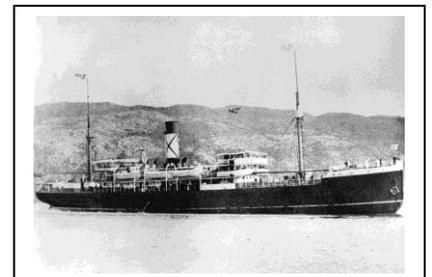




Private William Harnett (Regimental Number 3922) is interred in Dadizeele New British Cemetery – Grave reference VI. E. 1.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a lumberman, William Harnett 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 28, 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 Harnett 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 17th.*

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 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 from Hazely Down that Private Harnett was eventually to be 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 Harnett 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. It 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 organization* 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**)

**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.

(continued)

The Regimental War Diary makes no mention of any re-enforcements arriving either on or about April 4 – but this does not preclude Private Harnett's records 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 Harnett 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.

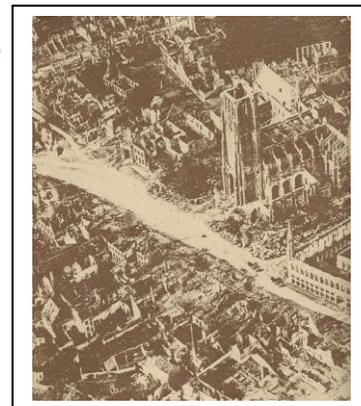
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

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*)

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 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 Harnett played during this frenetic period is not known, excepting the brief entry in the Regimental War Diary (see immediately below) - it is recorded only that he was a soldier of 'C' 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.

The Regimental War Diary entry of April 13 cites *...the remainder of 'C' Coy. under Capt. Paterson, M.C. and Hqrs. took up a position along a light railway line and prepared to fight to a finish. ...there can be no doubt that it was Hqrs., 'A' & 'C' Coys. that by their resistance saved what would have been at least a very serious position for the whole 34th Division*.*

****88th Brigade – therefore 1st Battalion – was seconded from 29th Division to the 34th Division during this critical period.***

(continued)

(Previous 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(?))

Just days after the crisis had passed, on April 24, 1st Battalion officially said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of 88th Brigade and 29th Division and on the morrow participated in a recessional parade attended by the officer commanding 88th Brigade, Brigadier Freyberg. It would later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 1st Battalion was to move a world away from Flanders where it had just fought during the German spring offensive, 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 Étaples, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening. For now, for them, the fighting was a thing of the past.

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.***

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)

(continued)

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 (*Ingooigem*).

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.*



By October 3 the advance on the Newfoundlanders' front had stalled temporarily. At a place called Ledeghem the Germans gave notice that they were far from being a spent force. For five days attempts were made to take the village; on October 6, when 1st Battalion retired to rest, it was still in enemy hands.

The son of Cornelius Harnett (deceased September 20, 1916) and Mary Jane Harnett (née Snow, she later married John Kearley of Campbellton) – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Little Burnt Bay, Notre Dame Bay (and later of Campbellton) he was also brother to at least Fred, Louis, Joseph, Pauline, Reuben, Stewart, Sarah, Mary and to Garfield.

Private Harnett was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 3, 1918, while serving with 'C' Company in fighting near the village of Ledeghem.

Buried in the German Cemetery at Waterdamhoek, to the south-east of Passchendaele, his remains were later transferred to where they repose today.

William Harnett had enlisted at the age of twenty-three years and nine months.



(Right above: *the re-constructed village of Ledeghem, Belgium, almost a century later – photograph from 2010*)

(continued)

(Right: *The sacrifice of Private William J. Harnett is honoured on the War Memorial in Seldom, Fogo Island – photograph from 2013*)



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

