

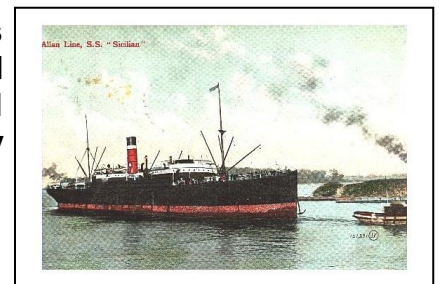


**Private Eugene Harris (Regimental Number 2607) is buried in the Rocquigny-Équancourt Road British Cemetery – Grave reference VI. A. 22.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman earning an annual \$400.00, Eugene Harris was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on April 25, 1916, he then enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on the following day, April 26. He attested on that same April 26.**

**Private Harris sailed from St. John's on July 19 on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right below). The ship - refitted some ten years previously to carry well over one thousand passengers - had left the Canadian port of Montreal on July 16, carrying Canadian military personnel.**

**(continued)**



It is likely that the troops disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool; however, it is *certain* that upon disembarkation the contingent journeyed north by train to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot.

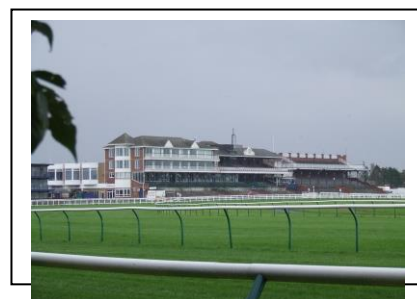
*\*Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport during another conflict, carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War.*

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 the base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)

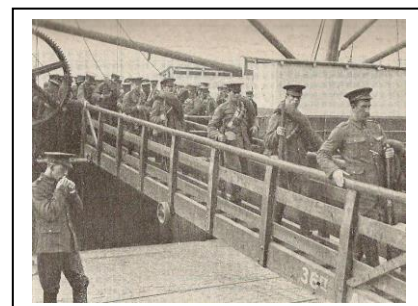
At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been 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 – photograph from 2012*)

The 12<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Harris among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 11 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, October 12, 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



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

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

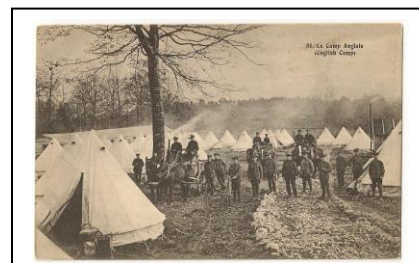
Private Harris's contingent comprised a single officer and two-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* by the time it reported *to duty* at the Bernafay Wood Camp on October 22. Still in the area of Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been relieved in the front line three days before, on the 19<sup>th</sup>.



(Right: *Bernafay Wood a century later – not being close to the front lines, the wood may well have resembled what is seen here – photograph from 2014*)

After the episode of October 12 at Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had remained in the same area of *the Somme* and was regularly into and out of the trenches. There were no infantry engagements, but the incessant artillery action ensured a steady stream of casualties.

The Newfoundlanders would be withdrawn from active service on or about December 12 and were to spend the following six weeks or so encamped well behind the lines and close to the city of Amiens.



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

After that welcome six-week Christmas-time respite away from the front lines, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

The only infantry activity involving 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion during that entire period – from the action in mid-October of 1916 at Gueudecourt, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the 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(?)*)

(continued)

Just days after the action at Sailly-Saillisel, on March 5 at a time when the Newfoundlanders were withdrawing from the front lines, Private Harris was admitted into the 89<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, suffering from tonsillitis. He was discharged from there back *to duty* on the 21<sup>st</sup> of that same month.

(Right: a *British field ambulance* – the one pictured here of a more permanent nature – not so far behind the front line on the Continent – from a vintage post-card)

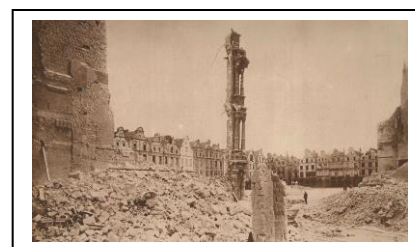


After the efforts at Sailly-Saillisel, the month of March was to be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris (right), the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



It was on March 29 that 1<sup>st</sup> 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, its march to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.

(Right adjacent: *the remnants of the Grande Place in the city of Arras in early 1916* – 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)

1<sup>st</sup> 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 to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 alone.



(Previous page: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community. The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

On April 14 Private Harris was wounded while serving with 'A' Company during the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux. Evacuated to the 87<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance with unspecified injuries, he was almost immediately forwarded on to an unidentified casualty clearing station, thence to the 6<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital at Frévent and, next, onto an ambulance train at some time on April 15.



