

Private Leo Francis Jesso (Regimental Number 1812) is interred in Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Cemetery in St. John's, in the Naval and Military Plot.

His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of *labourer* and *fisherman* working for a monthly forty dollars with the *Gordon Pew Fish Company* of Wood's Island, Leo Francis Jesso enlisted at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on September 4, 1915 (another source has September 2, another 7\*) and was thereupon engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was then added a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

It was then to be three days later at the same venue, the CLB Armoury on Harvey Road, that there came the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On September 7\*\*\* he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, at which moment Leo Francis Jesso thereupon became...*a soldier of the King*.

***\*The majority of papers cite September 4, but of course, they might be simply copies of an original mistake.***

***\*\*There is no record of a medical assessment undergone at the time of enlistment although such a procedure was surely mandatory prior to service with the Regiment.***

***\*\*\*There is some confusion with the date here as well as September 4, the day of his enlistment, is also suggested to also have been that of his attestation.***

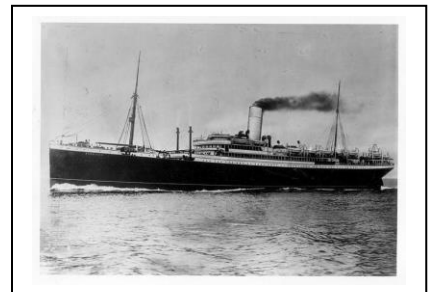
A further, and lengthier, waiting-period was now in store for the recruits of this draft, designated as 'G' Company, before they were to depart from Newfoundland for...overseas service.

Private Jesso, Regimental Number 1812, was now not to be called upon until October 27, after a period of some seven weeks. Where he was to spend this intervening time appears not to have been recorded although he may possibly have returned to work, and perhaps even travelled back to visit his family and friends at his home on Wood's Island, Bay St. George on Newfoundland's west coast – all of which is, however, only speculation.

On the above-mentioned October 27, 'G' Company left St. John's by train to cross the island to Port aux Basques, the other passengers on board reportedly having included several naval reservists and also some German prisoners-of-war. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry – documented as having been the *Kyle* - and afterwards proceeded again by train from North Sydney as far as Québec City.

There the Newfoundlanders joined His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* for the trans-Atlantic voyage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9. The vessel had departed Montreal on October 30 with Canadian troops on board before stopping at Québec: the 55<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion and the Second Draft of the (1<sup>st</sup>?) Divisional Signals Company.

***(Right: The image of Corsican is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Launched in 1907 for the Allan Line, one of the largest private shipping companies of the time, she spent much of her early career chartered to the Canadian Pacific Line which in 1917 was to purchase the entire Allan Line business. She was employed as a troop-ship during much of the Great War which she survived – only to be wrecked near Cape Race on May 21, 1923.)***



By the morning of November 10, Private Jesso's 'G' Company had again travelled by train, to Scotland where it had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gailles, not far removed from the evolving Newfoundland Regimental Depot at Ayr where accommodation for the new arrivals was as yet not available.



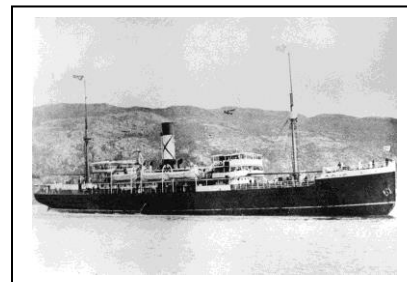
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(Preceding page: *The once-busy Royal Navy facility and harbour of Devonport almost a century after the Great War – photograph from 2012(?)*)

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More than a year prior to that November 10 of 1915, 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 had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

(Right above: *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 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island.

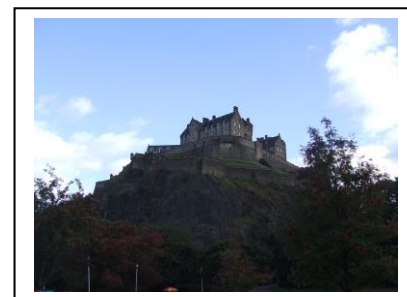
(Right below: *Fort George, constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, still serves the British Army to this day. – photograph from 2011*)

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.



*\*It was to do so at Devonport through which 'G' Company was to pass eleven months later.*

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\*.

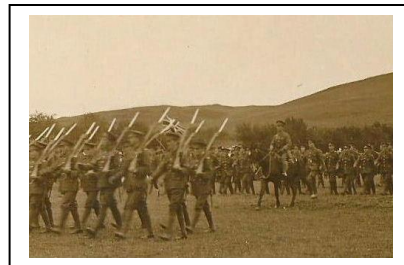


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***\*These five Companies, while a contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.***

***(Preceding page: 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 above: 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*.

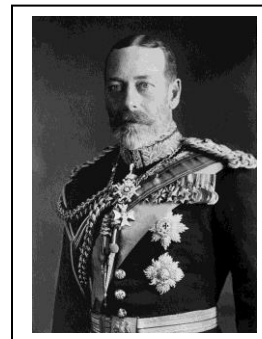
This had been an important moment: the Company's arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment's numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength\* of a battalion which could be posted on...active service.



***\*A number sufficient to furnish 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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*.



***(Right above: 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.)***



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 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.

***(Preceding page: 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 below: 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.***

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer and the early autumn of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 – that the new-comers were sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion\*.



***\*The first such draft was, in fact, to depart from Ayr for service on the Gallipoli Peninsula, only days after the arrival in Scotland of Private Jesso's 'G' Company, on November 15.***

This then had been the situation at the time of Private Jesso's arrival there: the new Regimental Depot had still been in the throes of its establishment when he and his comrades-in-arms of 'G' Company were to finish their journey to Scotland on November 10 of 1915; thus, as related in a preceding paragraph, the new-comers were required to be quartered at Gailes, some sixteen kilometres further up the coast – but apparently more than sixty kilometres distant by road.

It was after almost five months spent in Scotland, on April 5 of 1916, and only three days before his departure from there to join the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, the unit by that time in France, that he was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion...*for the duration of the war*.\*.

***\*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 signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.***

By the time of his eventual departure, Private Jesso had witnessed the despatch of the first three re-enforcement drafts from Ayr: the First in mid-November of 1915 which had joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on December 1 at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula; the Second which had sailed for Egypt in mid-March only to be ordered back to the French port of Marseille; and the Third which had left Scotland at the end of March to go directly to the Continent, to France.

