

CONNORS, M.G.

Private Maurice Gregory Connors (Regimental Number 3942), 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 paper-maker working for the *Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company* in Grand Falls and earning a weekly twenty-one dollars (including overtime!), Maurice Gregory Connors was a recruit of the Sixteenth Draft.

Presenting himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on August 31, 1917, he then enlisted - engaged *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attested on that same day.

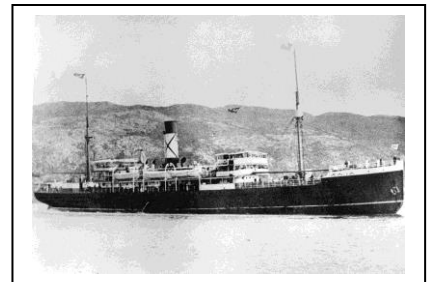
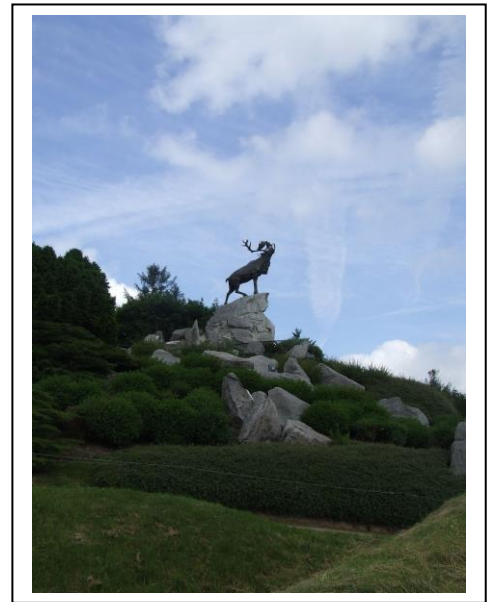
Private Connors embarked for overseas service on October 3 of 1917. While some records say that his draft travelled from St. John's by train, certain other sources have it to be on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) that the party travelled to Halifax, Nova Scotia, there to take a troop transport* across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom.

**Perhaps it was on Metagama which sailed from Halifax with Canadian re-enforcements on October 6 to dock in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on the 17th.*

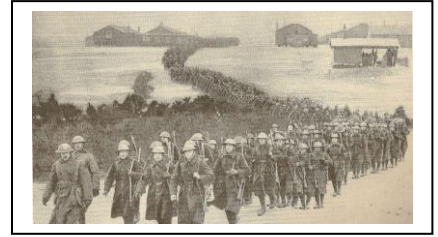
Arriving in England the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence to serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for more than two years. It was from here – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home had been despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the *Western Front*, there 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)

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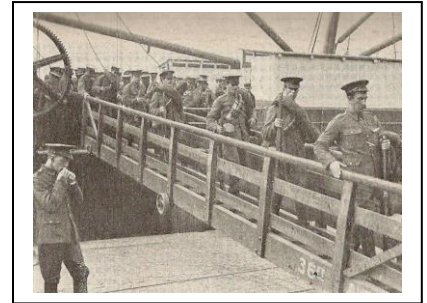
2nd (Reserve) Battalion was soon to move quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester.



This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was from Hazely Down that Private Connors was eventually to be ordered to France to join the British Expeditionary Force.

(Right above: *a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from **The War Illustrated***)

Private Connors was a soldier of the 40th Re-enforcement Draft of eighty *other ranks* which left Hazely Down on March 27, 1918, en route to the Continent. It disembarked on the 29th, two days later, almost inevitably spending some days, as was customary, at the British Expeditionary Force Base Depot at Rouen for last-minute training and organization* before proceeding to its rendezvous with 1st Battalion in Belgium.



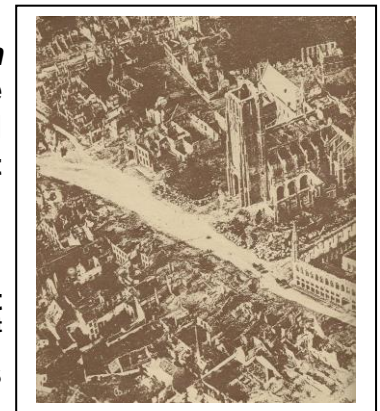
(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from **Illustration***)

**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 Regimental War Diary makes no mention of any re-enforcements arriving either on or about April 4 – but this does not preclude Private Connors' records being correct. It was a day on which three of the four Companies of 1st Battalion, at the time posted to Haslar Camp to the rear, were providing work-parties to labour on defences in the *Divisional Reserve Line*.

