

Private Mortimer Leopold Hawker (Regimental Number 2292) is interred in St. James' Anglican Church Cemetery in Carbonear.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a *scholar* having just completed his schooling, and now awaiting employment as a clerk expectant of earning an annual two hundred dollars, Mortimer Leopold Hawker was a volunteer of the Ninth Recruitment Draft. He presented himself for medical examination - at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury** in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on March 24 of 1916. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service.*

****The building was to serve as the Regimental Headquarters in Newfoundland for the duration of the conflict.***

It was on the day of that medical assessment, March 24, while at the same venue, that Mortimer Leopold Hawker would enlist. He was thus engaged...*for the duration of the war**...at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was to be appended a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

****At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.***

Only a few more hours were now to follow before there subsequently came to pass, on this occasion still at the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On the same twenty-fourth day of that month of March he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, Mortimer Leopold Hawker became...*a soldier of the King.*

Private Hawker, Number 2292, would not sail to the United Kingdom until the lengthy period of seventeen weeks less two days had then elapsed. In fact ten days of this period, from March 28 until April 6 (*inclusive*) was granted to him as home leave to spend time at the family residence in the Conception Bay community of Carbonear. It is likely that subsequent to his return to St. John's that he was to be quartered in temporary barracks and to undergo training in the capital city*.

****A number of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the capital city, or those who had no friends or family to offer them board and lodging, were to be quartered in the curling rink in the area of Fort William in St. John's, a building which was at the time to serve as barracks.***

It was to be the vessel *SS Sicilian* which would carry Private Hawker and his draft overseas. Apparently it was a detachment two-companies strong, thus five-hundred Regimental personnel, that sailed from St. John's on July 19, 1916, in the company of a contingent of Newfoundland Royal Naval Reservists and some three-hundred civilian passengers since the vessel was on a scheduled commercial route from Canada to the United Kingdom.



(Right above: *Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when 'Sicilian' was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War. During the Great War she was apparently requisitioned as a troopship on only one occasion: in October of 1914 she was a vessel of the armada which transported the (1st) Canadian Division overseas to the United Kingdom. She otherwise continued to work commercially between Great Britain and Canada for her owners, the Allan Line and later Canadian Pacific, at times carrying soldiery if and when her schedule allowed.*

She was to carry Newfoundland military personnel eastwards across the Atlantic on three occasions, all in the year 1916.

Upon the arrival of *Sicilian* in British waters, the ship proceeded to the south-coast Royal Naval port of Devonport where the first contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment had landed with the (1st) Canadian Division in October of 1914. Having arrived in port during the last days of July, from there the reservists left for naval barracks, and Private Hawker and his comrades-in-arms now boarded a train for the journey north to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot.



(Right above: A no-longer bustling Devonport Harbour, today bereft of its former importance – photograph from 2012)

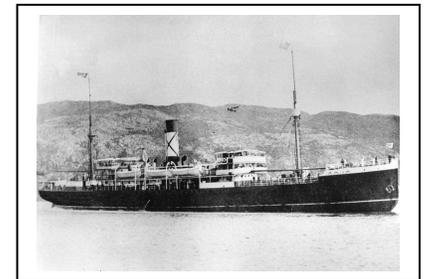
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Some two years prior to *Sicilian's* arrival in England, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's *first* recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and were formed into 'A' and 'B' Companies.

During that same period the various authorities in both Newfoundland and the United Kingdom had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

(Right: The image of 'Florizel' at anchor in the harbour at St. John's is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.)

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after a recruit's enlistment and/ or attestation. To become known to history as the *First Five Hundred* and also as the *Blue Puttees*, on that day they had boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.



The ship had sailed for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

(Right: Fort George, constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, still serves the British Army to this day. – photograph from 2011)

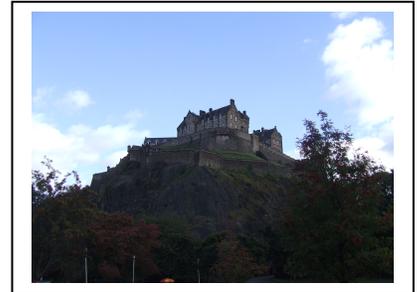


Once having disembarked* in the United Kingdom this first Newfoundland contingent was to train in three venues during the late autumn of 1914 and then the winter of 1914-1915: firstly in southern England on the *Salisbury Plain*; then in Scotland at *Fort George* – on the *Moray Firth* close to Inverness; and lastly at *Edinburgh Castle* – where it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.