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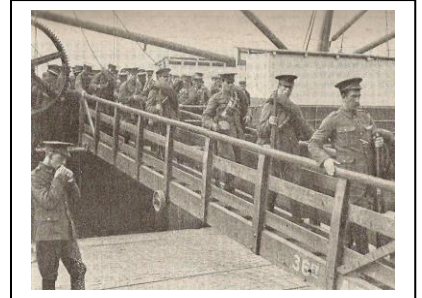


On April 8 he, Private Jesso, as a private soldier of the Fourth Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on his way to report to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on the Continent. Arriving on that same day, the 8<sup>th</sup>, in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, the Draft was posted there for several days of final training and organization\* before being dispatched to seek out the parent Newfoundland Battalion.

This rendezvous occurred on April 26 while the Newfoundland unit was undertaking its first tour in the trenches of the *Western Front* (*but also see further below*).

(Right: *British troops at an earlier time in the War 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.*



\* \* \* \* \*

A year prior to this juncture, in the summer of 1915, the Regimental Depot in Scotland had only just been beginning to evolve: both 'E' and 'F' Companies had only then been beginning their time of training at Ayr; as for Leo Francis Jesso, he was at home awaiting enlistment and attestation after which he would still have some two months to wait before the call was to come to sail overseas to the United Kingdom.

The four senior companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', of the Newfoundland Regiment – aforementioned on an earlier page - having now become the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had at this same time been attached to the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the (British) Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and had been dispatched to...*active service*.



(Right above: *Some of the personnel of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at Aldershot in August of 1915, prior to its departure to active service on the Gallipoli Peninsula – from The Fighting Newfoundlander by Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D.*)

(Right: *The image of Megantic, here in her peace-time colours of a 'White Star Line' vessel, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)



On August 20 of 1915, the Newfoundland Battalion had embarked in the Royal Navy Harbour of Devonport onto the requisitioned passenger-liner *Megantic* for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting against the Turks.

There, a month later – having spent some two weeks billeted in British barracks in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to land at *Suvla Bay* on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.

(Right: ‘*Kangaroo Beach*’, where the officers and men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is to be seen in the distance at the far end of *Suvla Bay*. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on ‘*A*’ Beach. – photograph taken in 2011)



(Right: Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at *Mudros*: either *Megantic* on August 29, *Ausonia* on September 18, or *Prince Abbas* on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on *Gallipoli*. – from Provincial Archives)



(Right: A century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at *Suvla*, and where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to serve during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)



When the Newfoundlanders had landed from their transport ship at *Suvla Bay* they were to disembark into a campaign that was already on the threshold of collapse.

Not only in the area where the Newfoundland Battalion would now serve but, even ever since the very first days of the operation in April of 1915, the entire *Gallipoli Campaign*, including the operation at *Suvla Bay*, had been proving to be little more than a debacle:



(Right: *No-Man’s-Land* at *Suvla Bay* as seen from the Newfoundland positions – from Provincial Archives)

Flies, dust, disease, the frost-bite and the floods – and of course the casualties inflicted by an enemy who was to fight a great deal better than the British High Command\* had ever anticipated – were eventually to overwhelm the British-led forces and those of their allies, the French, and it would finally be decided to abandon not only *Suvla Bay* but the entire *Gallipoli* venture.

(Right: An un-identified Newfoundland soldier in the trenches at *Suvla Bay* – from Provincial Archives)

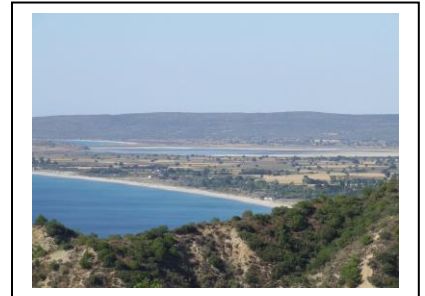


*\*Many of the commanders chosen were second-rate, had been brought out of retirement, and had little idea of how to fight – let alone of how to win. One of the generals at Suvla, apparently, had handed in his resignation during the Campaign and had just gone home.*

November 26 would see what perhaps was to be the nadir of the Newfoundland Battalion's fortunes at *Gallipoli*; there was to be a freak rain, snow and ice-storm strike the *Suvla Bay* area and the subsequent floods had wreaked havoc amongst the forces of both sides. For several days, survival rather than the enemy was to be the priority.

There were to be many casualties on both sides, some of them, surprised by the sudden inundation of their positions, fatalities who had drowned in their trenches – although no Newfoundlanders were to be among that number. Numerous, however, had been those afflicted by trench-foot and by frost-bite.

(Right: *This is Anzac Bay in the fore-ground with the Salt Lake in the centre further away. The bottom of Suvla Bay is just to be seen on the left and adjacent to the Salt Lake, and further away again. The hills in the distance and the ones from which this photograph was taken were held by the Turks and formed a horse-shoe around the plain surrounding the Salt Lake - which was where the British and Newfoundlanders were stationed. – photograph from 2011*)



By this time the situation there had daily been becoming more and more untenable, thus on the night of December 19-20, the British had abandoned the entire area of *Suvla Bay* – the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, to form a part of the rear-guard. Some of the Battalion personnel had thereupon been evacuated to the nearby island of Imbros, some to Lemnos, further away, but in neither case was the respite to be of a long duration; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion would be transferred only two days later to the area of *Cape Helles*, on the western tip of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.



(Right above: *Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed Achi Baba, positions which were never breached: The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011*)



The British, Indian and *Anzac* forces – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was also to serve at *Gallipoli* – had by now simply been marking time until a complete withdrawal of the *Peninsula* could be undertaken.

This final operation would take place on the night of January 8-9, the Newfoundland Battalion to furnish part of the British rear-guard on this second occasion also.

(Right above: *'W' Beach at Cape Helles as it was only days before the final British evacuation – from Illustration*)



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*\*Lieutenant Owen Steele of St. John's, Newfoundland, is cited as having been the last soldier of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force to step into the final small boat to sail from the Gallipoli Peninsula.*

*(Preceding page: 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces in that January of 1916 and by the Newfoundlanders who were to be the last soldiers off the beach: Vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture are still to be seen. – photograph from 2011)*

Immediately after the British evacuation of the *Gallipoli Peninsula*, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered to the Egyptian port-city of Alexandria and beyond and had thus once more taken ship.

On January 14, the Australian Expeditionary Force Transport *Nestor* had arrived at Alexandria with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on board. The vessel was to sail just after mid-day on the 16<sup>th</sup>, on its way southwards down the Suez Canal to Port Suez where she had docked early on the morrow and where the Newfoundlanders had landed and marched to their encampment.

There they were to await further orders since, at the time, the subsequent destination of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division had yet to be decided\*.