(Right above: *the railway station at Dannes-Camiers through which thousands of sick, wounded and convalescent military personnel passed during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The ambulance train transported him for further treatment to the 18<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers where he arrived on the same April 15. One week later again, on April 22, Private Harris was taken on board the Belgian hospital ship *Jan Breydel* (right) for the crossing of the English Channel back to the United Kingdom.



Upon arrival in England he was taken to the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth where he remained for treatment and convalescence until June 11.

(Right: *The main building of what became 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital during the Great War was opened, on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010*)



(Above far right: *Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing at 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

On that June 11 Private Harris was discharged from Wandsworth and granted the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom. The records say that he reported to his subsequent posting to 'H' Company at the Regimental Depot in Scotland on the 26<sup>th</sup> – although it was more likely to have been on the 20<sup>th</sup>.



(continued)

(Previous page: *the High Street in Ayr, dominated then as it still is today by the imposing Wallace Tower, as shown on a postcard of the time sent home by a Newfoundland soldier – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo*)

On July 22 the 27<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Barry\* – Private Harris one of its number – passed through Southampton and sailed to Rouen where it arrived on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Once again spending inevitable time in final preparation at the Base Depot there, the detachment eventually joined 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on August 28 – although his files say the 29<sup>th</sup>.

*\*During the summer months of 1917, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region 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.*

Private Harris was one of the two drafts totalling one-hundred sixty-six personnel which arrived at Penton Camp, on the outskirts of Poperinghe, on August 28. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had quit the line on the 24<sup>th</sup> and was not to return to the front for an entire month. This period, a planned lull in the fighting, was to allow the entire British Army time to reorganize and re-enforce.

*Passchendaele* recommenced for the Newfoundlanders in the front line on September 25, although they had suffered four wounded two days prior to that due to long-range artillery fire. In their trenches they prepared for the next offensive action. It came about two weeks later at the *Broembeek*.

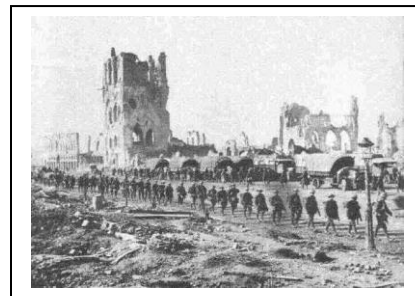
Two months prior to the return of Private Harris to the parent unit, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been once again ordered north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again to the area of *the Ypres Salient*. This had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of 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.

(Right: *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*)

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to remain 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.

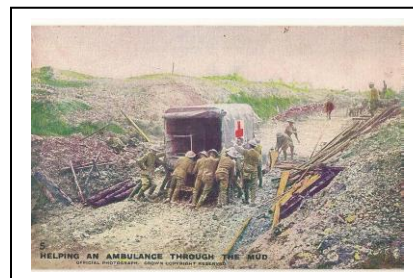
The so-called *Battle of Cambrai* was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders directly involved at all times during that period.

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. 1<sup>st</sup> 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.



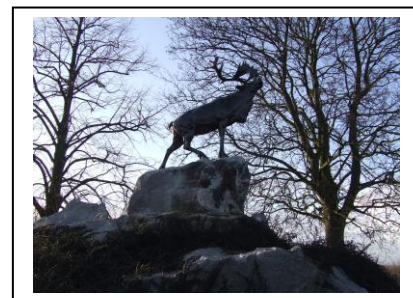
(Above right: *the Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

On November 30, Private Harris was reported as having been wounded and evacuated from the field to the 89<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance. He had incurred injuries inflicted by shell-fire to the back and shoulder while serving with 'A' Company in attempting to stem the heavy German counter-attacks.



(Right: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and manpower – from a vintage post-card*)

The son of Frederick (Fred) Harris and Mary Harris – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Glovertown, he was reported as having *died of wounds* on that same November 30, 1917, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Ytres. At home, it was the Reverend Herbert Moores of Glovertown who was requested to bear the news to his family.



(Right above: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on November 20; however, whether this was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012*)

(continued)

Eugene Harris had enlisted at the age of twenty years and three months.

His brother Private Clarence Valentine Harris (Regimental Number 3365) was later to be *killed in action* in Belgium on September 30, 1918.

(Far right: *The sacrifice of both Harris brothers is honoured on the War Memorial in the town of Glovertown. – photograph from 2013*)

(*The photograph of Private Harris is from the Provincial Archives.*)

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

