

HAMEN, R.J.

Private Richard Joseph Hamen (Regimental Number 3037), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

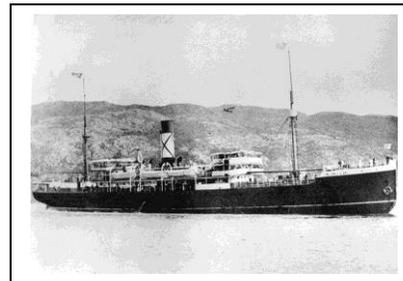
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman who had earned \$200.00 in the previous six months, Richard Joseph Hamen was a recruit of the Twelfth Draft. Having presented himself at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's for medical examination on August 28, 1916, he then both enlisted – *for the duration of the war* and engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on that same August 28.



It was to be a number of months before he was to depart from Newfoundland. It was while he was in St. John's awaiting further developments that Private Hamen contracted a case of measles, being admitted into the Military Infectious Diseases Hospital in St. John's from November 21 until December 22. His medical problems, however, were not yet over.

Private Hamen was one of the approximately three hundred twenty *all ranks* to leave St. John's for *overseas service* on the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (below), bound for Halifax, on January 31, 1917, from there to take ship to the United Kingdom.

Immediately upon its arrival in Nova Scotia, however, this detachment was forwarded to accommodation in the town of Windsor where it was soon to be quarantined because of an epidemic of measles and mumps. One of those afflicted, on this occasion with mumps, was Private Hamen who was once more hospitalized, on this occasion for twelve days, from March 10 to 22.



It was not before a lapse of some two-and-a-half months since its arrival that transport could be arranged for the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom for the so-called *Windsor Draft* – minus the twenty-five or so personnel still unable to travel.

On April 17, Private Hamen embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Ausonia* (right), one of three ships carrying the Newfoundlanders to sail on the next day in a convoy from Halifax. The vessels were also carrying Canadian reinforcements to the English west-coast port of Liverpool, where the ships docked on April 29.



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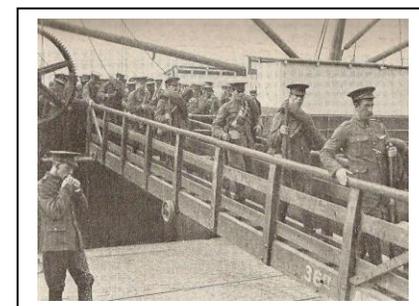
Arriving in England the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence to serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers had been 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: *the new race-course at Ayr – opened in 1907 – where men of the Regiment were billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photo from 2012*)

On June 11, 1917, the 25th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Hamen among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to France. On the following day, June 12, the contingent disembarked in the Norman capital, Rouen, where time was spent at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, to be organized and to undergo final training* before moving onward to its eventual rendezvous with 1st Battalion.

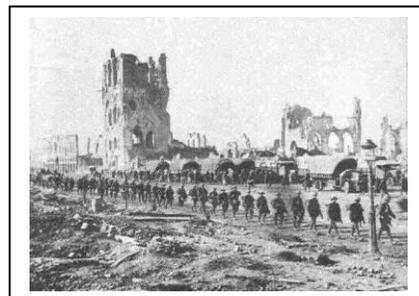


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

**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.*

The *Regimental War Diary* makes no mention of any incoming personnel on July 13 – nor does it for either the 14th or the 15 – likely because re-enforcements arriving would have been kept behind the lines, whereas the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion on those particular days were working forward in the support trenches. Nevertheless, his own records document Private Hamen reporting *to duty* with 1st Battalion on the 13th.

Only two weeks 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.



(Previous page: *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 remained 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*)



A week after the encounter of October 9 at the *Broembeek*, the Newfoundlanders were withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: *Cambrai*. They were ordered back south from Belgium into northern France on October 17 to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of Berles-au-Bois, a small rural community a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of Arras – some even being granted a ten-day furlough back to the United Kingdom.

The so-called *Battle of Cambrai* was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders directly involved at all times during that period.



The battle began well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered and by its close the British had relinquished as much territory as they had gained.

1st Battalion was again dealt with severely, at Marcoing and at Masnières - where a Caribou stands today: of the total of five-hundred fifty-eight officers and men who went into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of the second day.