*(Right: The image of the Blue Funnel Line vessel 'Nestor' is from the Shipspotting.com web-site. The vessel was launched and fitted in 1912-1913 and was to serve much of her commercial life until 1950 plying the routes between Britain and Australia. During the Great War she served mainly in the transport of Australian troops and was requisitioned once again in 1940 for government service in the Second World War. In 1950 she was broken up.)*



*\*Bulgaria had entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, and Salonika was already becoming a theatre of war.*

*(Right: The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment were among the last to leave on two occasions, at both Suvla Bay and Cape Helles. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)*



After a two-month interim spent in the vicinity of Port Suez, the almost six-hundred officers and other ranks of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were to board His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* at Port Tewfiq, on March 14 to begin the voyage back up through the *Suez Canal* en route to France.



*(Right: Port Tewfiq at the south end of the Suez Canal just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card)*

The Newfoundlanders would disembark eight days afterwards in the Mediterranean port-city of Marseille, on March 22.

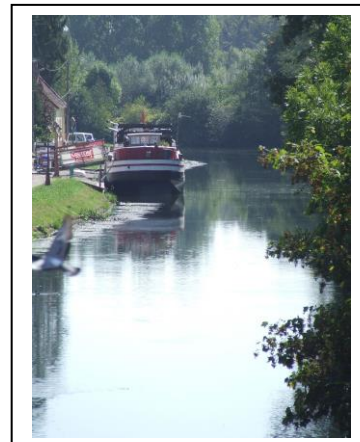
(Right: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseille.* – from a vintage post-card)

Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Newfoundland Battalion's train was to find its way to the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy, a thousand kilometres to the north of Marseille. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for the troops having inexcusably travelled unused in a separate wagon.



Having de-trained at the local station at two o'clock in the morning, the Newfoundlanders were now still to endure the long, dark march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.

It is doubtful if many of those tired soldiers were to pay much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge which they had then traversed on their way from the station. But some three months later *the Somme* would become a part of their history.



(Right: *A languid River Somme as seen from the bridge at Pont-Rémy* – photograph from 2010)

On April 13, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion – including the 2<sup>nd</sup> Re-enforcement Draft having arrived from Egypt - subsequently marched into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all from Pont-Rémy - where it would be billeted, would receive reinforcements from Scotland via Rouen and, in two days' time, would be introduced into the communication trenches of the *Western Front*.

Just days following the Newfoundland Battalion's arrival on the *Western Front*, two of the four Companies – 'A', and 'B' – were to take over several support positions from a British unit\* before the entire Newfoundland unit was to then be ordered to move further up for the first time into forward positions on April 22.

*\*It should be said that the Newfoundland Battalion and two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles who were serving at the time in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lincolnshire Regiment Battalion, were then the only units at the Somme from outside the British Isles - true also on the day of the attack on July 1.*

And as related in an earlier paragraph, it was during this period of the Newfoundland Battalion's first tour in the trenches of the *Western Front*, that a draft of an officer and forty-one other ranks arrived from Rouen on April 26 to report...to duty.



(Preceding page: *A part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)*)

On the night of May 3-4, the Newfoundland Battalion was relieved in the trenches and withdrew to billets in the small community of Mailly-Maillet, a village only a short distance behind the lines. It was here that on May 5 the next draft from Rouen, a contingent of one officer and thirty-two *other ranks* joined the unit.

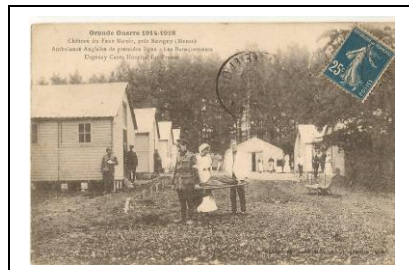
A third detachment comprising a single officer and just twelve *other ranks* then reported to not-distant Louvencourt on May 11 or 12 when the Battalion had completed a long route march and had also been practicing a system of communicating with the pilots and observers of the Royal Flying Corps.

It is not clear from the records with which one of those drafts Private Jesso had eventually reported...*to duty*...with the Newfoundland unit but, given the dates of the following events, it could have been only one of the three cited above.

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the meandering river that flowed – and today still flows - innocuously through the southern part of the region to which it lends its name, *the Somme*.

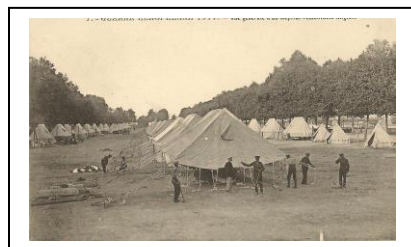
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On May 17 while the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion was still in the area of Louvencourt, Private Jesso was evacuated to the 87<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance and there diagnosed as suffering from acute nephritis. On the following day he was transferred to the 4<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Beauval. A week later, it was on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Aberdonian* that he made the crossing back to the United Kingdom on May 25.



(Right above: *A British Field Ambulance, more permanent than some nearer to the front, in north-eastern France at a later date in the War – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right: *A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War. Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card*)

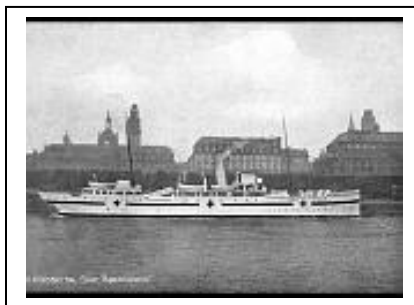


Once having arrived in England, Private Jesso was transported to and admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May. He was now to remain under medical care for the next six weeks.

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**(Right: The image of 'Aberdonian' clad in her war-time hospital-ship garb is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Built in 1909 for the Aberdeen Steam Navigation Company, the vessel was requisitioned in 1915 and converted for use as a hospital ship for just fewer than two-hundred fifty sick and wounded, a role she played from October, 1915, until June of 1919. Having survived the conflict she would serve again as a hospital ship during the Second World War after which she was sold and, three years later, scrapped.)**



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



**(Right below: A party of Newfoundland patients dressed in hospital uniform but otherwise unfortunately unidentified, is seen here convalescing in the grounds of the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital at Wandsworth – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)**



**(Right below: The Newfoundland Plot in Ayr Cemetery wherein lie fourteen Newfoundlanders whom the Commonwealth War Graves Commission refer to as Canadians – here and elsewhere – photograph from 2014)**



After treatment at Wandsworth followed by convalescence in the Auxiliary Hospital, Esher, this commencing as of July 7, Private Jesso was released to the customary ten-day furlough granted military personnel upon discharge from hospital. After this period of leave, from July 20 to 29 – which he seemingly was to spend in London – Private Jesso reported...to duty...in Scotland at the Regimental Depot at Ayr on August 3 – there appears to be no explanation of the discrepancy in the dates.

He remained in Scotland for almost a full year.