By the evening of the next day the Newfoundlanders were back *in* the line, having relieved the 2nd Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment, near the remnants of the village of Passchendaele. And although he was not to know it, Private Connors had arrived just in time for the upcoming crisis.

Some four months before, at the beginning of January of 1918, having spent a snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had been ordered to return to Belgium, to the Ypres Salient, for a third time.



There, as with the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.

(Right above: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

Meanwhile, while the Allies built their defences, by the beginning of 1918 the Germans were preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them.



It was expected that the Germans would launch a spring offensive. While they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders continued to dig.

(Right above: *countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

The Germans did as was expected of them. Ludendorff's armies had already launched a powerful thrust on March 21, striking at first in the area of *the Somme*, overrunning the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while the advance seemed unstoppable. Then a second offensive, *Georgette*, was launched in the northern sector of the front, in Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders were stationed: the date was April 9. Within two days the situation of the Allies was desperate.



(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

On the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due to come out of the line and move back to the Somme, boarded buses at three o'clock in the afternoon and were suddenly directed southward, towards Nieppe. They were in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, three hours later.



(Right above: *the area of La Crêche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station – photograph from 2010.*)

The British were pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12th of April 1st Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

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On April 13, during the defensive stand near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening - were equally heavily involved.



(Right above: *ground just to the east of Bailleul where 1st Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

What exact role Private Connors played during this frenetic period is not known, excepting the brief entry in the Regimental War Diary (see immediately below) - it is recorded only that he was likely to have been a soldier of either 'A' Company or of 'C' Company - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1st Battalion's personnel.



Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.

The Regimental War Diary entry of April 13 cites *...the remainder of 'C' Coy. under Capt. Paterson, M.C. and Hqrs. took up a position along a light railway line and prepared to fight to a finish. ...there can be no doubt that it was Hqrs., 'A' & 'C' Coys. that by their resistance saved what would have been at least a very serious position for the whole 34th Division*.*

**88th Brigade – therefore 1st Battalion – was seconded from 29th Division to the 34th Division during this critical period.*

(Right above: *These are the De Seule crossroads almost one-hundred years later, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, and also the scene of fierce fighting involving 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

The son of Patrick Connors, fisherman, and Ann (*Annie*) Connors, of Conception Harbour in the District of Harbour Main, he was also brother to at least Alice, Mary, Joseph and Ellen.

Private Connors was reported at first as *missing in action* on April 12*, 1918, while serving with either 'A' or 'C' Company near the town of Nieppe on the Franco-Belgian border.

However, a subsequent official German report forwarded to London through the offices of the Geneva Red Cross on or about July 23 of 1918, recorded Private Connors as having been *found dead on the battlefield*, then identified and buried by the enemy.

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His file was thus amended so as to read *killed in action or died of wounds on or shortly after 12/4 near Bailleul.*

Maurice Gregory Connors had enlisted at the age of twenty-one years and seven months.

**It may well have been the 13th as several dates were confused during these hectic days, even by the Regimental War Diarist.*

(Right above: *The sacrifice of Private Connors is honoured on the Grand Falls-Windsor War Memorial. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *the re-built town of Bailleul, almost a century later, near to which the Germans buried Private Connors – photograph from 2010.*)

Private Maurice Gregory Connors was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



Officer Commanding Headquarters

- Maurice Connors of Grand Falls has applied for enlistment but has been turned down for six months. He was examined by the Medical Officer and sent to Hospital for operation, which was performed, and he was then reported fit for light duty.

He now applies for a pass to go to his home at Grand Falls.

Will you kindly do what is necessary in the matter.

Governor

22 May 1917

(continued on following page)

Newfoundland

M. April 12/18

Connors, G. 3942

I think he was in 'A' Coy at the time of his Casualty; he was clean shaven; he had a gold tooth in his upper jaw which could be plainly seen when his mouth was open; he was about 5' 6" or 7", slightly made; he joined with me about a month before. I did not know him very well.

We were on the Armentiere front and returning from Bailleul about 4.0 p.m. I passed his body before we had entirely got out of the village so there were houses on both sides. He was quite dead but did not look knocked about at all. We passed on.

**Reference: Pte. Wm. Tremblett 3575, ???
'D' I. B. D. Rouen, 4/11/18**

12 Elmbank St
Ayr
Scotland
May.20.18

To the Pay & Record Office

Would you kindly send me any information you can regarding Pte Maurice Connors No 3942, 2/1 Royal NFLD Regt 'C' Coy as it is now more than 7 weeks since there has been any letters from him & Oblige

Yours truly
Q D Blare