

Private Nathaniel Croucher (Regimental Number 1495), 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 \$200.00, Nathaniel Croucher enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 - on April 27, 1915, before presenting himself for medical examination three days later, on the 30<sup>th</sup>. He then attested one day later again, on May 1.



*\*A second source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.*

Private Croucher embarked on board His Majesty's Transport *Calgarian* (above – original photograph from the *Provincial Archives*) on June 20 in St. John's Harbour and sailed (*almost*\*) directly to the United Kingdom. He was one of the two-hundred forty-two men of 'F' Company and eighty-five naval reservists to take passage on that day.

*\*Apparently the ship took nineteen days to make what was usually the journey of about a week. Not only was Calgarian escorting three submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders apparently even having the time to cross the straits to spend a few hours in North Africa. She reached Liverpool on July 9.*



(Right above: *the Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background. – from a vintage postcard*)

On the day after its arrival in the United Kingdom, 'F' Company marched from the railway station and reported *to duty* at Stobs Camp near the Scottish town of Hawick on the evening of July 10. It was an important moment: the Newfoundland Regiment, as of that day counting fifteen hundred personnel, was now at fighting strength and could be posted on *active service*.



(Right above: *The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles. – original photograph from the Provincial Archives*)

From Stobs, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the senior Companies, having now become 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, were transferred to Aldershot in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before departing on active service to the Middle East and to the fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

'E' and 'F' Companies – the latter having arrived at Stobs Camp on July 10 - were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were to form the nucleus of the newly-formed 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. The Depot was to become Private Croucher's home for the following seven months.

The Regimental Depot was being established during that 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. It was from there – as of November of 1915 up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were to be sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



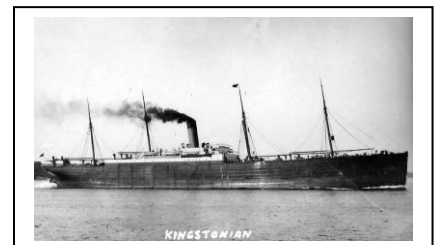
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

It was not until March 13 of the following year, 1916, that Private Croucher, as a soldier of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the naval establishment of Devonport on the English south coast, en route – although no-one knew it at the time – for France.

The Newfoundlanders were to travel by way of Egypt\*. By that time Private Croucher had re-enlisted at Ayr, on February 2, some six weeks before his departure from there.\*\*

*\*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 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 Marseilles from Alexandria on HMT Kingstonian (right).*



(continued)

**\*\*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.**

**(Right: British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles. – from a vintage post-card)**

The draft of one-hundred forty *other ranks*, under the command of Captain Ledingham, having disembarked in the French Mediterranean port of Marseilles on April 3, joined 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 8 in the small town of Louvencourt where the parent unit – still on its march towards the front - had already been billeted for two days.



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



**(Right: 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 through the southern part of the region to which it lends its name, *the Somme*.

The son of Elias Croucher and Hagar Croucher (née *Paddock*, deceased by 1921) – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of twenty cents from his pay - of Cutwell Arm on Long Island, Notre Dame Bay (the community of Beaumont (see below) is also cited), he was also brother to Enos and Kitchener.



Private Croucher was reported as *missing in action* on July 1, 1916, during the fighting on the first day of *the Somme*. Some six months later, he was officially presumed dead.

Nathaniel Croucher had enlisted at nineteen years of age.

**(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 from 2009)**



(Preceding page: a grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from ...)

(Right: The War Memorial standing in the community of Beaumont North (formerly Ward's Harbour) honours the sacrifice of Private Croucher – although his Regimental Number appears to be incorrect. – photograph from 2014)



Private Nathaniel Croucher was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