On July 22 of 1917, the 27<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Barry\* was on its way to the Continent. For a second time Private Jesso passed through the ports of Southampton and Rouen, disembarking in France on July 24. The Base Depot at Rouen then documents him as having... *proceeded to join Batt. 10.8.17.*

*\*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.*

But then the office of the OC Unit (*Officer Commanding Unit*), in an addendum of August 23\* (23/8/ 17), reported...*did not join*.

*\*It may instead read 23/9/17, but this does not appear to logically coincide with other dates. There appears to be no relevant information among his papers to account for this discrepancy.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Private Jesso had been away from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for just less than fifteen months by the time of his return to service...*in the field*...during that summer of 1917. His former unit had been involved in several major confrontations during that intervening period, perhaps the most remembered of all is the one which had been unleashed on July 1 – although June 30 had been the initial date – for the Newfoundlanders at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

If there is one name and date in Newfoundland history which is etched in the collective once-national memory, it is that of Beaumont-Hamel on July 1 of 1916; and if any numbers are remembered, they are those of the eight-hundred who went *over the top* in the third wave of the attack on that morning, and of the sixty-eight unwounded present at muster some twenty-four hours later\*.



(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel: Looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences: The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009*)

(Right: *A view of Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery Number 2 in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2009(?)*)

*\*Perhaps ironically, the majority of the Battalion's casualties was to be incurred during the advance from the third line of British trenches to the first line from where the attack proper was to be made, and while struggling through British wire laid to protect the British positions from any German attack.*



There are other numbers of course: the fifty-seven thousand British casualties incurred in four hours on that same morning of which nineteen-thousand were recorded as having been...*killed in action*...or...*died of wounds*.

It was to be the greatest disaster ever in the annals of the British Army...and, perhaps just as depressing, the carnage of the...*First Battle of the Somme* was to continue for four and a half months.

(continued)

(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel is a commune, not a village.* – photographs from 2010 and 2015)

*In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists today – at the time comprising two communities: Beaumont, a village on the German side of the lines, and Hamel which was behind those of the British. No-Man's-Land, on which the Newfoundland Memorial Park lies partially today, was on land that separated Beaumont from Hamel.*



(Right: *A grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland - dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel* – from...?)

After the events of the morning of July 1, 1916, such had then been the dire condition of the attacking British forces that it had been feared that any German counter-assault might well annihilate what had managed to survive of the British Expeditionary Force on *the Somme*.



The few remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion – and of the other depleted British units - had thus remained in the trenches perhaps fearing the worst, and at night searching for the wounded and burying the dead. It was to be July 6 before the Newfoundlanders were to be relieved from the forward area and to be ordered withdrawn to Englebelmer.

It had then been a further two days before the unit had marched further again to the rear area and to billets in the village of Mailly-Maillet.

(Right: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John's East.* – photograph from 2009)



There on July 11, a draft of one-hundred twenty-seven re-enforcements – a second source cites one-hundred thirty – had reported *to duty*. They had been the first to arrive following the events at Beaumont-Hamel but even with this additional man-power having arrived, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was still to number only... *11 officers and 260 rifles*...after the holocaust of Beaumont-Hamel, just one-quarter of establishment battalion strength.

On July 27-28 of 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still under establishment battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong – maybe fewer even after two further re-enforcement drafts – had moved north and entered into the *Kingdom of Belgium* for the first time.

(continued)



It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.

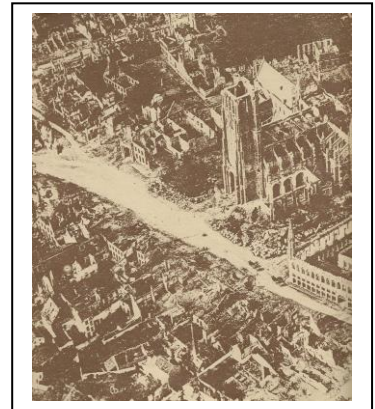
(Right: *The entrance to 'A' Company's quarters – obviously renovated since that time - in the ramparts of the city of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)



*The Salient* – close to the front lines for almost the entire fifty-two month conflict - was to be relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there; yet they nonetheless had incurred casualties, a number – fifteen? - of them fatal.

Then on October 8, after having served in Belgium for some ten weeks, the Newfoundland Battalion had been ordered to return south, back into France and back into the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

(Right: *An aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916: it is described as the 'Ville morte'. – from Illustration*)



Four days after that return to France, on October 12, 1916, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had again been ordered to the offensive; it was to be at a place called Gueudecourt, the vestiges of a village some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel.

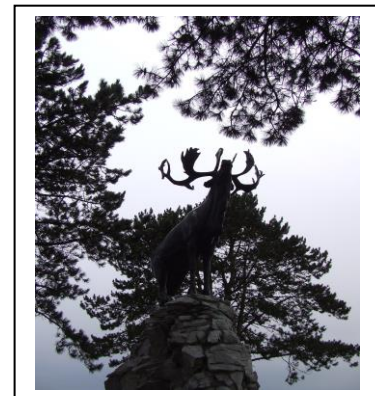
The encounter was to prove to be another ill-conceived and costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.



(Right above: *This is the ground over which the 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. – photograph from 2007*)

(Right: *The Caribou at Gueudecourt stands at the furthest point of the Newfoundland Battalion's advance of October 12, 1916. – photograph from 2012*)

The Newfoundland Battalion was not to be directly involved in any further concerted infantry action in the immediate area of Gueudecourt although, on October 18, it would supply two-hundred fifty men to act as stretcher-bearers in an attack undertaken by troops of two British regiments, the Hampshires and the Worcestershires, of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.



(continued)

(Right: *Stretcher-bearers not only shared the dangers of the battle-field with their arms-bearing comrades, but they often spent a longer period of time exposed to those same perils. This photograph was likely taken during First Somme. – from Illustration*)



On October 30, the Newfoundland unit had eventually been retired to rear positions from the Gueudecourt area. It had been serving in front-line and support positions for three weeks less a day.

The Newfoundlanders were now to spend two weeks withdrawn to the area of Ville-sous-Corbie, re-enforcing and reorganizing. It was not to be until November 15 that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had begun to wend its way back up to the front lines.



There it had continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period broken only by another several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and in close proximity to the city of Amiens.

(Right above: *A typical British Army Camp during rather inclement winter conditions somewhere on the Continent – from a vintage post-card*)

The Christmas festivities completed – turkey dinner washed down with...*real ale*...apparently – it was not to be until January 11 that the Newfoundland Battalion would be ordered out of *Corps Reserve* and from its lodgings at *Camps en Amiennois* to make its way on foot to the community of Airaines. From the railway station there it was to entrain for the small town of Corbie where it had thereupon taken over billets which it had already occupied for a short period only two months before.