Only days after 'A' and 'B' Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, 'C' Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of 'D' Company to arrive – they via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty*...at Edinburgh, and then 'E' Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4*.

**These five Companies, while a contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

(Right: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011*)



Seven days after the arrival of 'E' Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent had been ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit had been dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, all under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.

(Right: *The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915. – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and of Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



Two months less a day later, on July 10, 'F' Company would march into *Stobs Camp*.

This had been an important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength* of a battalion which could be posted on...*active service*.



**A number sufficient for four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.*

(Right above: *The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles. – original photograph from the Provincial Archives*)

From *Stobs Camp*, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the four senior Companies, having now become the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, had been transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before the Battalion's departure to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



The later arrivals to the United Kingdom, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were eventually to form the nucleus of the soon-to-be-formed 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.



(Preceding page: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India* – the photograph is from *Bain News Services* via the *Wikipedia* web-site.)

(Right above: *An aerial view of Ayr, likely from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr, where were quartered the 'other ranks', is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right.* – by courtesy of the *Carnegie Library* at Ayr)



(Right: *The High Street in Ayr as shown on a postcard of the time, the imposing Wallace Tower – it stands to this day (2017) - dominating the scene* – by courtesy of Reverend *Wilson Tibbo* and Mrs *Lillian Tibbo*.)

Ayr was a small town on the west coast of Scotland whose history precedes the year 1205 when it was established as a Royal Burgh (Borough) by the crown of Scotland, an appointment which emphasized the importance of the town as a harbour, market and, later, administrative centre. By the time of the Great War centuries later it was expanding and the River Ayr which had once marked the northern boundary of the place was now flowing through its centre; a new town to the north (Newton-on-Ayr), its population fast-increasing, perhaps encouraged by the coming of the railway, was soon to be housing the majority of the personnel of the Newfoundland Regimental Depot.

That November 15 of 1915 was to see not only the departure of the 1st Re-enforcement Draft to the Middle East and to the *Gallipoli Campaign* but also, only five days prior, the arrival from home of 'G' Company which would take up its quarters at *Gailes Camp*, some sixteen kilometres up the coast from Ayr itself – but over sixty if one went by road.

A further seven weeks plus a day were now to pass before the first one-hundred personnel of 'H' Company, having sailed in mid-December as recorded in an earlier paragraph, were to present themselves at the Regimental Depot on January 4, some of them to be affected, even fatally, by an ongoing measles epidemic of the time.

After that there was then to be an interlude of three months plus several days before the second detachment of 'H' Company reported on April 9, 1916, to the Regimental Depot.

Note: Until as late as the spring of 1916 it had been the intention to form a 2nd Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment to fight on the Continent. In fact it would seem that the last-mentioned contingent of one-hundred sixty-three recruits was to form the nucleus of that unit, while the personnel already at the Depot by this time would form a reserve battalion to serve as a re-enforcement pool for both the fighting units.

It could not have been long before a change of plan came about as very soon men of that contingent (the second half of 'H' Company) were being sent to strengthen the 1st Newfoundland Battalion already on the Continent – maybe Beaumont-Hamel had something to do with it.

Then towards mid-summer, of course, and as seen above, it was the turn of Private Hawker and his detachment to report to the Regimental Depot in Scotland.

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(Right: Wellington Square (see following paragraph) seen here almost a century after it hosted the officers of the Newfoundland Regiment – photograph from 2012)



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 eventually serve as the base for the 2nd (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 the 1st Battalion.



(Right: 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)

At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to be able to accommodate the number of new arrivals – plus men from other British regiments which were still being billeted in the area...and a measles epidemic which was to claim the life of several Regiment personnel – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in the town-centre of Ayr itself, and the *other ranks* had been billeted at Newton Park School and otherwise in the grandstand or a tented camp at the newly-built racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr – on the far side of the river.

There seem to be no further records of Private Hawker's activities in Scotland until January 29 of the New Year, 1917. On that date he was admitted into the 3rd Scottish General Hospital in Glasgow complaining of a sprained wrist. The problem had occurred the previous October during a signalling exercise, but apparently the subsequent treatment of massage and iodine had proved to be of no avail and he thus reported sick once more.