(Right above: *the Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

By December 1 the Germans had recovered from those early successes of the British offensive and were themselves attacking and recovering much of the ground that had been lost. Masnières and Marcoing saw some desperate fighting as the Newfoundlanders became a part of a fighting retreat. Private Hamen was wounded in the left foot on this December 1 and was evacuated to the 37th Field Ambulance on the same day.



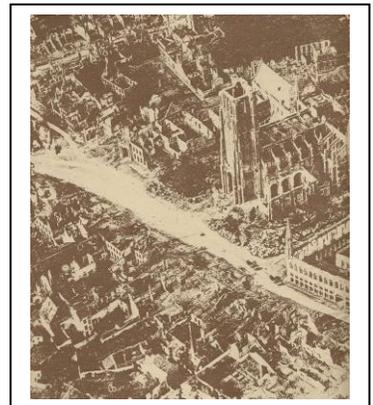
(Right above: *a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)

Still on that same day, he was forwarded to the 55th (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station – perhaps at Tincourt – and on the morrow, on to the 16th General Hospital at Le Tréport – by then being run by the Americans - for further treatment. The injury was likely none too serious as he was released ten days later to Base Details and was reporting back *to duty in the field* to 1st Battalion on December 20.



(Right above: a coastal resort as seen here in peace-time, Le Tréport became an important medical complex during the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

At the close of the *Battle of Cambrai*, 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 were 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 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 returned 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*)

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: 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)



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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, April 10, the day after the first heavy bombardments, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due at the time to come out of the line and move back to *the Somme* to stem the German flow there, boarded buses at three o'clock in the afternoon but then 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 Crêche - 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.



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

On April 13, during the defensive confrontation 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: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving 1st Battalion on April 12 -14, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

What exactly the role was that Private Hamen played is not known - it is 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 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.

On April 24, 1st Battalion said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of 88th Brigade and 29th Division. It would 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 during the crisis of the German spring offensive, to be stationed on the west coast of France. On April 29, the Newfoundlanders took train in Belgium for Étapes, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening – still a two-hour march away from their billets.

Two days later, on the day of 1st Battalion's farewell parade, April 26, Private Hamen was admitted into the 4th Stationary Hospital in the northern French community of Arques, suffering from venereal disease. He remained there for treatment for three weeks, and was then discharged to Base Details at St-Ouen on May 14, before returning to 1st Battalion *in the field* in the company of eleven other *other ranks*, on the very next day: May 15 was a *very hot day* according to the *Regimental War Diary*.

The summer of 1918 was to pass peaceably enough for most of the personnel of 1st Battalion. For the months of May, 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.*

It was only one month after his return, on June 15, that Private Hamen was once more in need of medical treatment. He was admitted into the 56th General Hospital at Étapes with that common complaint, PUO (*Pain of Unknown Origin*), which was soon diagnosed as being due to the ravages of influenza. Eight days later he was discharged *to duty*, only to return to hospital – on this occasion to the 55th General Hospital at Hardelot – suffering from scabies, on July 13. Released *to duty* on July 31, he was back *in the field* on August 1 at Equihen Camp by the sea-side.

Maybe the Germans had decided to welcome him back: there was an air-raid reported by the *War Diary* on that day.

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The posting to Écuire completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders were encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihen – 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 Équihen at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

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 was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today *Ingoogem*).



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

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 a conflict of movement.

**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.*

(Right: *The Newfoundlanders' furthest point of advance was to about this spot on October 25/26 – just outside Inghoyghem - from where they were overlooking the valley of the River Scheldt. That evening they retired from battle – and from the War. – photograph from 2010*)



The son of Benjamin Hamen, fisherman, and Susannah (*Susie*) Hamen – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Mortier Bay then Creston South, Burin, he was also younger brother to Douglas and had a sister living in North Sydney.

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Private Hamen was reported as *missing in action* on October 25, 1918, while serving with 'D' Company in fighting in Belgium near Ingoyghem. It was to be the Battalion's last engagement - and final day - of the War.

Some thirty weeks later, on May 27, 1919, he was officially *presumed dead*.



Richard Joseph Hamen had enlisted at the age of nineteen years and two months.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Courtrai – today Kortrijk – commemorates the crossing of the Lys Canal and honours the sacrifices of this last campaign of the Great War. – photograph from 2012*)

Private Richard Joseph Hamen was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