After that recent six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve* far to the rear, the Newfoundlanders were to *officially* return to *active service* on January 23, although they apparently had already returned to the trenches by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

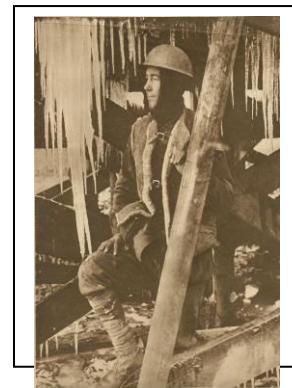
Those casualties, however, were to be only some of those everyday thousands whom Douglas Haig somewhat cavalierly referred to as *wastage* since the Newfoundland unit had not ventured from its trenches during those several days.

However, that winter period – as had been and was to be the case of all the winter periods of the Great War – would be a time of relative calm, although cold and uncomfortable for most of the combatants of both sides. It had been a time of sickness, and the medical facilities were kept busy, particularly, so it seems - from at least Canadian medical documentation - with thousands of cases of dental work.

And as has been related in an earlier paragraph, this period also provided the opportunity to undergo training and familiarization with the new practices and weaponry of war; in the

case of the Newfoundland Battalion this had at least partially been undertaken in the vicinity of the communities of Carnoy and Coisy.

On February 18 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began a five-day trek back from Coisy to the forward area where it went back into the firing-line on February 23, relieving a unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers. It was at a place called Sailly-Saillisel and the reception offered by the Germans was lively: after only two days the Battalion had incurred four dead, nine wounded and three gassed without there having been any infantry action. The Newfoundlanders were withdrawn on February 25 to return three days later.



They carried with them orders for a...*bombing raid*...on the enemy positions at Sailly-Saillisel...to be carried out on March 1.

In fact, the sole infantry activity *directly* involving the Newfoundland unit during that entire period – from Gueudecourt in mid-October, 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in mid-April of 1917 – was to be that sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action which would bring this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.

(Right above: A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers, his unit to be relieved by the Newfoundlanders on March 1, enjoys his cigarette in the cold and ice of the trenches at Sailly-Saillisel during the winter of 1916-1917. – from *Illustration*)

(Right: The fighting during the period 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 Sailly-Saillisel the month of March had been a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they were now to spend their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and in training for upcoming events. They had even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris, the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



(Right above: The Prime Minister of Newfoundland visiting the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, encamped at Meaulté – from *The War Illustrated*)

On March 29, the Newfoundlanders had begun to make their way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, the march to finish amid the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.





(Preceding page: *The remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War, in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

(Right below: *The Canadian National Memorial which has stood atop Vimy Ridge since 1936 – photograph from 2010*)

On April 9 the British Army was to launch an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a major French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties – just over four thousand - this attack was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, its only positive episode to be the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday, 1917.



And while the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, the French *Bataille du Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

(Right: *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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part during the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at the 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, the ineptly-planned action at Monchy-le-Preux would prove to be the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties all told on April 14 alone\*.

*\*It was also an action in which a DSO, an MC and eight MMs were won by a small group of nine personnel of the Battalion – the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) awarded to the unit's Commanding officer. An MM for the same action was also presented to a private from the Essex Regiment .*

After this further debacle the remnants of the Newfoundland Battalion had remained but for a few days in the area of Monchy-le-Preux. Its casualty count had been high enough to warrant that it and the Essex Regiment, which had also incurred heavy losses, be amalgamated into a composite battalion until such time as incoming re-enforcements would allow the two units' strengths to once more resemble those of bona fide battalions.

The final action in which the Newfoundland Battalion was to be involved during the five-week long *Battle of Arras* would be the engagement of April 23 at *Les Fosses Farm*. This was in fact an element of a larger offensive undertaken at the time by units of the British 5<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies. It was apparently not to be a particularly successful venture, at least not in the area of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, several of the adjacent units reporting having been driven back by German counter-attacks, actions accompanied by heavy losses.

(continued)

And the Newfoundlanders also had sustained further casualties: ten...*killed in action*, three ...*missing in action*, and forty-eight...*wounded*.

Late, on that same evening of April 23, the Newfoundlanders had retired the dozen or so kilometres to the relative calm of Arras.

(Right above: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery* – from a vintage post-card)

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

The *Battle of Arras* was now proceeding to its costly and inconclusive close in mid-month, but the Newfoundland unit was not to be further involved in any further co-ordinated offensive action – it was too exhausted; this now would be a period when the Battalion was to be moving in a circular fashion on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches.

On May 7 it was on the move once again and marching to different billets in Berneville where it was to be the subject of a war journalist and photographer.

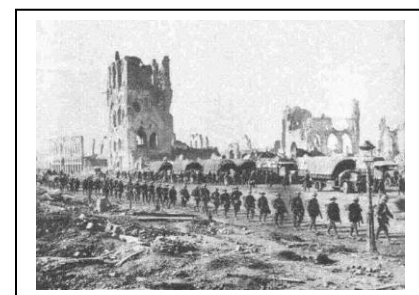
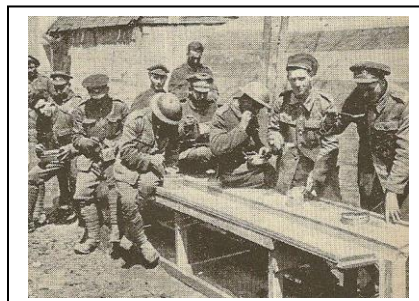
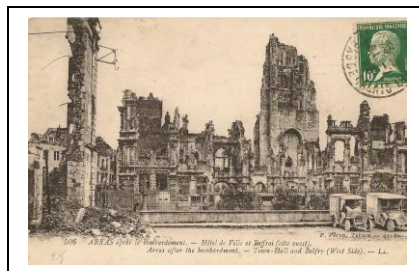
(Right above: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville* – as cited immediately above - in early May, perhaps the 7<sup>th</sup>, of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated*)

The Newfoundlanders had then soon once again been moving north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again into the vicinity of Ypres and...*the Salient*, their first posting to be to the banks of the *Yser Canal* just to the north of the city.

(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, manned its eastern bank: East is to the right* – photograph from 2014)

This low-lying area, Belgian *Flanders*, the only part of the country unoccupied by German forces, had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917.

(Right: *Troops arriving from the railway station in single file, march past the vestiges of the historic Cloth Hall and through the rubble of the medieval city centre of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer or early autumn of 1917.* – from *Illustration*)



Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to come to be better known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a not-very high ridge to the north-east that later was to be cited as having been – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

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

(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration*)

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army. This had been or was also to be the case with the Australians, the New Zealanders and the Canadians, all of whose troops had floundered or would soon flounder their way across the sodden and shell-torn countryside of Belgian Flanders.

