



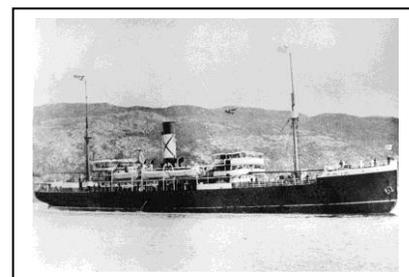
Private John William Pye Halfyard (Regimental Number 3801) is interred in Duhallow A.D.S. Cemetery – Grave reference IV. J. 31.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, John William Pye Halfyard was a recruit of the Sixteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on May 19 of 1917, he then enlisted - engaged *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attested two days afterwards, on May 21.

Private Halfyard was not to depart for overseas service for almost a further four-and-a-half months.

(continued)

It was on October 3 of 1917 that Private Halfyard took ship from Newfoundland. While some records say it was by train, certain others have it to be on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) that the draft travelled for overseas service to Halifax, Nova Scotia, there to take a troop transport* across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom.



**Perhaps Metagama which sailed from Halifax with Canadian re-enforcements on October 6 to dock in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on the 17th.*

Arriving in the United Kingdom 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 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for more than 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*, there to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.



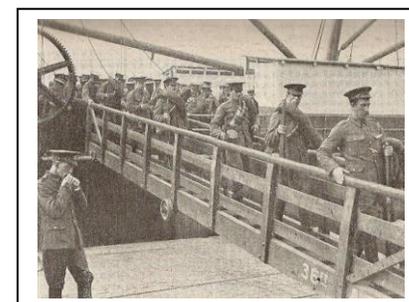
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

2nd (Reserve) Battalion was soon to move quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was there that Private Halfyard was stationed when he was ordered to France to join the British Expeditionary Force.



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

Private Halfyard was a soldier of the 40th Re-enforcement Draft of eighty *other ranks* which left Hazely Down on March 27, 1918, en route to the Continent. The contingent disembarked on the 29th, two days later, almost inevitably spending some days, as was customary, at the British Expeditionary Force Base Depot at Rouen for last-minute training and organizing* before proceeding to its rendezvous with 1st Battalion in Belgium.



(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.*

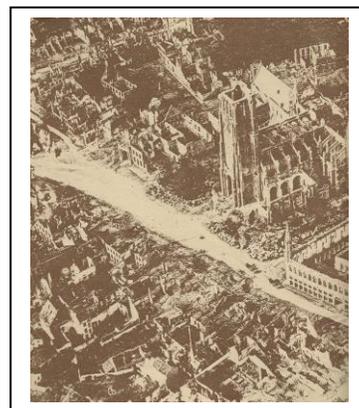
The Regimental War Diary makes no mention of any re-enforcements arriving either on or about April 4 – but this does not preclude Halfyard's records of his reporting *to duty* being correct. It was a day on which three of the four Companies of 1st Battalion, at the time posted to Haslar Camp to the rear, were providing work-parties to labour on defences in the *Divisional Reserve Line*.

By the evening of the next day the Newfoundlanders were back *in* the line, having relieved the 2nd Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment, near the remnants of the village of Passchendaele. And although he was not to know it, Private Halfyard had arrived just in time for the upcoming crisis.

Some four months before, at the beginning of January of 1918, having spent a snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had been ordered to return to Belgium, to the Ypres Salient, for a third time.

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

(Right: *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*)

(continued)

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 12th of April 1st Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

On April 13, during the defensive stand 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 1st Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

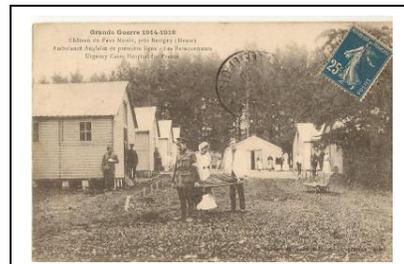
What exact role Private Halfyard played during this frantic time is not known – it does not even appear that the Company in which he was serving at the time is documented - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.



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(Preceding page: *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 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

On April 12, Private Halfyard was wounded. Having incurred gun-shot injuries to the left arm, he was evacuated to the 57th Field Ambulance for preliminary treatment before being forwarded on the same day to the 64th Casualty Clearing Station at Mendinghem*.



