

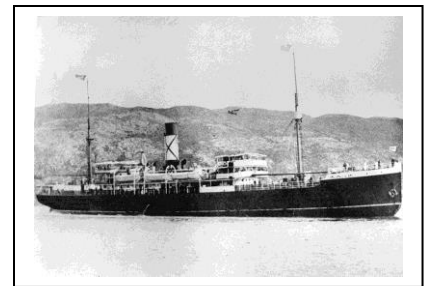


Private John William Hart (Regimental Number 3550), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service that of a fisherman, John Hart was a recruit of the Thirteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on March 19, 1917, he then enlisted – *for the duration of the war* at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on that same day.



It was on April 7 of 1917, that Private Hart boarded either the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) for Halifax, or a train\* in St. John's for the cross-island journey to Port aux Basques from where a ferry and another train would have transported Private Hart and his co-travellers to Halifax – the files are contradictory. Apparently it had been hoped that the fifty personnel of this draft would be joining the *Windsor Draft*\*\* on April 16 or 17 when it was to board one of the three transports awaiting in Halifax harbour and sail to the United Kingdom.



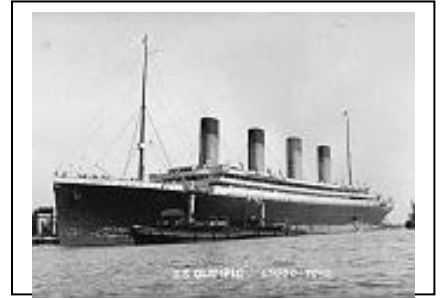
*\*The records of Private Hart and also those of other personnel cite... 'Embarked St. John's S.S. Train to Halifax 7/4/17' ...while other sources hint that the passage to Nova Scotia may have been by ship: nevertheless, a personal memo of a Private Yetman mentions the Florizel.*

*\*\*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, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was running low on man-power.*

Having avoided sickness up until that point during that winter's measles and mumps epidemic – it had been rife in Newfoundland as well - it was then on April 14 that Private Hart was admitted into the Station (Garrison) Hospital (Halifax?) where he remained until the 27<sup>th</sup> to be treated... for a case of influenza.

He was discharged in time to take ship with his comrades-in-arms with whom he had travelled to Halifax some three weeks previously.

The original plan for this contingent to depart Halifax as part of the convoy of April 18 was not to be however, for whatever the reason – perhaps lack of space as the ships were carrying Canadian re-enforcements overseas - and it was not until the final day\* of the month that this small contingent – Private Hart once again one of its number - finally sailed from Halifax. They may, in fact, have embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* (right) – sister-ship of *Titanic* – which sailed at that time from Halifax with Canadian troops to the United Kingdom.



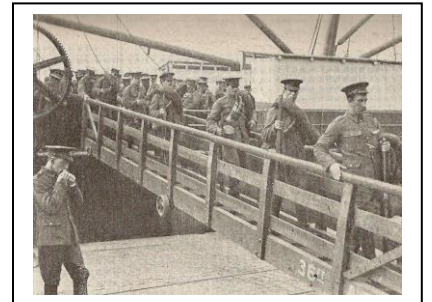
*\*If it were on Olympic that the contingent embarked – she appears to have been the only ship sailing on or about that time - then the Newfoundlanders sailed from Halifax on April 29 to arrive in Liverpool on May 7.*

Having arrived 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 some two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were being 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-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*)

On June 11, the 25<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Private Hart among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to the Continent. The detachment disembarked in Rouen on the following day, the 12<sup>th</sup>, and made its way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot there for a few days of final training and organizing\* before proceeding on its way to a rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



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

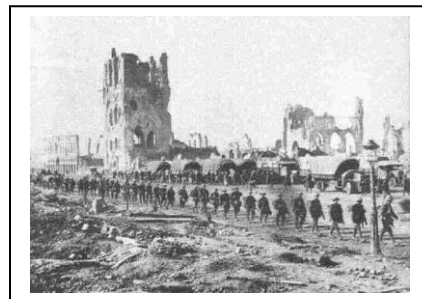
*\*Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

(continued)

The records show that it was on July 2 – the *Regimental War Diary* says, in fact, on the day before - that Private Hart's contingent of two-hundred fifty *other ranks* reported to duty at Caribou Camp, behind the lines near Woesten in Belgium. For the next few days – and nights – 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion supplied working parties for road-mending and for the construction of infantry tracks. For that purpose, several of the Newfoundlanders were attached temporarily until July 20 to the 173<sup>rd</sup> Company of the Royal Engineers.

Only days before, at the end of June, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had once again moved north into Belgium and once again to the area of Ypres.

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*)

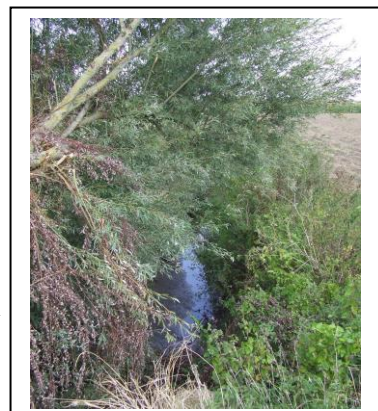
1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army which floundered its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders. Notably it fought in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



(Right: *an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

The son of Henry Hart, fisherman, and Margaret Hart (née *Ford*) – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Island Harbour in the District of Fogo, he was also brother to Arthur, to Ambrose, to Kate, Henry-Jacob, Sarah-Jane and to Louisa.

Private Hart was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 9, 1917, while serving with 'B' Company in the fighting at the *Broembeek*. At home, it was the Reverend J. O. Britnell of Fogo who was requested to bear the news to his family.



John William Hart had enlisted at the *declared age* of twenty-five years and six months (however, date of birth according to parish records: March 24, 1890).

(Right: *The Broembeek, usually a placid, meandering country stream, had burst its banks in the fall on 1917, transforming its surrounds into a quagmire. – photograph from 2010*)

(continued)

**(Right: *The War Memorial in Fogo honours the sacrifice of Private Hart.* – photograph from 2013)**



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

