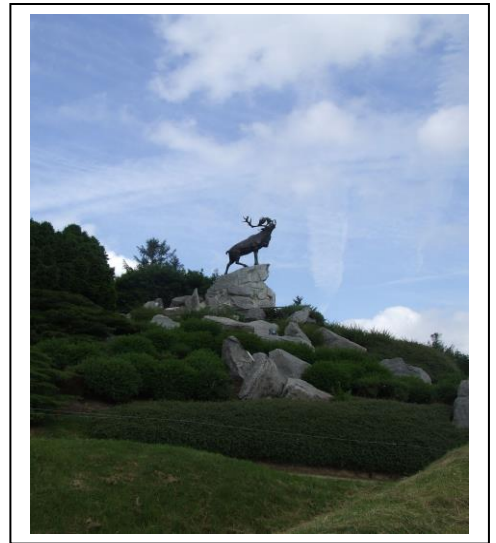


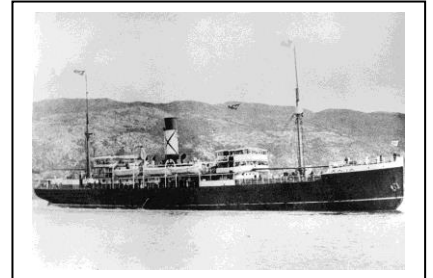


Private Robert Hann (Regimental Number 3915), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Robert Hann was a recruit of the Sixteenth Draft. Presenting himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on July 20, 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 Hann embarked for overseas service on October 3 of 1917. While some records say that his draft travelled from St. John's by train, certain other sources have it to be on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) that the party travelled to Halifax, Nova Scotia, there to take a troop transport\* across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom.



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

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 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 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*)

2<sup>nd</sup> (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.

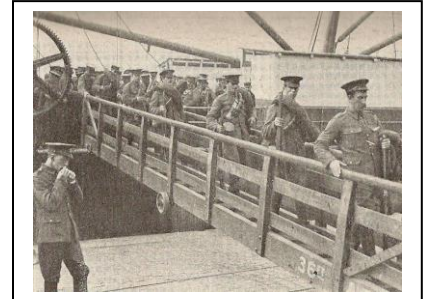


(continued)

This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was from Hazely Down that Private Hann was eventually to be ordered to France to join the British Expeditionary Force.

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

Private Hann was a soldier of the 40<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft of eighty *other ranks* which left Hazely Down on March 27, 1918, en route to the Continent. It disembarked on the 29<sup>th</sup>, 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 organization\* before proceeding to its rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in Belgium.



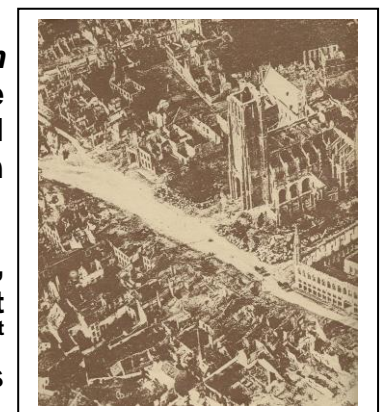
(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

*\*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, 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 Private Hann's records being correct. It was a day on which three of the four Companies of 1<sup>st</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment, near the remnants of the village of Passchendaele. And although he was not to know it, Private Hann 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 above: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

(continued)

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*)

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 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 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.

(continued)

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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

What exact role Private Hann played during this frenetic period is not known - it seems not even to be recorded of which Company he was a soldier- 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.



(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 James Hann, fisherman, and Mary Elizabeth Hann (née *Clarke*) – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Trout River, Bonne Bay, he was also brother to Mary-Elizabeth, Emily, William, Susannah, George-Prible, Charles and Cora-Myrtle\*.

*\*This family data is based mostly upon a single source – some of it confirmed by parish records - which cites Robert Hann's birth-date as about 1888. This is practically impossible unless he were Susannah's twin. Given his declared age at the time of enlistment, he should have been born about 1892 - as a second reference has it (see below).*

Private Hann was reported as *wounded and missing in action* on April 13, 1918, during fighting on the Franco-Belgian border. Some thirty weeks later, he was officially *presumed dead*\*.

Robert Hann had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-six years and four months\*\*.

*\*In fact, three successive telegrams were sent to his family, on May 7, 24 and 28: the first one reported him wounded with hopes expressed for his convalescence; the second declared him as now missing; while the last then then reported him as both wounded and missing. There was, of course, a final one despatched some thirty weeks later.*

(continued)

***\*\*His birth-date being recorded as May 21, 1892 – and baptized June 12, 1892 - he was probably only twenty-five years and two months of age at the time of enlistment.***

**(Right below: *The sacrifice of Private Hann is honoured on the War Memorial in Woody Point. – photograph from 2010*)**

**Statement received from the Rev. G. H. Maidment, Bonne Bay, Nfld. Dated 25/10/18 regarding 3915 PTE. ROBERT HANN (Wounded and Missing 13/4/18)**

**“3915 Pte. Robt. Hann of Trout River in my parish is officially reported “Missing”. Another soldier Pte. Taylor Parsons of the same place, writes to say that he himself took Pte. Hann to the aid post and that he is dead. It would be a great relief to Hann’s parents if you would kindly ascertain the truth from Pte. Taylor Parsons as at present the reports are contradictory...”**

**- Handwritten note on file: *Not substantiated?***

**The photograph of Private Hann is from the Royal Canadian Legion publication *Lest We Forget*.**

**Private Robert Hann was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