(Right: *a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)

On April 15 he was admitted into the 1st Australian General Hospital at Rouen where his wound was still considered as severe. However, on the following day Private Halfyard was released to the 2nd Convalescent Depot, also in Rouen, before being furthered to the 11th Convalescent Depot at Buchy on April 20.

**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.*



(Right above: *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*)

Discharged to duty at the Base Depot, Rouen, on May 9, it was a further six days before he was ordered to re-join his unit. The entry for May 15 in the Regimental War Diary merely notes: *Écuire - Draft 12 O. R. arrived. Very hot day.*

While Private Halfyard was receiving medical attention, and only days after the crisis of the German spring offensive had passed, on April 24, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion said farewell to their comrades-in-arms of 88th Brigade and 29th Division. On the following day there was a recessional parade. 1st Battalion was to later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 it was to move a world away from Flanders where it had just fought, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – 1st Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four other ranks - took train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étapes, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening. For now, for them, the fighting was a thing of the past.

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The summer of 1918 was to pass peaceably enough for most of the personnel of 1st Battalion. For the months of May - during which 1st Battalion was re-joined by Private Halfyard - June and until early July, the unit was posted to Écuire, to the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



(Right: *Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ – from Illustration*)

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1st Battalion of the recently-proclaimed *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* was no longer capable of serving in the field.

**Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that 1st Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

The posting to Écuire completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion were encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihe – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.



(Right above: *a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihe at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Re-enforced, the Newfoundlanders returned to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28th Brigade of 9th Scottish Division. 1st Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it would finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (*Ingoigem*).

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2nd British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive**. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge. After almost four years of stalemate, it was once again to be a conflict of movement.

(Right: *British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days – from Illustration*)

**This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3rd Somme.*



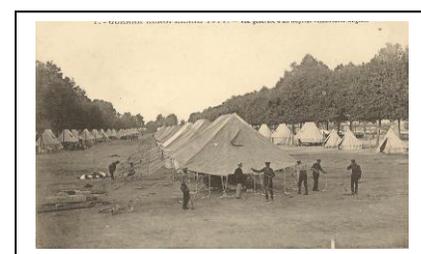
The advance, despite fierce resistance at times, was relentless. On the night of October 19-20, 1st Battalion crossed the Lys Canal under fire just to the east of Courtrai – today Kortrijk - on barrel bridges and on the morrow was advancing towards the village of Vichte.

(Right: *the Lys – both canal and river – at a point not far from the crossing-place – right to left - of October 19-20, 1918 - The Harlebeke Caribou stands about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)



On October 20, during the advance from the River Lys towards the village of Vichte, Private Halfyard was wounded for a second time: on this occasion multiple gun-shots had penetrated his abdomen. He was evacuated from the field to the 44th Casualty Clearing Station at Berque.

(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*)



The son of Silas Halfyard, former fisherman, deceased January 31 of 1910, and Laura Halfyard (also *born Halfyard*) – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Birchy Head, Bonne Bay (both parents originally from Ochre Pit Cove, also using the address of 38, Mullock Street, St. John's, by 1922), he was brother to Henrietta-Sarah, to Julia-Alberta, and to Henry-Stephen.

(Right: *The War Memorial at Woody Point, Bonne Bay, honours the sacrifice of Private Halfyard. – photograph from 2010*)



Private Halfyard was reported as having *died of wounds* at a quarter past eight on the evening of October 22, 1918, in the same 44th CCS.

John William Pye Halfyard had enlisted at the age of twenty-four years and eleven months.

(Right: *The Caribou at Harlebeke – commemorates the crossing of the Lys Canal and the sacrifices of the last campaign of the War. – photograph from 2012*)



(continued)

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



Lieut Coll
Chief Staff Officer

Bonne Bay
Birchy Head
March 8th
1920

Dear Sir

I beg you to confer my humble thanks to his Majesty the King for his kind message of sympathy and Memorial Scroll. John gave his life for freedoms cause. I mourn not without hoe I belive God called him to a higher service

yours sincerly
Laura Halfyard