



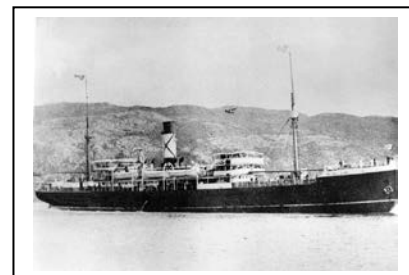
Corporal Leo Francis Crotty (Regimental Number 3935) is buried in Vichte Military Cemetery – Grave reference I. A. 22.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a self-employed cab-man, Leo Crotty was a recruit of the Eighteenth Draft. Presenting himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on August 9, 1917, he enlisted - engaged *for the duration of the war* at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attested on that same day.

Private Crotty was still in St. John's awaiting departure for overseas service when he received a first promotion to the rank of lance corporal, the date of which was November 1.

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He did not embark for overseas service until January 29 of 1918, when he boarded the Bowring Brothers' Red Cross Line vessel *Florizel* en route for Halifax. From there he sailed on an unspecified troop-ship to the United Kingdom.



(Right: *The photograph of Florizel in the harbour at St. John's is shown by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.*)

In January of the New Year of 1918, the Regimental Depot used by the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the soon-to-be-proclaimed Royal Newfoundland Regiment had been transferred from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down in the county of Hampshire, and not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester.



This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was *to* there that Lance Corporal Crotty reported *to duty* from Newfoundland and *from* there that he was then later despatched to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.

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

On July 2, either the 47th or the 48th Re-enforcement Draft, from Hazely Down - with (acting) Corporal Crotty, having been once more promoted on June 27, as one of its non-commissioned officers - passed through the English port of Folkestone. On either July 4 or 5, having likely disembarked in the French port city of Le Havre, the contingent reported to the British Expeditionary Base Depot in the vicinity of Rouen for final training and organization* before finding its way to the 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the top of the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)

(Right: *A view of the French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



Only some five days later again, on July 8 – although *his* file says the 9th – Corporal Crotty was surely one of the detachment of one-hundred twenty-eight *other ranks* from Rouen which reported *to duty* with the 1st Battalion at Équihen on the French west coast.

**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.*

Almost ten weeks previous to the arrival of Corporal Crotty at Équihen, on April 24, having terminated its service in Belgium, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the previous two and a-half years, the 88th Brigade and the 29th Division, and on the morrow had participated in a recessional parade attended by the officer commanding the 88th Brigade, the New Zealander, Brigadier Freyberg.

The Newfoundlanders were later to be deployed to another Division, but for the summer of 1918 the 1st Battalion was to move a world away from Belgian Flanders where it had just fought during the crisis of the German spring offensives. It was now to be stationed on the west coast of France.

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – the 1st Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four other ranks, fifty per cent of regulation strength of a battalion - took train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étapes where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening. For now, for them, the fighting was a thing of the past.

The summer of 1918 was to pass peaceably enough for most of the personnel of the Newfoundland unit. For the months of May, June and up until early July, the unit was posted to Écuire, to the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



(Right: *Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ – from Illustration*)

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1st Battalion of the recently-proclaimed *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* was no longer capable of serving in the field.

**Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that the 1st Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September of that 1918 before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

The posting to Écuire completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders were encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihen – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.



This was the time at which and the place to which Corporal Crotty reported *to duty* in early July.

(Right above: *A view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihen on the English Channel – the inhabitants of the village knew it as La Manche - at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Thus re-enforced, the Newfoundlanders returned to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28th Brigade of the 9th (Scottish) Division. The 1st Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it would finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (*Ingooigem*).

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2nd British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive**. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge.

After almost four years of stalemate in the area of Ypres, the Great War was once again to revert to a conflict of movement.

(Right: *British troops with their German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days – from Illustration*)



**This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3rd Somme. A third push eastwards from Arras began on August 26.*

The advance, despite fierce resistance at times, was relentless. On the night of October 19-20, the 1st Battalion crossed the Lys Canal under fire just to the east of Courtrai – today Kortrijk - on barrel bridges and on the morrow was advancing towards the village of Vichte.



(Right: *The Lys – both canal and river – at a point not far from the crossing-place – right to left - of October 19-20, 1918: The Harlebeke Caribou stands about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

The son of William Crotty, former watchman for the *Bank of Montreal*, and Ellen Crotty – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of 12, Walsh's Square, St. John's, he was also brother to Michael (cab-driver), William (reporter) and James J. (serving in the U.S. Army).



Corporal Crotty was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 25, 1918, while serving with 'D' Company, fighting in the advance from Vichte to Inghoyghem during the last days of the Newfoundlanders' conflict.

(Preceding page: *The Caribou at Harlebeke – commemorates the crossing of the Lys Canal and the sacrifices of the last campaign of the War. – photograph from 2012*)

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On the following evening, October 26, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, having advanced again on that day, turned its back on the *Great War* for a final time and marched away.

At home, it was the Reverend Doctor M. P. Kitchen of St. Joseph's Parish who was requested to inform his family.

Leo Francis Crotty had enlisted at the age of twenty years and eleven months.

(Right above: *the valley of the Scheldt as seen from Ingoyghem, the Newfoundlanders' furthest point of advance on October 26, 1918* – photograph from 2010)

(Right: *A family memorial which stands in Mount Carmel Cemetery in St. Johns commemorates the sacrifice of Corporal Leo Francis Crotty.* – photograph from 2015)

Corporal Leo Francis Crotty was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

