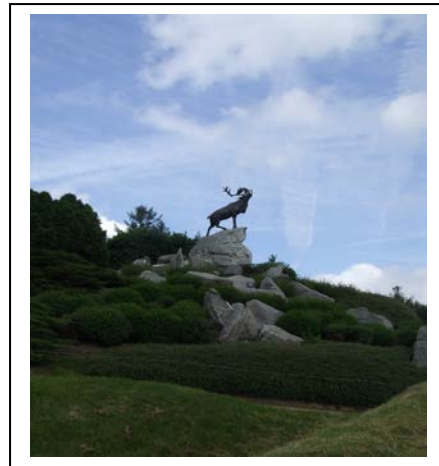




Private Laurence (elsewhere *Lawrence*) Joseph Corcoran\* (Regimental Number 1635), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the bronze beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

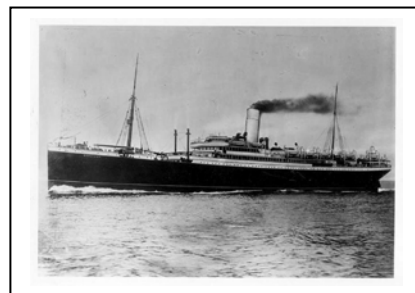
*\*Cited as Cochrane in vital statistics*

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a cooper, Laurence Joseph Corcoran was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on June 25, 1915, before enlisting – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on that same day.



He then attested some seventeen days later, on July 12. *\*Another source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment*

Private Corcoran and the other personnel of 'G' Company – apparently in the company of several naval reservists and also some German prisoners (these latter presumably to remain in Canada) - left St. John's by train on October 27, to cross the island to Port aux Basques. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry, and proceeded by train from North Sydney to Quebec City.



At Québec the Newfoundlanders boarded His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* on or about October 30 for the trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom. Private Corcoran's draft was to be accompanied on the voyage by two units of the Canadian Army: the 55<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of the Divisional Signalling Company.

(Preceding page: *The photograph of HMT Corsican is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

The vessel sailed from the port of Québec on that October 30, 1915, to arrive in the English south-coast naval facility and dock of Plymouth-Devonport some ten days later, on November 9. By the morning of the following day the new arrivals had travelled by train and had gone north to Scotland. There they had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gailles, not far removed from the new Regimental Depot where accommodation for the contingent was as yet not available.



(Right above: *The harbour of Plymouth-Devonport as it was almost a century after the Great War – a lot less busy nowadays - photograph from 2013*)

(continued)

That new Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland to serve as a base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment.. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the newcomers arriving from home were to be despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the *Western Front*, France and Belgium, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)

It was not to be until March 13, some four months later, that Private Corcoran, as a soldier of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the naval establishment of Devonport for a second time, on this occasion outward-bound - although no-one knew it at the time – for France. By that time Private Corcoran had re-enlisted at Ayr, on February 2, some six weeks before his departure from there.\*

*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

The fact that no-one appeared to know that the Newfoundlanders were on their way to the Western Front was because – undoubtedly somewhat surprisingly – they were to travel there by way of Egypt\*.

*\*At the time there was some confusion as to whether 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would stay in the Middle East or not, and this draft apparently had orders to set sail for Egypt. However, there was surely a bureaucratic foul-up as the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion embarked in Egypt on only the following day for passage to France. The two ships presumably passed each other in the Mediterranean Sea, going in opposite directions.*

*One can only suppose that the ship from Devonport was carrying supplies, equipment and/ or other personnel that were needed in the Middle East and therefore could not be turned around – either that or the vessel had no radio. The 1<sup>st</sup> Draft then voyaged to Marseille from Alexandria on HMT Kingstonian (right).*



(Right: *Led by an officer in tropical uniform, British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseille. Once in Gallipoli, neither the uniforms nor those who wore them were to remain smart for very long. – from a vintage post-card*)



(continued)

Private Corcoran's draft of one-hundred forty *other ranks*, under the command of Captain Ledingham, having eventually disembarked in the French Mediterranean port of Marseille on April 3, was to report to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 8 in the small town of Louvencourt in the *département* of the *Somme*. There the parent unit – itself still on its way towards the front from Egypt - had already been billeted for two days.

Five days later, on April 13, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion marched into the village of Englebelmer – situated at some three kilometres behind the front. There the Newfoundlander unit was to be billeted, to welcome further re-enforcements from Rouen on the 15<sup>th</sup> and, on the evening of that day, was ordered forward into the British lines to work in some of the communication trenches.



(Right: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the meandering river that flowed – and today still flows – innocuously towards the sea through the region to which it lends its name, *the Somme*.



(Right: *The Somme as it still flows today towards the city of Amiens on its way westward – photograph from 2009*)

The son of Laurence Joseph Corcoran, also a cooper, and of Julia Corcoran (*née Hogan*, deceased March 16, 1904) of Brine Street – later, in 1919, of 4, Fleming Street; later again, by 1922, of 29, Central Street - he was also brother to Patrick, to Mary-Isabella, to John, to Catherine-Joseph, to Maurice and to Maggie who died young. (*Mary-Isabella and Catherine-Joseph are not named on the family memorial. – were they step-siblings? (see immediately below)*)

However, in yet other records his mother is cited as being Elizabeth Murrin (was she a second wife of Laurence Joseph?); Private Corcoran had allotted to her – this in his own writing - a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay\*.



*\*Given that Private Corcoran had re-assigned his mother's allotment to both his father and to himself before his death, it may well be that Elizabeth Murrin had passed away by that time. However, neither parish records nor vital statistics seem to be able to confirm this.*

(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel - looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences: The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009*)

Private Corcoran was reported as having been *killed in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with ‘B’ Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*.

Laurence Joseph Corcoran had enlisted at the *declared* age of thirty-two years and eleven months.

(Right above black & white: a *grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel* – from ...)

(Right: A family memorial stands in Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Cemetery in St. John’s to commemorate the sacrifice of Private Lawrence Corcoran. – photograph from 2015)

Private Laurence (Lawrence) Joseph Corcoran was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



(Right below: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village*. – photographs from 2010 & 2015)

*In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists as such today – at the time and comprised two communities: Beaumont, a village on the German side of the lines, and Hamel, which was behind the trenches of the British front.*

*No-Man’s-Land, on which the Newfoundland Memorial Park lies partially today, and where the action of July 1 was fought, was on the land between Beaumont and Hamel, land which today is still part of the commune.*

