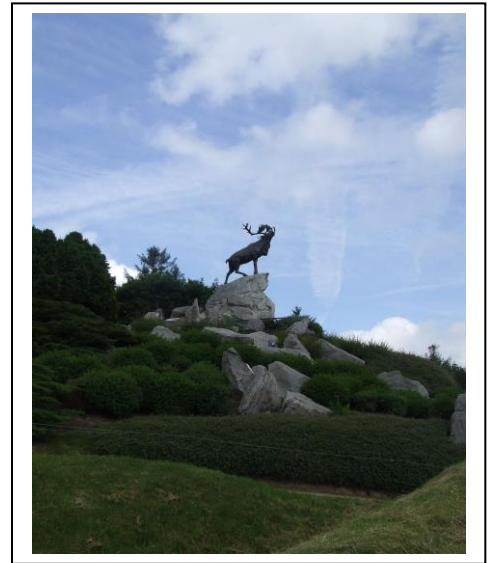




Corporal Henry Thomas Hatcher (Regimental Number 2705), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service that of a fisherman earning an annual \$300.00, Henry Thomas Hatcher was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on May 3 of 1916, he also enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on that same May 3, before attesting three days afterwards, on May 6.



Private Hatcher sailed from St. John's on July 19 on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right). 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.



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.*

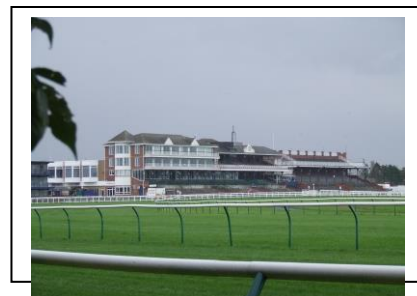
The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as the base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving 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-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*)

(continued)

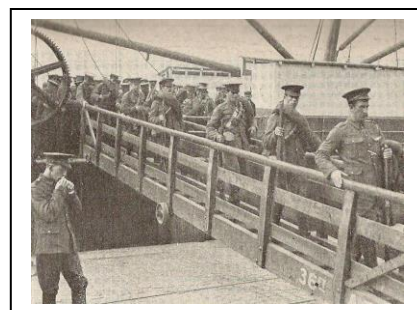
At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been 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 11<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Hatcher among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 3 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 4, 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*)

*\*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.*

The contingent with which Private Hatcher reported *for duty in the field* was a large detachment of two-hundred sixty-six *other ranks* which arrived from Rouen at the Battalion transport lines on October 12. This was also the day on which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion made its attack on the enemy positions at Gueudecourt, again sustaining heavy casualties – two-hundred thirty-nine all told - and gaining little.

Thus it was that the new-comers remained behind the lines until the 14<sup>th</sup>, two days later, when they were moved up to *Switch Trench* and parcelled out to the Battalion's four depleted fighting companies. Consequently, the date of their arrival is often recorded not as October 12 but as October 14.

(Right: *This is the ground over which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. This is also the area of the positions into which the re-enforcements of October 12-14 were posted. – photograph from 2007*)



For the remainder of that autumn of 1916, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 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.



(Above right: *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(?))

After the infantry affair at Sailly-Saillisel, the month of March was a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now 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.



On March 29, 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, on to the village of Monchy-le-Preux.



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

(continued)

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.

(Above right: *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.

(Right above: *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*)

It was during this short but difficult period of some ten days that Private Hatcher received a first promotion, to the rank of lance corporal, on April 16.

The Newfoundlanders' final engagement during the *Battle of Arras* took place at *Les Fosses Farm*, on the main road between Arras and Cambrai. There were numerous casualties of which many, as ever, were the result of artillery fire. On the following day, April 24, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was withdrawn from the *Battle* and marched again towards Arras.

(Right above: *Windmill Cemetery stands about mid-way between Monchy-le-Preux – about three hundred metres behind the photographer – and Les Fosses Farm – three hundred metres to the right along the main road to Arras. – photograph from 2007*)

(Right: *Newfoundland troops just after the time of Monchy-le-Preux – from *The War Illustrated**)

(continued)



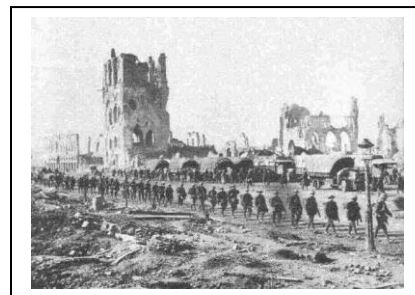
In contrast to the hard fighting at Monchy-le-Preux in April, May of 1917 was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders were ordered hither and thither on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches. Apart from the ever-present artillery, however, there was little infantry activity – except for the marching.

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville in early May of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)



At the beginning of June, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion retired from the line to Bonneville and spent its time re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

The Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were 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 above: *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 remained 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.