Notably the Newfoundland Battalion at *Passchendaele* was to fight in two major engagements: at the *Steenbeek* on August 16; and at the *Broembeek* (see both immediately below) on October 9.

At the former it had incurred nine *killed in action*, ninety-three *wounded*, and one *missing in action*; at the *Broembeek* the cost had been higher: forty-eight *killed or died of wounds*, one-hundred thirty-two *wounded* and fifteen *missing in action*.

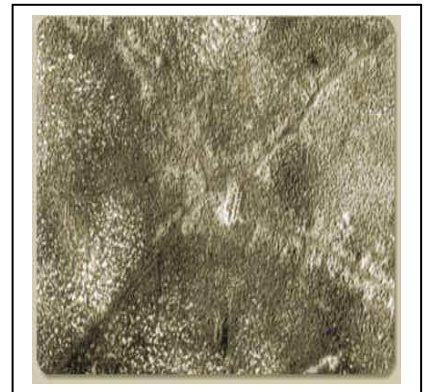
(Right above: *This is the area of the Steenbeek – the stream runs close to the line of trees - and is therefore near to where the Newfoundland Battalion fought the engagement of August 16, 1917. It is some eight kilometres distant from a village called Passchendaele. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *The once-village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

If Private Jesso was to serve at all with the Newfoundland unit at Passchendaele – and this, as has been seen, is not at all clear, it would have been during the period when the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion fought at the *Steenbeek* (see just above) on August 16. On August 24 the unit had begun to withdraw from the fray and for the next month would be encamped well behind the forward area in the vicinity of the Belgian town of Poperinghe.

\* \* \* \* \*

(continued)





If Private Jesso, as has been suggested, had not re-joined his 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on August 10, it can only be speculated that he was hospitalized during the journey towards the front or immediately upon arrival: the dates also appear to confirm this. And even if he *had* served, it was not to be very long – sixteen days – before, on August 26, he was admitted into the 10<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital at St. Omer suffering from what was classified at the time as NYD (*Not Yet Diagnosed/ Determined*) – but which later was diagnosed as a venereal condition.

Two days later, on August 28 Private Jesso was back in Rouen in the 1<sup>st</sup> General Hospital, there for a stay of just less than three weeks; he was then discharged from there to the nearby Base Depot on September 16, and was to report back...*to duty...with the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion...in the field...on October 12.*

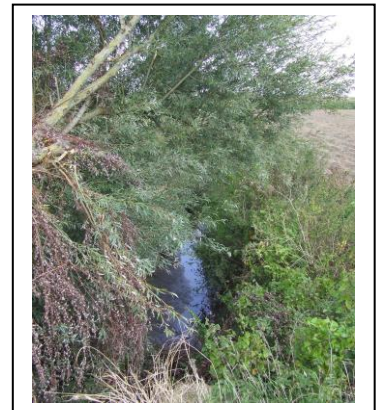
Private Jesso was one of a draft of ninety-four *other ranks* to arrive from Rouen on that day, the newcomers reporting to *Swindon Camp*, in the environs of the Belgian community of Proven, where the parent unit was recuperating from the exertions of fighting at the *Broembeek*, only three days prior.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the end of the month of August – after the action at the *Steenbeek* but before that at the *Broembeek* – the Newfoundland Battalion at *Penton Camp* – to the north-west of Poperinghe, had been busy re-organizing, resting and re-enforcing. So also had been much of the British Army after a month of fighting in a battle which was not proceeding as well as the High Command had optimistically anticipated.

There were then to be four weeks of relative calm which were to begin at the time of the arrival of the Newfoundland unit at *Penton Camp* on August 28, and which had continued while the British forces re-enforced and re-organized. While Private Jesso was still in hospital in Rouen, the Newfoundland Battalion would go back to war during the last days of what had been a fine September – of course, as the fighting started once more...so did the rain.

The offensive recommenced for the Newfoundland Battalion on September 25, although the unit had incurred four wounded two days prior to that date due to long-range artillery fire. Back in their trenches they prepared for their next concerted attack on German positions.



It came some two weeks later and it came at the *Broembeek*.

(Right above: *An innocuous, placid stream as shown here, in 1917 the Broembeek was a torrent which would flood the surrounding terrain, transforming it into a quagmire. – photograph from 2009*)

It was to be only two days after the confrontation of that October 9 of 1917 at the *Broembeek* that the Newfoundland Battalion had marched to the railway station at Elverdinghe, from where it was to be transported to *Swindon Camp* in the area of Proven. There it was at *Swindon Camp* on the day following, October 12, that the aforementioned

draft of ninety-four *other ranks* from Rouen, Private Jesso one of that number, had reported back to his unit.

Then, having then remained there for a further five days to be both re-enforced and bombed, on the morning of October 17 the entire unit had once more boarded a train. By ten-thirty that same evening, the Battalion had arrived just to the west of the city of Arras and would now march the final kilometres to billets in the community of Berles-au-Bois.

The Newfoundlanders had still been there, at Berles-au-Bois, four weeks and two days later when, on November 17, the Battalion had again been ordered once again onto a train, on this occasion to travel south-eastwards to the town of Peronne. From there it had begun to move further eastward, on foot, towards the theatre of the battle now imminent.

On November 19, while still on the move, the unit had been issued as it went with... *war stores, rations and equipment*. For much of that night it had marched up to the assembly areas from where, at twenty minutes past six on that morning of November 20 – *Zero Hour* – the Newfoundland unit, not being in the first wave of the attack, was to move forward into its forming-up area. From those forward position, some hours later, at ten minutes past ten, bugles blowing, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had advanced to the fray.

(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)



This new offensive – apparently initially conceived to be no more than a large-scale raid -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 having been directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle was to begin well for the British who had used tanks on a large scale for the first time, but opportunities had been squandered. There were to be no troops available to exploit what had been a hoped-for yet - admittedly - unexpected success, and by the close of the battle, the Germans had counter-attacked and the British had relinquished as much – more in places - territory as they had originally gained.

The Newfoundland Battalion had once again been dealt with severely, in the vicinity of Marcoing, Masnières - where a Caribou stands today - and in the area of the Canal St-Quentin which flows through both places: of the total of five-hundred fifty-three officers and men who had advanced into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of only the second day\*.



