



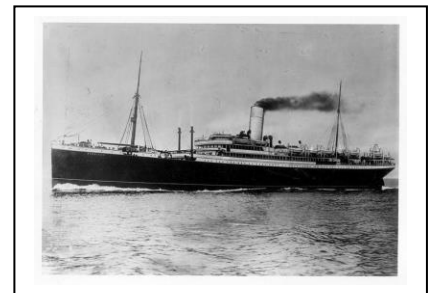
Private Thomas Joseph Fitzgerald (Regimental Number 1645), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service that of a labourer, Thomas Joseph Fitzgerald was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on June 19, 1915, before enlisting two days later – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on the 21<sup>st</sup>. He then attested three weeks later again, on July 12\*.



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

Private Fitzgerald and the other personnel of 'G' Company – apparently in the company of several naval reservists and also some German prisoners (these latter presumably to remain in Canada) - left St. John's by train on October 27, to cross the island to Port aux Basques. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry, and proceeded by train from North Sydney to Quebec City.



At Québec the Newfoundlanders boarded His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* (above) for the trans-Atlantic passage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9.

By the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> the new arrivals had travelled by train and had gone north to Scotland. There they had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gailles, not far removed from the new Regimental Depot where accommodation for the contingent was as yet not available.

That new Regimental Depot had been established during the 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 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers were sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



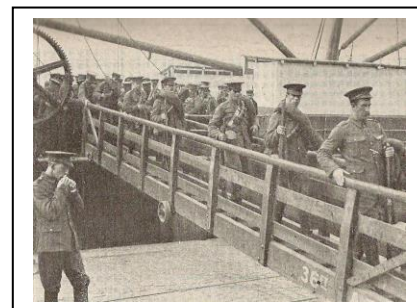
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

(continued)

It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that, on May 24, and three weeks before his departure to France on *active service*, Private Fitzgerald was prevailed upon to re-enlist *for the duration of the War*\*.

*\*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.*

It was not until June 14, 1916, that the 6<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Fitzgerald among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent. On the following day, the 15<sup>th</sup>, it disembarked in Rouen. Capital city of Normandy any the site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot where the contingent spent time in final training and organizing\* before moving on to a rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right above: *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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

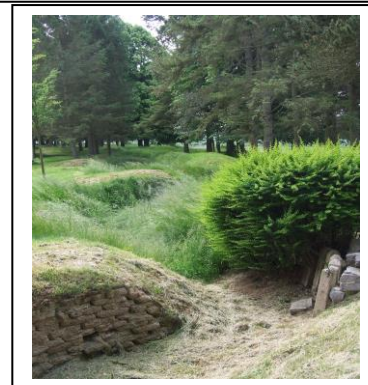
A draft of sixty-six men from Rouen arrived to join the parent unit at Louvencourt on June 30. At 9:15 that evening, most of the Newfoundlanders – minus the ten per cent reserve company but including many of the new-comers - marched from there to their assigned *forming-up place trenches i.e. rear line of trenches in our usual sector* (from the Regimental War Diary).

In the weeks preceding the arrival of Private Fitzgerald's detachment, the Newfoundlanders had been preparing for the upcoming British campaign of that summer. It was 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*. Originally scheduled to begin on June 30, bad weather had decided the commanders to postpone the attack for twenty-four hours, until July 1.



(Right above: *the Somme as it still flows today between the town of Albert and the city of Amiens – photograph from 2009*)

(Right: *Just inside the entrance to the Newfoundland Memorial Park is to be found the re-constituted forming-up trench from where 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion attacked on the morning of July 1. – photograph from 2010*)



Private Fitzgerald – having arrived merely hours beforehand – was thrust unprepared into the offensive of July 1, 1916, the first day of *the Somme*. He emerged unscathed from the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel and was one of the sixty-eight to answer muster on the following day. The records show that he remained with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion during the days and weeks which followed.

On July 27-28 of 1916, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still at only half of battalion strength at five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after re-enforcement - moved north and entered into Belgium for the first time. It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to re-enforce and to re-organize. *The Salient* was relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there, yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number of them fatal.



On October 8, after ten weeks in Belgium, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved south back to France and back to the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

(Right above: *the entrance to 'A' Company's quarters in the ramparts of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



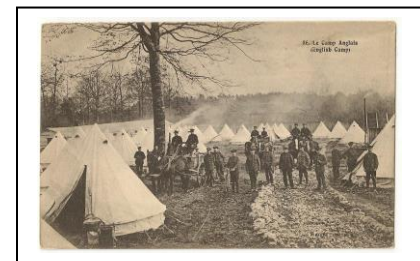
(Right: *the city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – and eight months before the Newfoundlanders were posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)

Four days after its return to France, on October 12, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion went again to the offensive at a place called Gueudecourt, some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel. It proved to be another costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.



(Right: *This is the ground over which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)

After Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period broken only by the several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and close to the city of Amiens.



(Right above: *a typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card*)



After that welcome six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve*, the Newfoundlanders had *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, 1917, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had incurred their first casualties of 1917.

The only infantry activity directly involving 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion during the entire period from the action at Gueudecourt in mid-October of 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917, was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and 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(?)*)

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March was a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even 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 on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



On March 29, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, their march to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right: *the remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War – 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*)

(continued)

1<sup>st</sup> 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 of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

The son of Thomas Joseph Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Fitzgerald\* – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Ropewalk Range in St. John's, he was reported as having been *killed in action* on April 14, 1917, while serving with the almost annihilated 'D' Company during the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux.

A single document suggests that the remains of Private Fitzgerald were identified and buried on the following day, April 15. If so, the grave's location was either lost or forgotten, or it was destroyed in the following weeks of turmoil or even later, in the subsequent battles of 1918.

Thomas Fitzgerald had enlisted at the age of eighteen years.

*\*Private Fitzgerald's mother was a widow by 1917, perhaps for a second time. By January of that year she had changed her name to Hicks, suggesting that she had re-married by then, except that in one correspondence she refers to herself as Hicks, widow. To complicate matters, in further correspondence she referred to by officialdom as née Fitzgerald.*



(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(?)*)

Private Thomas Joseph Fitzgerald was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

