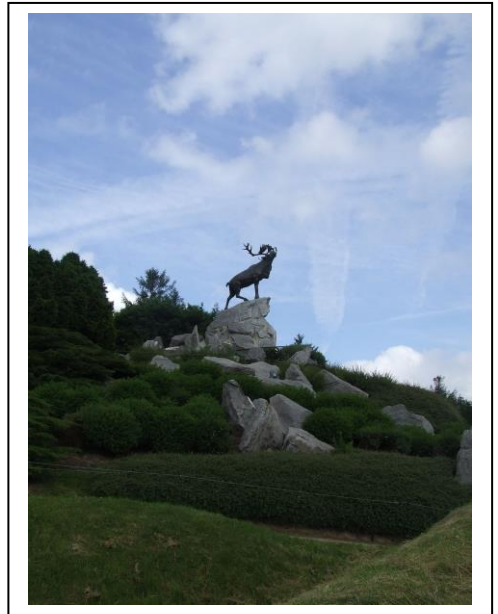


HARDING, E. W.

Private Ernest William Harding (Regimental Number 2949), 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 earning four hundred dollars per annum, Ernest Harding was a recruit of the Tenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road in St. John's on July 10, 1916, he also enlisted – engaged *for the duration of the war* at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 - and attested on the same day.



It was the 28th of August before Private Harding embarked for passage to the United Kingdom and it was on His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian** (right) that he was to make the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom. This was the third such voyage that the ship was to make in 1916, the Newfoundlanders likely sharing the vessel with Canadian personnel**. He sailed as a soldier of 12th Platoon, Section 13, of 'C' Company of 3rd Battalion***.



**Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War.*

***Sicilian had been re-fitted in 1906 to carry just under twelve-hundred passengers, thus her journey to St. John's in March of 1916 was likely followed by the short passage to Halifax to embark Canadian military personnel. Likewise, in July, she had sailed from Montreal on July 16 with Canadians to embark the Newfoundlanders awaiting passage overseas.*

****3rd Battalion was based in St. John's, whereas 2nd (Reserve) Battalion – 'E', 'F', 'G' and 'H' Companies - was stationed in the United Kingdom. 1st Battalion was the edge of the sword – 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies – and was posted to the front.*

Upon arrival in the United Kingdom, the ship docked in the south-coast naval port of Devonport from where the Newfoundlanders entrained for the journey north to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot where each newcomer was delegated to one of the four resident companies - and the where the somewhat confusing title of 'C' Company was abandoned.

(continued)

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were despatched 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-upon-Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been billeted at Newton Park School and either in the grandstand or in a tented camp at the racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr.



(Right above: *the new race-course at Newton-upon-Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photo from 2012*)

The 14th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Harding among that contingent - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on November 30 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front. The contingent disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, December 1, and spent time at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, in final training and organization*, before making its way to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.

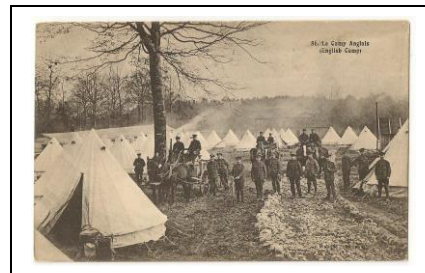


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

**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.*

When that rendezvous was effected it was late in the day of December 11 – which is most likely why it is recorded elsewhere as happening on the 12th. The parent unit had retired from the front on December 8, but many of the men had been seconded for work at Carnoy and Fricourt.

Those spared had marched on to Méricourt l'Abbé which is where the one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Base Depot – Private Harding among that contingent - reported to *duty*.



The newcomers were just in time for the six-week Christmas period to be spent encamped well behind the lines in *Corps Reserve* and near to the city of Amiens.

(Right above: a *British encampment somewhere on the Continent, apparently during the winter season* – from a vintage post-card)

The Newfoundlanders officially returned to active service on January 23 of 1917, although they had already been back in the trenches and had suffered their first casualties – and fatality – of the year. The next five weeks differed little from those of the preceding autumn: in and out of the trenches, the occasional dead, wounded and ill, and the occasional winter's day which did not seem to bother the Newfoundlanders. Anything was better than rain and mud.

The only infantry activity involving 1st Battalion during that entire period from mid-October, 1916 – the costly affair at Gueudecourt - until 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(?))

For the Newfoundlanders, the month of March was a quiet period. Having departed from the trenches, they spent their time near the community of Meauté re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even enjoyed the novelty of a visit from the Regimental Band from Scotland as of March 6, and a second, from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris (right), 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 end in the remnants of a village by the name of Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right: *the rubble of the Grande Place in the city of 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*)

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, almost a century later, 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 David Harding, fisherman, and Phoebe Harding (née *Rose*) – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Little Bay West, Fortune Bay, he was also brother to Richard, John, Frank, Florence, Tryphenia and two other siblings.



Private Harding was reported as *missing in action* on April 14, 1917, while serving with 'D' Company during the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux.

Some thirty weeks later, on November 17, 1917, he was officially presumed dead.

Ernest William Harding had enlisted at the age of twenty years and four months.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the vestiges of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed community. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

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



(continued)

Little Bay West
Via Harber Breton

Dear Sir

As I saw in the Evening Herald of the Graves of the Dear Boys how will I would like to hear of my dear Boy who went april 14 1917 He was in the Missing List we don't know how he went I looks over the papers to see if I can see his name but I cant see his name on no paper how well I would like to hear he has a grave Pte E W Harding No 2949 he is always on my mind not knowing how he went Well Sir I am writing this note if you know any thing about him please write and let me know

I remain yours

this his mother Phoebe Harding

Little Bay via Harber Breton