



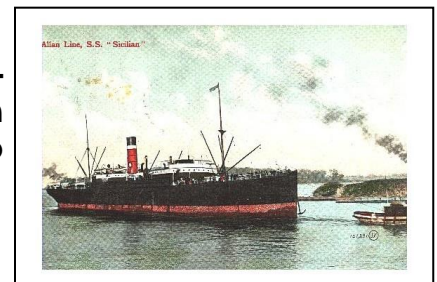
Private James Cook (Regimental Number 2600) is interred in Mendingham Military Cemetery – Grave reference III. AA. 13.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a lumberman earning an annual \$300.00, James Cook was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination on April 25, 1916, at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's, he then enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on April 26, 1916, attesting on that same day.

Private Cook 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.

(continued)



**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.



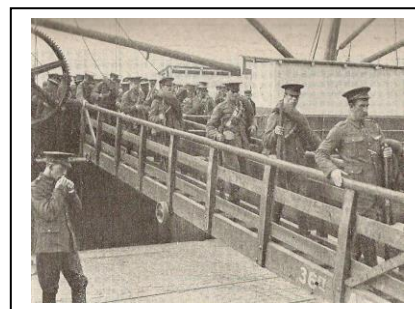
(Right above: an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-upon-Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)

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 – photograph from 2012)

The 13th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Cook one of that contingent of just ten *other ranks* - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 24 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 25, 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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

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A small re-enforcement draft from Rouen reported *to duty* on November 7 while 1st Battalion was behind the lines, re-enforcing and re-organizing after its recent efforts at Gueudecourt; there, once again, the Newfoundlanders had incurred heavy losses – two-hundred thirty-nine casualties all told over two days of action.

Twenty-four *other ranks* and eight officers comprised this particular contingent, one of several such detachments to arrive at Ville-sous-Corbie within the space of a week. 1st Battalion was not to be ordered again towards the front lines until November 15.

For the remainder of that autumn of 1916, 1st Battalion remained in the same area of *the Somme* being regularly posted into and out of the trenches. After the action of Gueudecourt in mid-October were no further infantry engagements, but the incessant artillery action ensured a steady stream of casualties.

The Newfoundlanders would then be withdrawn from active service on or about December 12 and were to spend the following six weeks or so encamped well behind the lines and close to the city of Amiens.



(Right: a *British encampment somewhere on the Continent, apparently during the winter season* – from a vintage post-card)

After that welcome six-week Christmas-time respite away from the front lines, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion *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 involving 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 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(?))

After the efforts at Sailly-Saillisel, the month of March was to be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris (right), the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



It was on March 29 that 1st Battalion began to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, its march to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right adjacent: *the remnants of the Grande Place in the city of Arras in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

On April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties it was the most expensive operation of the War for the British, its only positive episode being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



The French offensive was a disaster.

(Right above: *the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

1st Battalion was to play its part in the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at a place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, Monchy-le-Preux was to prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 alone.



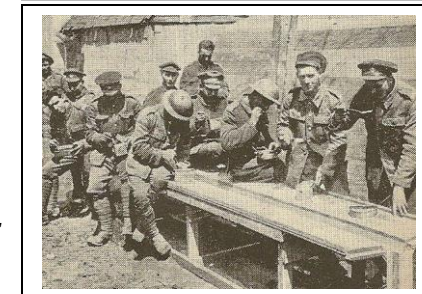
(Above right: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community. The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

The Newfoundlanders' final engagement during the *Battle of Arras* took place at *Les Fosses Farm*, on the main road between Arras and Cambrai. There were numerous casualties of which many, as ever, were the result of artillery fire. On the following day, April 24, 1st Battalion was withdrawn from the *Battle* and marched again towards Arras.



(Right above: *Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras. – photograph from 2007*)

(Right: *Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from The War Illustrated*)



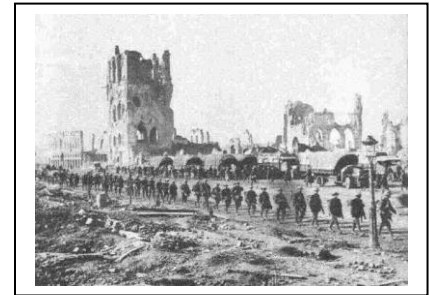
In contrast to the hard fighting at Monchy-le-Preux in April, May of 1917 was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders were moved hither and thither on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches. Apart from the ever-present artillery, there was little infantry activity – except for the marching.



(Right: *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 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.

The Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion were once again ordered 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 named 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.



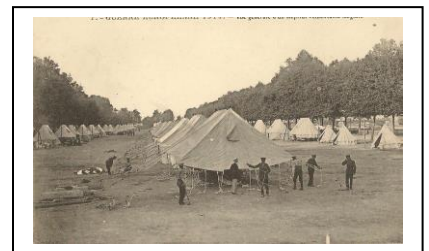
(Right above: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from *Illustration**)

1st Battalion was 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. Notably it fought in two major engagements, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



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

On October 9, Private Cook was wounded while he was serving with 'C' Company during the fighting at the *Broembeek*. He was evacuated from the field to the 64th Casualty Clearing Station at Mendinghem for treatment to injuries to the face and forehead, and to compound skull fractures inflicted by shell-fire. On at least two later occasions his condition was reported as *improved*, but this evaluation, alas, proved to be too optimistic.



(Right above: *a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas to allow for mobility if and when necessary – in the process of being put into service somewhere on the Continent – from a vintage post-card*)

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The son of John Cook (seaman-sealer, died at sea before 1903) and Bethsa (*Elizabeth*) Jane Cook (née *Critch* of Lower Island Cove) of Southside Battery Road, St. John's, his own place of residence is recorded as being Hickman's Harbour where he resided with his foster-father, George C. Critch (elsewhere *Crutch*), fisherman - to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay and to whom he had willed his all – and his wife Annie(?).

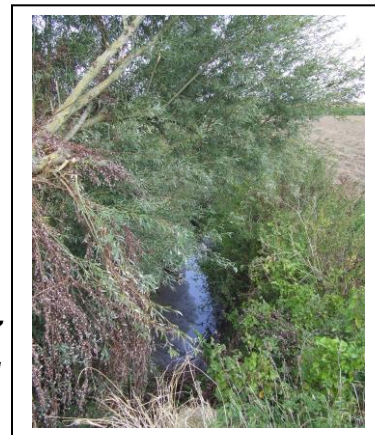
He was also brother to Frieda, to Ethel, to Elsie and to Frederick – as well as step-brother to seven later children of his mother who re-married, to John Robbins.

Private Cook was reported as having *died of wounds* on November 4, 1917, at the same 64th CCS.

At home, it was the Reverend Thomas Pitcher of Britannia who was requested to bear the news to his family.

James Cook had enlisted at the age of twenty years and three months.

(Right: A narrow, placid stream pictured here, in October of 1917 the Broembeek had burst its banks, transforming the surrounding area into a quagmire. – photograph from 2009)



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



In the event of my death I leave my money to Mister George Critch as my father is dead and he took me in and brought me up.

Hickmans Harbour
Trinity Bay