After another period of treatment in hospital, the proceedings to show few or no results at all, on or about the 24th day of that month of March Private Hawker had both of his wrists x-rayed, the four plates showing...*degeneration very marked of all the bones in left*. It was eventually determined that the problem was tuberculosis. On June 3, his hand was amputated above the wrist.

Some eight months later, on November 14, Private Hawker was fitted with an artificial limb at St. Leonard's Hospital at Dumfermline. Some five weeks later again he was discharged from hospital and ordered to report to the Newfoundland *Pay & Record Office* on Victoria Street, London.

Apparently, from there he was sent north again, to face a medical board on January 25 at the Edinburgh War Hospital. There it was decided that Private Hawker was...*no longer physically fit for War Service*. It was thereupon recommended that he be discharged from the Army.

During the some four weeks that followed, Private Hawker was granted an extended furlough in the English coastal town of Bournemouth where his address was *Kingsbere* on Myrick Park Crescent, to where his orders for repatriation were sent. The records show his stay there to have eventually terminated at ten o'clock in the morning of February 19 at which point he began his long journey homewards, having been ordered to report to the *Pay & Record Office* in London on that date.

The 57th Repatriation Draft embarked in Liverpool on or about February 25 of 1918. The name of the vessel seems not to have been recorded - several sailed on or about that date - nor its destination although she was likely bound for Halifax - most of the returning troops on board would have been Canadian - the vessel did not stop in Newfoundland - and the majority of the sailings of that time were destined for that port.

It was nevertheless apparently not until March 25 – perhaps somewhat later than might be expected and perhaps due to the reported emaciated condition in which he arrived after his trans-Atlantic passage - that Private Hawker arrived in St. John's and reported to the local Regimental Headquarters...*to duty*.

Only three days later again, on March 28, it was recommended that he be treated at the *Jensen Camp*, a newly-established centre for tubercular patients on Blackmarsh Road on the outskirts of the capital. He was admitted there on April 9.

The son of Manoah James Hawker, general agent, and Clara Mortimer Hawker – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Carbonear, he was also brother to Walter-Charles* as well as to Frederick, to Ernest and to Beatrice.

Private Hawker was reported to have...*died of sickness*...official cause tuberculosis, at the *Jensen Camp* on April 29, 1918.

Mortimer Leopold Hawker had enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years and eight months (date of birth July 22, 1897, from a copy of the Newfoundland Vital Statistics).

(continued)



(Preceding page: *The sacrifice of Private Hawker is honoured on the Carbonear Cenotaph.* – photograph from 2010)

His remains were prepared on or about June 26, 1918, to be buried in his home town. The Commonwealth War Grave headstone for his grave was eventually sent to Carbonear in June of 1923).



Private Mortimer Leopold Hawker was entitled to the British War Medal (seen on the preceding page) for his overseas service.

(Right above: *This photograph of the two oldest Hawker brothers is from a Carbonear Museum web-site ‘A Mother’s War’. Mortimer Leopold Hawker aged about sixteen years is seen to the left and his brother Walter Charles (see below), a year older, is to the right.*)

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****2nd Lieutenant Walter Charles Hawker, Regimental Number 1843, had enlisted on September 22 of 1915 and, having travelled via Quebec, had boarded ‘Corsican’ for passage to the United Kingdom – in the company of Canadian troops – to land in England on November 9 and to have travelled northward to Ayr on the morrow.***

It was to be on August 24 of the following year that he had been dispatched to report to join the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment on the Continent by which time he had been promoted on three occasions and held the rank of sergeant.

Wounded on the final day of that November, within a week he had been invalided back to England and to the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth.

After discharge from hospital and the subsequent furlough in May of 1917, he was ordered to Ayr, to remain attached to the Regimental Depot both there and at Barry during that summer, and also when the Depot and the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion were more permanently transferred to Hazely Down Camp in the southern English county of Hampshire at the end of January of 1918.

In May of that year he was attached to an officer cadet battalion but it was not to be until after the Armistice, on November 27, that he received his commission, became 2nd Lieutenant Hawker and was posted back to Hazely Down Camp.

On May 22 of 1919 he began the journey back to Newfoundland for demobilization and arrived in St. John’s on June 1, some nine days later. He left the Army on June 17, 1919.

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The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 31, 2023.