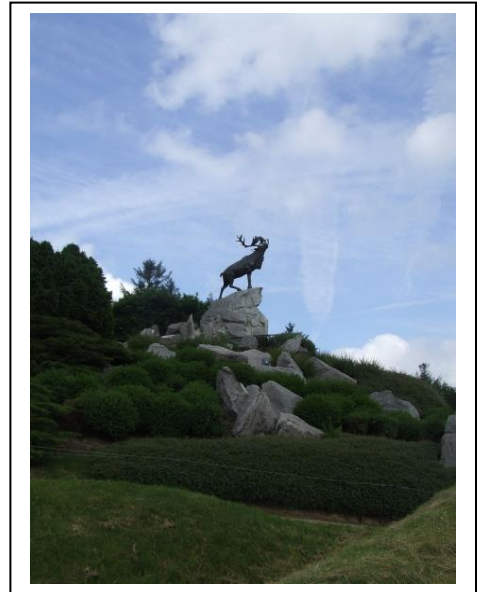




Private Clarence Valentine Harris (Regimental Number 3365), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Clarence Valentine Harris was a recruit of the Eleventh Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on December 29, 1916, he then enlisted – *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attested on that same day.



Private Harris was one of the contingent of one-hundred four *other ranks* to leave St. John's on March 17, St. Patrick's Day of 1917, for the journey to Halifax. The means of their departure, however, is not clear: in one source, *The Fighting Newfoundlander*, the claim is that it was on board the Bowring Brothers vessel *Florizel*; the files of the soldiers themselves record that it was... *Embarked S.S. Train to Halifax 17/3/17...* presumably via Port-aux Basques and thence by ferry and train again to Halifax. Other sources have not proved helpful.

It was from Halifax that the detachment made its trans-Atlantic crossing in the company of Canadian troops on board His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right), sailing from Nova Scotia on March 28. Thus this draft was to reach the United Kingdom two weeks or so before the ill-fated *Windsor Draft** which had left Newfoundland at the end of January, some ten weeks earlier.



**This was the name given to the draft of about three-hundred twenty all ranks which had left St. John's on January 31, 1917, en route to Halifax from where they were to sail to the United Kingdom. This contingent would eventually make that voyage, but about thirteen weeks later than envisaged. They were quarantined at Windsor as the result of a measles and mumps epidemic that claimed two of their number – and maybe a later third. In the meantime, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was running low on man-power.*

Missanabie having docked in Liverpool on April 6, the Newfoundland 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.



(continued)

It was from Ayr – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the newcomers from Newfoundland were to be 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.

(Previous page: 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)

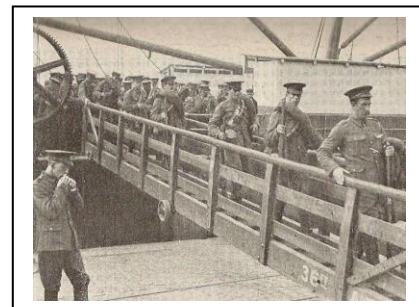
While many of his comrades-in-arms on the voyage were soon to make their way to the Continent, Private Harris was not to quit the United Kingdom until the first day of autumn. He was admitted into Heathfield Hospital, Ayr, on April 27, where he remained until May 26 for treatment for diphtheria.

Although the records are not too clear at this point, he was possibly then accorded the customary ten-day furlough granted to military personnel upon discharge from hospital – if so, the probable dates are May 30 until June 8, with the dates May 27 to 29 spent at some unspecified convalescent post. Once back at the Regimental Depot, he was assigned *light duty* for an unrecorded period.



(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)

Private Harris spent his summer with the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr and then at Barry. It was from Barry* that the 30th Re-enforcement Draft of fifty *other ranks* – Private Harris among that number - proceeded to Southampton where it embarked on September 22. On the next day it disembarked in the Norman capital, Rouen, where time was spent at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, to organize and train** 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)

**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of the city of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

(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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Private Harris joined 1st Battalion *in the field* – not in France but in Belgium - three days after the engagement at the *Broembeek*. By that time the Newfoundlanders had retired to *Swindon Camp* in the area of Poperinghe, and it was there that the ninety-four *other ranks* of Private Harris' detachment reported *to duty in the field* on October 12.

From the end of the month of June, 1st Battalion had been in Belgium, to serve there until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army which was to flounder its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders. By that date it had played its role in the British summer and fall offensive, the *Third Battle of Ypres*, a campaign which came to be known to history simply as... *Passchendaele*.



Notably the Newfoundlanders had fought in two major actions: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9.

It was on the 12th of that month that Private Harris and his contingent arrived.

(Right above: *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 personnel even having been granted at the time a ten-day furlough back to the United Kingdom.

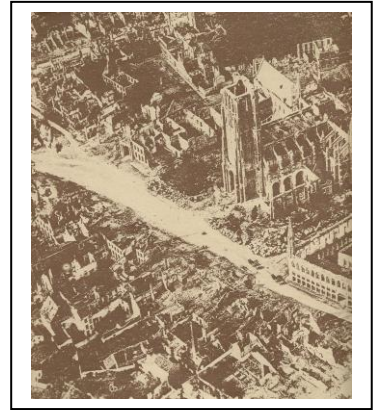
The so-called *Battle of Cambrai* was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders directly involved at all times during that period.

