



Private Richard Fleming (Regimental Number 1594), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as being that of a labourer and earning a monthly \$35.00, Richard Fleming was a recruit of the Fifth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on May 25, 1915, before enlisting – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 - two days later, on May 27. He is variously documented as having attested on June 4 or 5.



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

Private Fleming 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*.



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(Previous page: *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 1st 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 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. The Depot was to become home to Private Fleming for the next eight 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 2nd (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 1st Battalion.

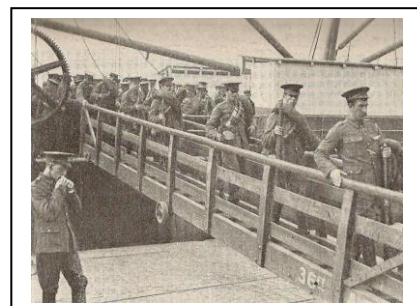


(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on-Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

It was most likely while at Ayr that Private Fleming was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion *for the duration of the war**. While in his case no documents seem to be available, those who originally enlisted with him in St. John’s in 1915 did so during this period before leaving for France and for *active service*.

**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.*

The 10th Re-enforcement Draft passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent on August 24, 1916, Private Fleming among its ranks. On the next day, the 25th, the detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot. There the draft spent some days in final training and organizing* before proceeding to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



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

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****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.***

It was a detachment of twenty-five other ranks, among them Private Fleming, which reported to duty with 1st Battalion on September 7 or 8, in the Belgian city of Ypres.

In the meantime, 1st Battalion - still below battalion strength after the sacrifice of July 1 at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – had moved north into Belgium on July 27-28, having been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, there to continue to re-enforce and re-organize. Relatively quiet at the time, the *Salient* was nonetheless one of the most lethal postings of the entire War, and casualties, including a number of fatalities, were suffered.



The unit spent ten weeks there, moving south once more into France on October 8, back to the area - 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*)

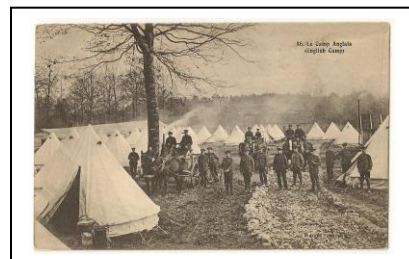


Four days after its return to France, on October 12, 1st Battalion went again to the attack at a place called Gueudecourt, some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel. It proved to be another costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.



(Right: *This is the ground over which 1st Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some 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, 1st 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*)

...and, for Private Fleming, interrupted by ten days spent receiving medical attention. On January 18 of the New Year, 1917, while 1st Battalion was preparing for a return to the front, he was admitted into the 53rd Field Ambulance for treatment to a case of enteritis. Some ten days later, on the 27th, he was discharged back *to duty* with his unit.

Just days before, 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 1st 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, 1st 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.



(Preceding page: *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 of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

While some documents record Private Fleming as missing in action on April 14 at Monchy-le-Preux, by far the preponderance of evidence documents him as having been serving with 1st Battalion until April 23, the day of the encounter at *Les Fosses Farm*.

His place of residence recorded as being Main Street, Bell Island, Private Fleming had at least two sisters: Bride of 10, Barter's Hill in St. John's – 171, Pleasant Street and 16 Coronation Street are later addresses – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay; and P. J. Hogan of 402, Charlotte Street in Sydney, Nova Scotia. He also had one brother, John, also of 10, Barter's Hill; and an aunt, Mrs. Anthony (*Kate*) Cummings, also of Main Street, Bell Island, whom he recorded as his next of kin.

Both of Private Fleming's parents had passed away by the time of his enlistment.

Private Fleming was reported as *missing in action* on April 23*, in fighting in the area of Guemappe and *Les Fosses Farm* during the *Battle of Arras*. Two-hundred seventeen days later, on November 17, 1917, he was officially *presumed dead*.



Richard Fleming had enlisted at the age of twenty-one years.

*A second source lists him as *missing in action* on April 14, 1917, at Monchy-le-Preux.

(Right above: *Windmill Cemetery stand just south of Monchy-le-Preux. Les Fosses Farm is about three hundred metres along the main Camrai-Arras road, seen here, to the right. The Newfoundlanders were attacking across this countryside from right to left in the photo. – photograph from 2007*)

(Right: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stand in the centre of the re-built community on top of the vestiges of a German strongpoint. – from a vintage post-card*)



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

