty-nine all told - and gaining little in return.

Thus it was that the new-comers remained behind the lines until the 14th, two days later, when they were moved up to *Switch Trench* and parcelled out to the Battalion's four depleted fighting companies. Consequently, the date of their arrival is often recorded not as October 12 but as October 14.

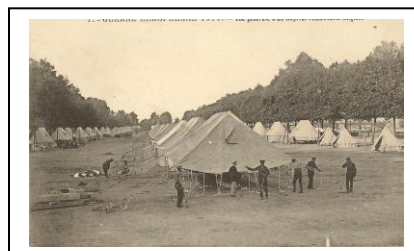
(Right: *This is the ground over which 1st Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. This is also the area of the positions into which the re-enforcements of October 12-14 were posted. – photograph from 2007*)



After the action at Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1st Battalion had continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter.

One of those casualties of the next few weeks, all of them from enemy artillery fire, was Private Columbus who received a slight gun-shot wound to the left hip during the period of November 17-21 which 1st Battalion spent in the front-line trenches near the village of LesBoeufs: total casualties, five dead and fifteen wounded.

On that latter date, the 21st, he was evacuated to the 55th (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown. Back with his unit on either December 5 or 7, he was not to miss the upcoming Christmas festivities.



(Right: a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card)

The Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion were withdrawn as of December 11-12 well behind the lines to spend the Christmas period encamped close to the city of Amiens.



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

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

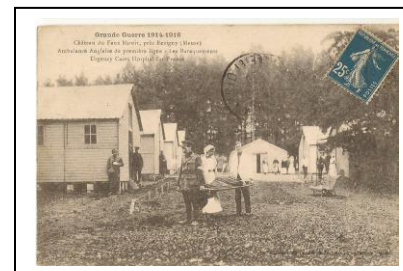
The only infantry activity to directly involve 1st Battalion during that entire period – from the action in mid-October of 1916 at Gueudecourt, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917 – was to be the sharp infantry engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action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

However, Private Columbus was not to serve at Sailly-Saillisel. On February 17, he was admitted into the 88th Field Ambulance suffering from tonsillitis, being transferred almost immediately from there to the 38th Casualty Clearing Station at Heilly.

(Right: a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card)



Some six days later, on the 23rd, he was forwarded to the 25th Stationary Hospital at Rouen where diphtheria was added to his list of medical woes.

He was to remain there for treatment and convalescence until March 30 when he was discharged *to duty* at the Base Depot, Rouen.

On June 7 Private Columbus re-joined 1st Battalion *in the field*.

(Right above: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)

In the meantime, May of 1917 had been a period when the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had been ordered hither and thither on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches. And while there was the ever-present artillery, there had been little infantry activity – apart from the marching.

(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville in early May of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)

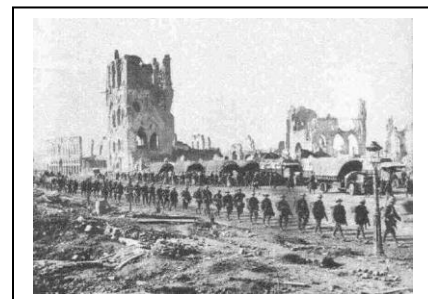
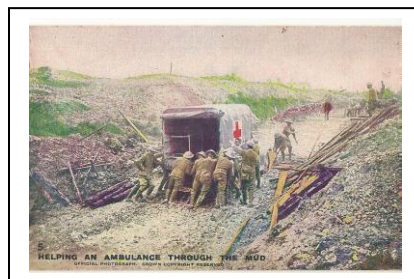
At the beginning of June, 1st Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville – which is where Private Columbus reported back *to duty* - and there spent its time re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

The Newfoundlanders then 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**)

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 *Broembek* on October 9.

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



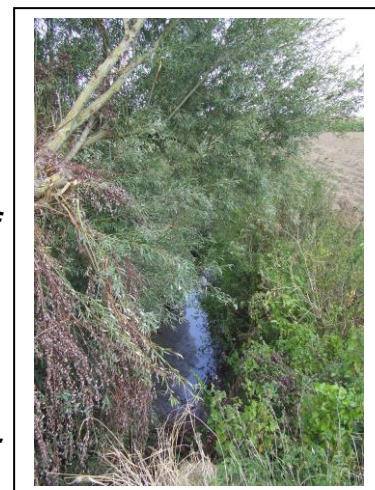
The son of Francis Columbus, fisherman and farmer who worked with the couple's three oldest sons, originally from Cape Breton, deceased June 9, 1921, and Susan Columbus* - to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Shallop Cove in the District of St. George – he was the fifth of some seventeen children: Joseph, Fred (see below*), Mary, Peter, David, Nancy, Alice, Louis, Delia, Richard, Stacia, Mercy, Genevieve, Cecelia and Isabella being his siblings.

Private Columbus was at first reported as *missing in action* while serving with 'A' Company on October 10, 1917, in fighting at the *Broembeek*. However, due to a subsequent burial report submitted on October 31 of the same year by the Reverend J.H. Massey, attendant to the Burial Officer of the 50th Division, his record was amended so as to read killed *in action or died of wounds on or shortly after 9/10/17.***

Frank Columbus had enlisted at the age of twenty years.

**The family name is Colombe on the 1911 Census.*

***The location of a grave was often forgotten, lost or mistaken, or it was destroyed during later fighting.*



(Right above: *At the time of this photograph an innocuous-looking stream, in October of 1917 the Broembeek had burst its banks, transforming the surroundings into a quagmire. – photograph from 2010*)

**His brother Fred Columbus, Private, Regimental Number 912, had died of wounds in hospital on October 9, 1915, in the 21st General Hospital in Alexandria, Egypt, while serving during the Gallipoli Campaign.*

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