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.



(Above right: *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*)

At the close of the *Battle of Cambrai* at the beginning of December of 1917, 1st Battalion – once again badly under-strength due to the heavy casualties incurred – was 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 were ordered 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*)

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.

(Above 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*)

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: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

(continued)

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*)

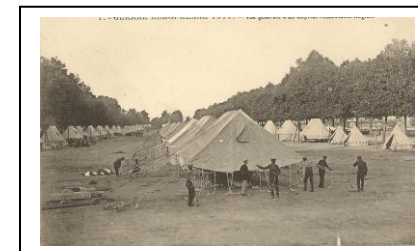
On April 13, during the defensive confrontation near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening - were equally heavily involved.



(Above right: *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(?)*)

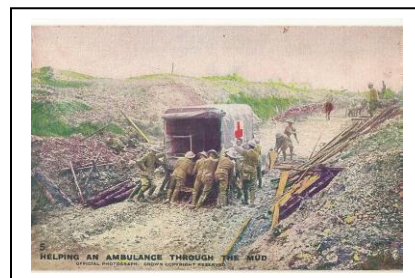
What exact role Private Harris played is not known - it is only recorded that he was a soldier of 'B' Company, and wounded during the fighting - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.

It was at some point during the fighting of April 12-13 – even the Regimental War Diarist finds it difficult keeping the dates straight at this point – that Private Harris was wounded, suffering a bullet wound to an arm. He was evacuated to the 57th Field Ambulance for immediate treatment and, only hours afterwards, was transferred to the 64th Casualty Station at Mendinghem*.



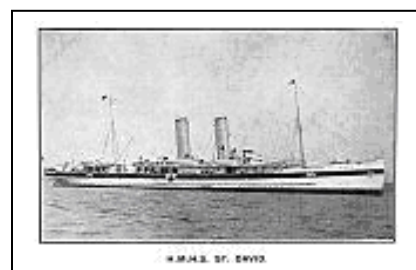
(Preceding page: a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card)

*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)

Private Harris was next forwarded to the 10th General Hospital in Rouen where he was admitted on April 15. There it was decided to invalid him back to the United Kingdom and, on April 18, he accordingly was embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. David* (right) for the journey across the English Channel.



Once having arrived in England he was transported to the 1st London General Hospital in Camberwell, south-east London, where he remained for a week before being sent, on April 25, to Beech House Hospital where he was in convalescence until May 30.

A ten-day furlough once again followed his release from hospital – from May 30 until June 8 – at which time Private Harris was posted to 'H' Company at the new Regimental Centre. 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had by then moved 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 to there that Private Harris reported *to duty* after that period of leave.

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

On August 9, the 50th Re-enforcement Draft from Hazely Down passed through Southampton to embark for France. While his personal file records Private Harris reporting for duty with 1st Battalion on August 19, the only corresponding entry in the *Regimental War Diary* has a draft of thirty-two *other ranks* from Rouen arriving at Equihen Camp on the French west coast two days prior, on the 17th.

(continued)

By that time the summer of 1918 was passing peaceably enough for most of the personnel of 1st Battalion. For the months of May, June and until early July, the unit had been 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.



It was to Équihen that Private Harris reported in the middle of August.

(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 *Ingooigem*).



(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 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.*

The son of Frederick Harris, fisherman, and Mary Harris – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Glovertown, Alexander Bay, he was reported as having been *killed in action* on September 29-30, 1918, while serving with ‘B’ Company during fighting in Belgium to the north of the village of Dadizeele during the *Hundred Days Offensive*.

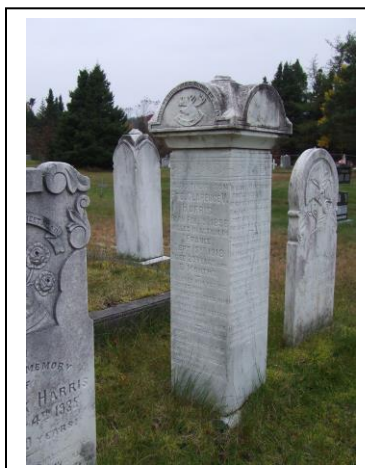


Clarence Valentine Harris had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and ten months.

His brother Eugene, Private E. Harris, Regimental Number 2607, had *died of wounds* on November 30, 1917.

(Right above: *the re-constructed village of Dadizeele (Dadizele) just to the north of which the Newfoundlanders dug in on the evening of September 29, 1918 – photograph from 2013*)

(Far right: *The sacrifice of both Privates Harris is honoured on the War Memorial in the town of Glovertown. – photograph*



from 2013)

(Left above: *a family monument in the United Church Cemetery in Glovertown stands in commemoration of Privates Eugene and Clarence Harris – photograph from 2014*)

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



Private Clarence Valentine Harris was entitled to the British War Medal (centre) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