(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 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on November 20; however, whether its capture was ever achieved is at best controversial.* – photograph from 2012)

***\*At five-hundred fifty-three all ranks – not counting the aforementioned ten per cent reserve - the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment even at the outset of the operation was operating at just over fifty per cent of establishment strength: not that it would have been any consolation had it been known, but a goodly number of battalions in all the British and Dominion forces – with perhaps the exception of the Canadians - were encountering the same problem.***



***(Right above: A number of graves of soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment in Marcoing Military Cemetery. Here, as is almost always the case elsewhere, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, has identified them as being Canadian. – photograph from 2010)***

**After the exertions of *Cambrai*, the Newfoundlanders were to be withdrawn from the line, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment by then numbering the strength of only a single company - whereas a full battalion comprises four. The unit had then remained in the vicinity of Humbercourt, to the west of Arras, until December 18 when it was to march to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There the unit would spend both Christmas and New Year. The weather had obliged and had even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow - a bit too much at times apparently.**

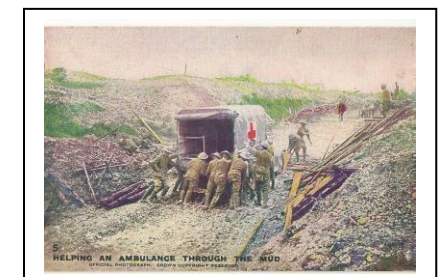
**At the beginning of January of 1918, after that snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had returned to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time. There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.**



***(Right above: By 1918 Ypres was looking like this; some of these broken buildings had been a school which had served as a shelter for troops in the earlier days of the conflict. – from a vintage post-card)***

\* \* \* \* \*

**On January 15 of the New Year, 1918, while the Battalion had been undertaking a practice attack with the other battalions of the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, Private Jesso, once more in need of medical attention, had reported into the 88<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, suffering from PUO (*Pain of Unknown Origin*), soon to be diagnosed once more as a venereal problem. From there he had been admitted on January 21 into the 4<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital\* at Arques near the northern French town of St-Omer, to be later discharged to Base Details on March 30.**

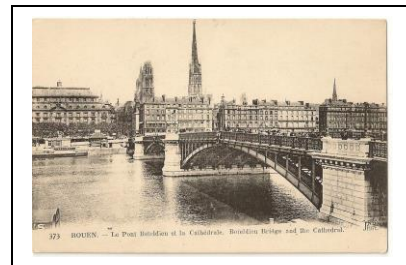


***(Right above: transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card)***



***\*Contrary reports have him in the 4<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital at Arques on April 10, yet this unit was apparently not in operation there until a month later, in mid-May. There appears to be no further documentation a propos.***

Private Jesso was on the Regimental nominal roll call of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 1, but a confusing welter of letters and numbers in his file may suggest that he almost immediately had a relapse and by April 7 had been admitted with a further PUO into the 2<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital in the industrial port-city of Le Havre situated on the estuary of the River Seine\*.



Forty-six days later, on May 13, he was released, one may presume to the Base Depot at Rouen, further-up-stream. Then dispatched...*to duty*...on May 17, he appears to have re-joined his unit still in the area of the Franco-Belgian border four days later again, on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of that month.

(Right above: *The River Seine flows through the centre of the French city of Rouen – and under the watchful eye of the venerable gothic cathedral – at or about the time of the Great War. – from a vintage post-card*)

If the above is correct (but see \* below) Private Jesso was one of a draft of sixty *other ranks* which reported from the Base Depot on that May 21, at a time when the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been posted ...*to duty*...the British Expeditionary Forces Headquarters in a chateau at Écuire and not far-removed from the coast.

***\*Other documents have him serving with the Battalion from April 9 – the day of the German attack – until May 5 when he was admitted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Stationary Hospital. There appears to be no way of knowing which to be correct.***

\* \* \* \* \*

In the meantime, after Private Jesso's departure for further medical attention in that January of 1918, and while the Battalion had been preparing defences and building a tram-way, the Germans had been 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 they would launch a spring offensive - which they were to do – in fact they were to unleash several of them\*.

***\*There were also to be several assaults by the Germans on French forces during that spring. They all met with varying degrees of success at the outset, but eventually they would be thwarted by Petain's divisions, aided at times by the newly-arriving Americans.***

In the sector where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was stationed, the blow was not to fall until April. Thus, while they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders had continued to dig.

(Preceding page: *Some of the countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were building that tramway in January and were still stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

As suggested above, the Germans would do as was expected of them: Ludendorff's armies had launched a powerful thrust against the British on March 21, the first day of that spring of 1918; they had struck at first in the area of and just south of *the Somme*, there to overrun the battlefields of 1916 and well beyond - for a while their advance had seemed unstoppable.

For a number of reasons, after two weeks the offensive had begun to falter and would eventually halt; but then, just days afterwards, a second offensive, *Georgette*, was to be launched in the northern sector of the front, in Belgian Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders had been stationed: the date April 9. Within only two days the situation of the British had become 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, and as the Germans had approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were to be deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, having been due to come out of the line and to move back to the area of *the Somme*, were instead to board buses at three o'clock in the afternoon, thereupon to be directed southward, towards the border town of Nieppe.



They were to be in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, just three hours later.

(Right above: *The area of La Crèche - 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 had been pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of April the Newfoundland Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, had to make a series of desperate stands.

On April 12-13 – the dates in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's War Diary are not clear - during the defensive stand near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company had been obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company had taken up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, had stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening – had been equally heavily involved.

(continued)

The period from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never had materialised and the front had finally been stabilised\*.

*\*The 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade – and therefore the Newfoundland Battalion – was to be seconded to the 34<sup>th</sup> Division from the 29<sup>th</sup> Division during this critical period.*

(Right: Ground just to the east of Bailleul where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to be in action during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013)



(Right below: These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there stand several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?))

On April 24, the Newfoundland Battalion had said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 29<sup>th</sup> Division and on the following day there had been a recessional parade.

The unit was to later be deployed to another unit, a Scottish infantry division, but for the summer of 1918 it would be ordered moved a world away from Flanders where, as seen in the preceding pages, it had just fought during the crisis of the German spring offensive, to now be stationed on the west coast of France.



On April 29, the Newfoundlanders took a train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étaples where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening. They still had...miles to march...before they reached their billets.

The Newfoundland Battalion was to be posted for the months of May, June and until early July, to the vicinity of Écuire, not far from the coast of the English Channel – *La Manche* to their French allies - to serve at the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



(Right: Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ – from *Illustration*)

\* \* \* \* \*

*It must be remembered that one source has Private Jesso returning to the Battalion from a month in hospital on May 21, 1918, while a second one cites him having re-joined the unit on April 10, thus suggesting his possible presence with the Newfoundland unit during the fighting of the German Spring Offensive related in the above paragraphs.*

But whether or not he had been present with his Battalion in April of 1918 or not, there were soon to be more medical problems for Private Jesso: At the end of that month of May,



on the 28<sup>th</sup> he was admitted into the 51<sup>st</sup> General Hospital at Étaples before being forwarded to the 1<sup>st</sup> Stationary Hospital in Rouen on the 31<sup>st</sup>. The problem was the same: venereal. It was two months before, on July 30-31, Private Jesso returned...*to duty*...at the Base Depot, Rouen, and not until August 10 that he was to report back to the Newfoundland Battalion, by that time in the vicinity of the coastal village of Équihe.

