



Private William Devoe (Regimental Number 3443) lies in Wimereux Communal Cemetery – Grave reference VIII. D. 8.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a farmer, William Devoe was a recruit of the Eleventh Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on January 23, 1917, he also enlisted – *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on that same day.

Private Devoe was one of the contingent of one-hundred four *other ranks* to leave St. John's on March 17, St. Patrick's Day of 1917, for the journey to Halifax. The means of their departure, however, is not clear: in one source, *The Fighting Newfoundlander*, the claim is that it was on board the Bowring Brothers vessel *Florizel*; the files of the soldiers themselves record that it was... *Embarked S.S. Train to Halifax 17/3/17...* presumably via Port-aux Basques and thence by ferry and train again to Halifax. Other sources have not proved helpful.

It was from Halifax that the detachment made its trans-Atlantic crossing in the company of Canadian troops on board His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right), sailing from Nova Scotia on March 28. Thus this draft was to reach the United Kingdom two weeks or so before the ill-fated *Windsor Draft** which had left Newfoundland at the end of January, some ten weeks earlier.



**This was the name given to the draft of about three-hundred twenty all ranks which had left St. John's on January 31, 1917, en route to Halifax from where they were to sail to the United Kingdom. This contingent would eventually make that voyage, but about thirteen weeks later than envisaged. They were quarantined at Windsor as the result of a measles and mumps epidemic that claimed two of their number – and maybe a later third. In the meantime, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was running low on man-power.*

Missanabie having docked in Liverpool on April 6, the Newfoundland contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence to serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for two years.

It was from Ayr – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from Newfoundland were to be despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.



By the time that the Windsor Draft arrived at the Regimental Depot, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was becoming critically short of personnel.

(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*)

On June 11, the 25th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Private Devoe among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to the Continent. The detachment disembarked in Rouen on the following day, the 12th, and made its way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot there for a few days of final training and organization* before proceeding on its way to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

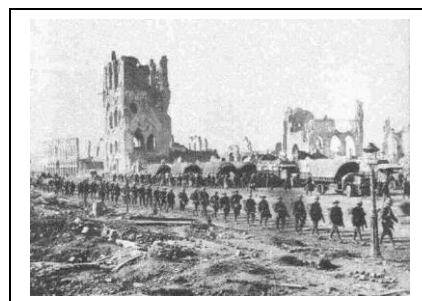
(continued)

**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.*

The records show that it was on July 2 – the *Regimental War Diary* says, in fact, on the day before - that Private Devoe's contingent of two-hundred fifty *other ranks* reported to duty at Caribou Camp, behind the lines near Woesten in Belgium. For the next few days – and nights – 1st Battalion supplied working parties for road-mending and for the construction of infantry tracks. For that purpose, several of the Newfoundlanders were attached temporarily until July 20 to the 173rd Company of the Royal Engineers.

Only days before, at the end of June, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had once again moved north into Belgium and once again to the area of Ypres.

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.



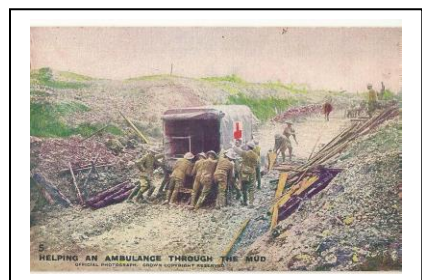
(Right: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

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 the latter occasion, *at the Broembeek*, Private Devoe received an injury to his nose and was immediately evacuated to the 87th Field Ambulance for treatment before being released to the 14th Corps Rest Station on that same day. On the following day he was moved to the 61st Casualty Clearing Station at Lozinghem* and, two days later again, on October 12, onward to the 5th General Hospital at Rouen.



**Several names such as Mendinghem, Bandagehem and Dozinghem were invented by the British troops as they resembled the Belgian and northern-French fashion of naming villages. These sites were occupied by medical facilities only – and the inevitable cemeteries which today remain. But Lozinghem seems to be an exception in that it is a real place – however much the name lends itself to the morbid spirit of the British soldier.*

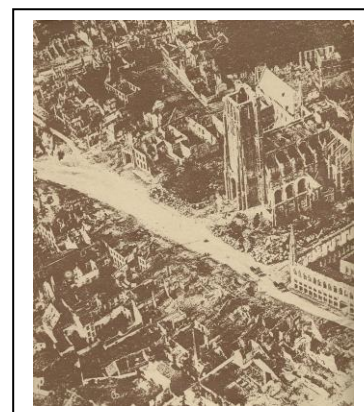
(Preceding page: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)



There he remained for nine days before being deemed well enough to be transferred to the 2nd Convalescent Depot on the 21st, to the 11th Convalescent Depot at some unspecified date, and from there to the Divisional Base Depot on January 13 of the New Year, 1918. Six days later, on January 19, he reported back to duty to 1st Battalion in the field at Hasler Camp

(Right above: *Hasler Dump Cemetery – whether it is in the proximity of Haslar Camp is, however, not altogether clear - and the flat Belgian countryside beyond its confines – photograph from 2013*)

Some six to seven weeks prior to Private Devoe's return to duty with 1st Battalion, at the close of the *Battle of Cambrai* at the beginning of December of 1917, 1st Battalion – once again badly under-strength due to the heavy casualties incurred – had been withdrawn from the area of the front lines to re-enforce and to re-organize. The following weeks had been spent at first to the south-west of the city of Arras, at Humbercourt and then at some distance to the north-west, at Fressin.



The weather obliged and even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow, a bit too much at times, apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, and after that snowy Christmas period spent to the west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had been ordered to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time.

There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.

(Right above: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

In the meantime, the Germans had been preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them. It was expected that they would launch a spring offensive.

Private Devoe, however, spent less than three weeks serving with 1st Battalion before being sent on February 7 to the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearing Station at Rémy Sidings in the outskirts of nearby Poperinghe. For the moment there was no clear diagnosis; even when forwarded to the 54th General Hospital at Wimereux on February 18 he was still being considered as NYD (*Not Yet Determined*).



Three days later again, Private Devoe was moved to the 14th Stationary Hospital also at Wimereux where, on March 5, he was deemed to be *dangerously ill*.

(Previous page: *the popular French coastal resort of Wimereux – to become part of an important medical complex during the Great War – at a time just prior to that – from a vintage post-card*)

The son of Marcelin Devoe, farmer, and Margaret (Maggie) Devoe* – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Grand River South in the District of Codroy - in fact *Devoe /Devereaux*, originally from Inverness, Nova Scotia, in 1887 - he was also brother to Lucy, Vincent, Clara, Sandy and to Martin.



Private Devoe was reported as having *died of sickness* in the 14th Stationary Hospital at Wimereux - of tuberculosis and peritonitis - on March 17, 1918.

William Devoe had enlisted at the age of nineteen years and ten months.

**still Deveraux in the 1921 Census; Desvaux in that of 1911*

(Right above: *the Commonwealth Plot in Wimereux Communal Cemetery – photograph from 2011*)

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