Lance Corporal Hatcher was to serve at only the former.

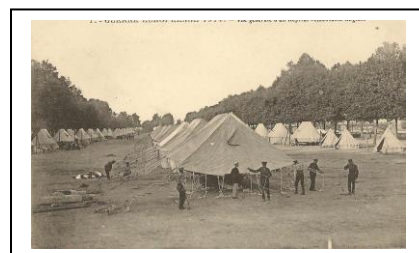
(Right above: *an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the *Passchendaele* battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from *Illustration**)



On August 22 – a second source has the 23<sup>rd</sup> - only a week after 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's efforts at the *Steenbeek*, Lance Corporal Hatcher was wounded, a victim of *friendly fire*: ...*The above-named was lying in the bottom of the trench when 2538, J. Rockwood, while cleaning his rifle, accidentally fired a shot which hit him* (from *Report on Accidental or Self-Inflicted Injuries*).

Lance Corporal Hatcher was evacuated to the 61<sup>st</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Lozinghem\* on the same day and, three days afterwards, on August 25, was forwarded to the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers.

(continued)



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



Five days later again he was placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. Denis* (right) for the cross-Channel journey back to the United Kingdom.

Once having been disembarked in England, he was transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth where he was admitted on August 31 for treatment to those gun-shot wounds to the lumbar region.

(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)



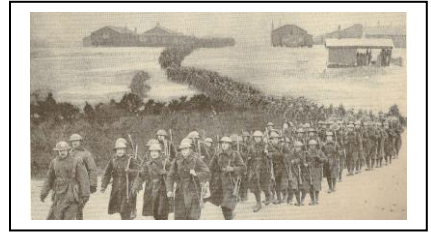
(Above far right: Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing at the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

Lance Corporal Hatcher remained at Wandsworth for the month of September and the first three weeks of October. He was then granted the customary ten-week furlough which was allowed military personnel upon discharge from hospital, on October 22. Posted immediately after that furlough to the Regimental Depot in Scotland, he remained attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion until February of 1918.



(Right above: 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)

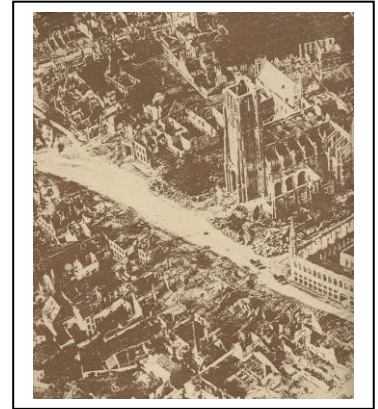
During this period, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion moved quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was there that Lance Corporal Hatcher would have been at the beginning of February when he was ordered to re-join the British Expeditionary Force.



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

On February 3-4, the 36<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Hazely - Lance Corporal Hatcher one of its non-commissioned officers - passed through Southampton and Rouen en route to a rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. On February 15 he, one of a draft of one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Rouen, reported to duty with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at Steenvoorde on the Franco-Belgian border.

At the beginning of the previous December, at the close of the *Battle of Cambrai*, 1<sup>st</sup> 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.



A month later, 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion returned to Belgium, to the Ypres Salient, for a third occasion.

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*)

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.

(continued)

It was during the month of March, on the 9<sup>th</sup> at a period when 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was in and about the front line to the north-east of Ypres, that Lance Corporal Hatcher received a second promotion, to the rank of corporal.

(Previous page: *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 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 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.



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.



(Right above: *ground just to the east of Bailleul where 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)



(Preceding page bottom: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 12 -14, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

What Corporal Hatcher's exact role was during this period of turmoil is not to be found among his documents. All that is known is that he was a non-commissioned officer of 'C' Company (see paragraph below). But that this was a critical period of some two weeks with the outcome of the war in the balance, there can be no doubt. Yet somehow the German advance was stemmed and the front eventually made stable.

The Regimental War Diary 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 34<sup>th</sup> Division\**.

*\*At the time, 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade – and thus 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - had been temporarily seconded from 29<sup>th</sup> Division to 34<sup>th</sup> Division.*

The son of George Hatcher, fisherman, and Amelia Hatcher (née *Galliot*) of Rose Blanche in the District of Burgeo and La Poile, he was he was also brother to Charles, Elizabeth, William, Anne-Marie-Hannah, John, Amelia, Israel - to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - to Abraham, to Georgina-Edna and to George.

Corporal Hatcher was reported as *missing in action* on April 13, 1918, while serving with 'C' Company during fighting near the Belgian border town of Neuve-Église, during *Georgette*, the German spring offensive. Some thirty weeks later, on November 9, he was officially *presumed dead*.

Henry Thomas Hatcher had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-nine years and one month. (The *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* records his death at thirty-seven years of age; Ancestry.ca documents his birthday as being March 10, 1885.)

Corporal Henry Thomas Hatcher was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

