



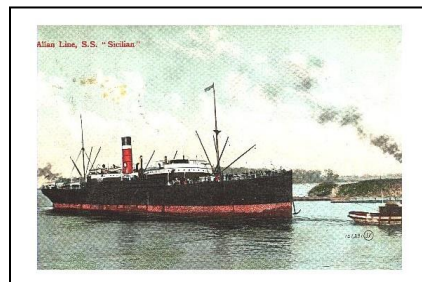
Private Henry Archibald Curtis (Regimental Number 2449), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman working for *D. A. Ryan* of King's Cove and earning a monthly twenty-five dollars, Henry Archibald Curtis was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lada Brigade Armoury in St. John's on April 5, 1916, he then enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on the same April 5, before attesting* three days later, on April 8.



**A second document reports him attesting on the day of his enlistment.*

Private Curtis 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.

**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-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*)

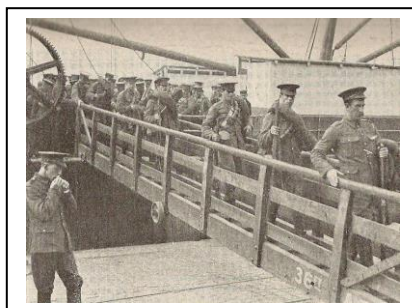
At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been 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 12th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Curtis among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 11 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front.

The contingent disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, October 12, 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: *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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.

Private Curtis' contingent comprised a single officer and two-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* by the time it reported for duty at the Bernafay Wood Camp on October 22. Still in the area of Gueudecourt, 1st Battalion had been relieved in the front line three days before, on the 19th.



(Right: *Bernafay Wood a century later – not being close to the front lines, the wood may have resembled what is seen here – photograph from 2014*)

After the episode of October 12 at Gueudecourt, 1st Battalion had remained in the same area of *the Somme* and was regularly into and out of the trenches. There were no infantry engagements, but the incessant artillery action ensured a steady stream of casualties.



(continued)

The Newfoundlanders would 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.

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

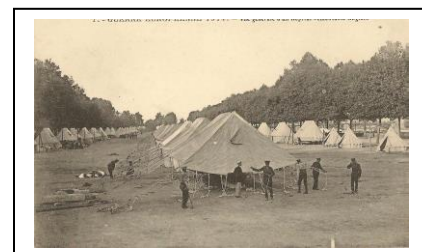
After that welcome six-week Christmas-time respite away from the front lines, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

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(?))

But Private Curtis was not to serve at Sailly-Saillisel. On the first day of February of 1917, he was admitted into the 55th (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown, Meaulté, suffering from myalgia.



(Right: a *British casualty clearing station* – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card)

One week later, on the 8th, he was transferred into the 11th Stationary Hospital in Rouen where he remained for treatment until February 21. Discharged *to duty* on that date to the Base Depot at Rouen, it was not until the last day of March that Private Curtis re-joined 1st Battalion.

On March 31 a draft from Rouen of five officers and thirty-two *other ranks* – Private Curtis one of that number - reported for duty to 1st Battalion in the village of Vignacourt to meet with the parent unit.



(continued)

(Page preceding: the village of Vignacourt at or about the time of the Great War – by courtesy of the *Australian War Memorial* archives)

In the meantime, after the efforts at Saily-Saillisel, the month of March had been a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they had spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had 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 taking place on March 17, St. Patrick’s Day.



It was on March 29 that 1st Battalion had begun to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east – pausing at Vignacourt to be joined by Private Curtis’ draft - 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 above: *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 the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders’ war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 alone.



(Right above: *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*)

(continued)

The son of James (former fisherman, deceased February, 1916) and Susannah (of George) Curtis – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay – of King's Cove, Bonavista Bay (later of Port Blandford, later again of Bay Roberts), he was also brother to Azariah – sailor; to Eleazar – schoolmaster; and to Andrew – fisherman.



Private Curtis was reported as *missing in action* on April 14, 1917, while fighting at Monchy-le-Preux. Some thirty weeks later, on November 17, he was officially *presumed dead*.

Henry Archibald Curtis had enlisted at the age of twenty-four years and two months.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the remains of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed village.* – photograph from 2009(?))

(Right: *The sacrifice of Private Curtis is honoured on the Summerville War Memorial.* – photograph from 2010)



Private Henry Archibald Curtis was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

