



Private John Joseph Healey (Regimental Number 2748), 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 an express (train?) driver earning a monthly(?) \$25.00, John Joseph Healey 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 10, 1916, he then enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – five days later, on May 15, also attesting on the same day.

Private Healey 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.

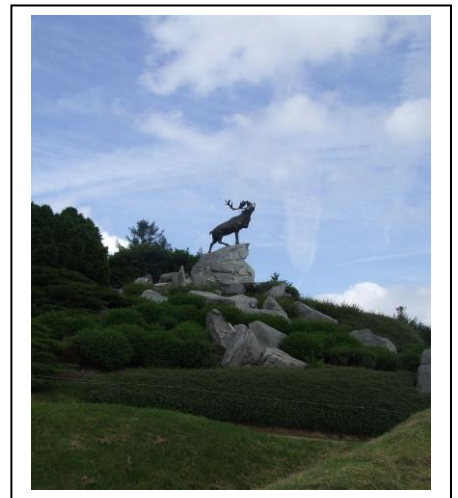
It is likely that the troops disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool; however, it is *certain* that upon disembarkation the contingent journeyed north by train to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot.

**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 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 1st 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*)

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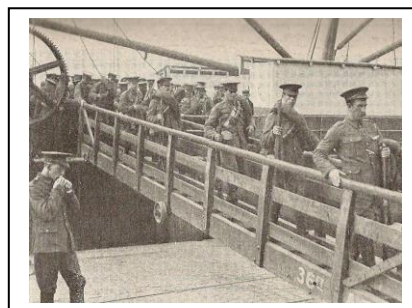


At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been 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 14th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Healey among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on November 30 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front. It disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, December 1, 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 1st Battalion.



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

When that rendezvous was effected it was late in the day of December 11 – which is likely why it is recorded in the Regimental War Diary as occurring on the 12th. The parent unit had retired from the front on December 8, but many of the men had been seconded for work at Carnoy and Fricourt.

Those spared had marched on to Méricourt l'Abbé which is where the one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Base Depot – Private Healey among that number - reported to duty. The newcomers were just in time for the six-week Christmas period to be spent well behind the lines in *Corps Reserve*, encamped near the city of Amiens.



(Right: *a typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card*)

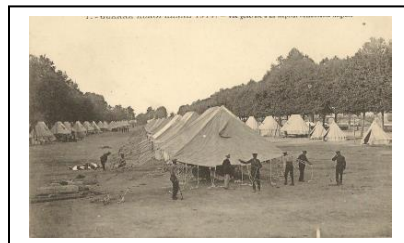
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After that Christmas respite, 1st Battalion *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23 of the New Year, 1917, although they had already been back in the trenches for several days and had suffered their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

The next five weeks were little different: in and out of the trenches, the occasional dead, wounded and ill, and the occasional cold winter's day with its snow and ice - which did not seem to bother the Newfoundlanders. Anything was perhaps better than rain and mud.

1st Battalion relieved the 1st Battalion, The Border Regiment, in the front line trenches on January 29, but it was undertaken without the aid of Private Healey.

On that day he was admitted into the 34th Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown just west of Albert, suffering from trench-foot. Forwarded to the 9th General Hospital in Rouen on February 5, he was discharged *to duty* at the Base Depot on February 21. He was to remain there for well over a month.



(Right above: a *British casualty clearing station* – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when necessary – being established somewhere on the Continent – from a vintage post-card)

Private Healey was reported as having returned to join 1st Battalion on March 31 - although it was more likely on the day before as one of a contingent of five officers and thirty-two *other ranks* who reported for duty from Rouen at the village of Vignacourt where the Newfoundlanders had been billeted since only the day before, involved in training for the upcoming spring campaign.



(Right above: *Vignacourt at the time of the Great War* – courtesy of the *Australian War Memorial* archives)

Just two days prior to this, on March 29, 1st Battalion had begun to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois towards the north-east and towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond. On March 31, the day that Private Healey reported *to duty*, the unit spent the day in training at Vignacourt. On the morrow, April 1, the Newfoundlanders were on the march again.



Some two weeks later they would enter into the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.

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

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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)

1st 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 of the place, to the east, away from the camera.* – photograph from 2013)

The son of Michael Healey, labourer with *Bowring Brothers*, and Lavinia Healey – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of 48, Cookstown Road in St John's, he was reported as *missing in action* on April 14, 1917, in the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux.



Some thirty weeks later, on November 17, he was officially *presumed dead**.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the vestiges of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed community.* – photograph from 2009(?))

*During November of 1917 a report arrived in London from the Frankfurt Red Cross that suggested Private Healey to be a prisoner-of-war. A subsequent memo, however, confirmed this to be a case of mistaken identity and that in fact... *2748 Pte. J.J. Healey was posted as Missing on 14/4/17 and no news has been heard of him since.*

John Joseph Healey had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and nine months*.

*There is an entry in the *St. John the Baptist* Roman Catholic Basilica records of a John Healey, born August 18 of 1897, to Michael and Emma Healey of Cookstown.

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

