



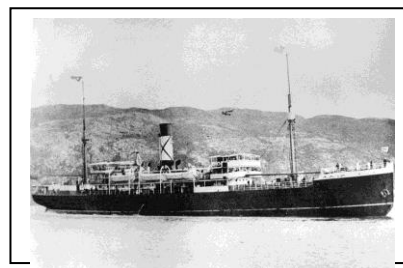
Private Ambrose Ellis\* (Regimental Number 3809), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

*\*Also known as Ambrose HOUSE, the family name of his foster-parents.*

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Ambrose Ellis was a recruit of the Fifteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on May 21 of 1917, he then 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 Ellis did not leave St. John's until August 4 of that year. On that day he marched down to St. John's harbour and boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel, *Florizel* (right)\*. The destination was Halifax, Nova Scotia, from where the Newfoundland draft now took ship - thus far un-identified: maybe *Missanabie* but this is far from certain - to cross the Atlantic to the United Kingdom.



*\*Albeit a second source claims that the contingent left St. John's by train.*

Arriving in England the 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 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here - as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 - that the new-comers from home had been despatched 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*)

Private Ellis spent the five months succeeding his arrival in the United Kingdom at the Regimental Depot at Ayr and likely also at Barry\*. In the latter half of January of the New Year, 1918, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion was to move quarters from Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester.



It was there that Private Ellis would have been stationed at the beginning of February when he was ordered to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.

*\*During the summer months of 1917, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

(Previous page: a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from *The War Illustrated*)

On February 4, the 36<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft of two hundred *other ranks* from Hazely Down – Private Ellis among its ranks - passed through the English port of Southampton on its way to the Continent. On the 6<sup>th</sup> the Newfoundlanders landed in the French port of Rouen for the inevitable final training and organization at the Base Depot before finding their way to the front.

(Right: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route 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.*

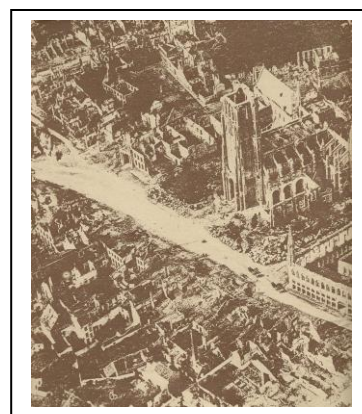


A detachment of one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Rouen – Private Ellis among that number - reported to *duty* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at Steenvoorde, on the Franco-Belgian frontier, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that February, the day before an inspection by Major-General Beauvoir de Lisle, Officer Commanding 29<sup>th</sup> Division, a parade complete with presentation of decorations and the announcement that the Newfoundland Regiment was to be designated as *Royal*.

Meanwhile, at the close of the *Battle of Cambrai* at the beginning of December of 1917, 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been ordered into Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time.



There, as it was with the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences. It was during a period while 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was out of the lines that Private Ellis reported to *active service*.

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

Meanwhile, while the Allies built their defences, by the beginning of 1918 the Germans were 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 the Germans would launch a spring offensive. While they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders continued to dig.

(Right above: *countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

Then the Germans did as was expected of them. Ludendorff's armies had already launched a powerful thrust on March 21, striking at first in the area of *the Somme*, overrunning the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while the advance seemed unstoppable.



Then a second offensive, *Georgette*, was launched in the northern sector of the front, in Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders were stationed: the date was April 9.

Within two days the situation of the Allies was desperate.

(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

On the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due to come out of the line and move back to the Somme, boarded buses at three o'clock in the afternoon and were suddenly directed southward, towards Nieppe.



They were in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, three hours later.

(Right above: *the area of La Crèche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station – photograph from 2010.*)

The British were pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

On April 13, during the defensive action near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening - were equally heavily involved.



(Right above: *ground just to the east of Bailleul where 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

What exact role Private Ellis played during this frantic period is not known - it *appears* to be recorded only that he was a soldier of 'D' Company - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.



He was reported killed near the Ravelsberg Ridge in the vicinity of Bailleul, and near to the Armentières Road – in the area shown in the upper photograph above.

(Right above: *These are the De Seule crossroads almost one-hundred years later, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, and also the scene of fierce fighting involving 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

The son of Thomas Ellis, former fisherman, and Fanny Ellis (both deceased, see below) of Port Saunders in the District of St. Barbe, he was also the foster-son of Abraham House, fisherman, and his wife Elizabeth – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay, and brother to Reuben, at the time resident of Prince Edward Island.

Private Ellis was reported as having been *killed in action* on April 13, 1918, near the French towns of Nieppe and Bailleul, during *Georgette*, the German spring offensive.

Ambrose Ellis had enlisted at the age of twenty-seven years and eight months.

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

(continued)



W T Rendell

Port Saunders  
March 7, 1920

Dear Sir

I see it was addressed to R. Ellis here. Ambrose Ellis fathers name was Thomas Ellis Ambrose Ellis was my adopted son he was adopted to me when three years old and he lived with me until he went to the war he has nobody belonging to him living at Port Saunders. he as one brother away he lived with me more than twenty-three years is father and mother is both dead. if there is anything concerning Ambrose Ellis please address it to me I have never got any thing from the battle field his belongings if there is anything to be got I would like to have it in remembrance of him

Yours Truely  
Abraham House