\* \* \* \* \*

The first three days of July had been taken up with the transfer from the BEF Headquarters at Écuire to the unit's new quarters several kilometres up the coast. It must have been quite an experience to work at British Headquarters but the cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, was no longer capable of serving in the field.

*\*Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service (see further below). At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

The posting to Écuire having been completed, for most of July and for all of August the Newfoundlanders were to be encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihe – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.

(Right below: *The village of Équihe - in the vicinity of which the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion spent much of the summer of 1918 – at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The unit's numbers, despite small re-enforcement drafts, nevertheless remained crippling low. On July 1, 2 and 3, the eleven officers and three-hundred twenty-three *other ranks* – well under establishment strength\* - of the Newfoundland Battalion had marched to *Equihen Camp* from Écuire. There the unit was to be visited on July 3 by the Right Honourable D.W.F. Lloyd, the new Prime Minister of Newfoundland.



*\*Thirteen different re-enforcement drafts are recorded as having arrived to join the Newfoundland Battalion during the months of May, June and July of 1918. As well as personnel returning from hospitalization, these drafts numbered from as few as six 'other ranks' to as many as one-hundred twenty-eight, barely enough – but just enough - to provide a depleted unit to serve in the Battalion's new parent units.*

The Newfoundlanders - by the end of the summer having enough personnel to return to...*active service*...were recalled from their service at General Headquarters and from the camp at Equihen on Friday, September 13, to be one of the three battalions\* of the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade\*\* of the 9<sup>th</sup> Scottish Division. The Newfoundland Battalion was now once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today *Ingoigem*).

(Right above: *British troops with their German prisoners in Flanders during the advance to the rest, the 'Hundred Days' (see below) – from Illustration)*

*\*British Divisions, because of their own man-power shortage, in 1918 were obliged to reduce the number of battalions in a brigade from four to three.*

*\*\*On September 13, a re-formed 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade replaced the South African Brigade which left on that same day.*



On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2<sup>nd</sup> British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive*\*. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the *Keiberg Ridge*. After almost four years of stalemate, it was now to be once again a conflict of movement.

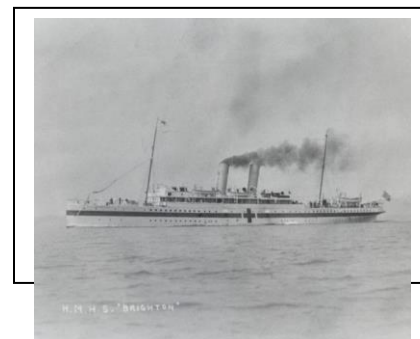
*\*This offensive would prove to be the final campaign on the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3<sup>rd</sup> Somme.*

\* \* \* \* \*

On October 2, Private Jesso was admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Casualty Clearing Station at *Bandaghem* – a war-time name only, invented by British troops – and sent immediately onward to the 55<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Boulogne. On October 10 he was shuttled to the 12<sup>th</sup> Convalescent Depot then to the Rest Camp St-Martin, it apparently having been decided by then that he had become a victim...*slight*...of mustard gas. More transfers occurred in quick succession: to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian General Hospital in Boulogne on October 12; to the 7<sup>th</sup> Convalescent Depot on October 21; back to Rest Camp St-Martin – now with tonsillitis – on the 25<sup>th</sup>; then again to the Base Depot on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

Having once re-joined the Base Depot in Rouen on the 28<sup>th</sup>, he was then to be admitted into the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers on December 7. From there it was another cross-Channel ride on the 14<sup>th</sup>, on this occasion on board HMHS *Brighton* before admission on the same day into Charing Cross Hospital, London. He was now suffering from an old complaint: nephritis...*slight*. From there he was transferred to the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital, Millbank, London, on the 17<sup>th</sup> or the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 1919.

(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)*



(continued)

(Preceding page: The image of 'Brighton' in her war-time hospital-ship garb is from the [www.eastsussexww1.org.uk](http://www.eastsussexww1.org.uk) web-site. Built in 1903 as a ferry for the 'London, Brighton and South Coast Railway' she was used primarily on the Newhaven to Dieppe route. The ship was requisitioned in 1914 for use as a troop transport before being converted to a hospital ship to carry one-hundred forty sick and wounded. During the conflict she made nine-hundred seventy-three crossings and carried just short of a total of one-hundred twenty-three patients.)

By the end of January of 1918 the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had left its quarters at Ayr in Scotland, and had re-established itself at *Hazely Down*, near to the historic city of Winchester in the south of England. After a ten-day furlough – from February 2 to 12 – it was to there, on the nominal roll of 'H' Company as of January 18, that Private Jesso was posted – and apparently was to remain.



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

Apparently there was a romantic side to Private Jesso's nature for, on June 1, 1919, some sixteen months later, not only did he transfer a daily allowance from his mother to Miss Evelyn Bertha Buckmall of 22, Dudley Road, Wolverhampton – she possibly an actress or otherwise performer as she mentions *the stage* - but he also married her. The ceremony took place at the Church of St. Mary and St. John, Snow Hill, Wolverhampton.

On June 24 of 1919, only weeks later, Private Jesso boarded - as did many other returning soldiers and naval reservists - the SS *Cassandra* for the return voyage direct to home. He was accompanied on the journey by Mrs. Jesso\*. The ship sailed later that same day – a second source has June 23 - and arrived in St. John's on July 1 where Private Jesso remained...*on strength*...with the Regiment until July 31 when he was declared as medically...*unfit for duty*...before being de-mobilized on August 16.



\*Apparently there had been a possibility that she would not travel as she possessed very little appropriate clothing for the voyage.

(Right above: The image of 'Cassandra' is for the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. She had served as a troop-carrier during the Great War and had been one of the vessels to carry the (1<sup>st</sup>) Canadian Division overseas to the United Kingdom in October of 1914.)

Demobilization was only, however, a formality in Private Jesso's case as the Civil Re-establishment Committee had already decided, on August 2, that he should...*remain in hospital*. Nephritis and chronic rheumatism were beginning to take their final toll.

(continued)



The son of Joseph Jesso, ice dealer, and of Catherine Jesso – to whom he had originally allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay before its transfer to his wife - of Wood's Island, Bay St. George, and husband of Evelyn Jesso, he died in hospital eight months later on April 9, 1920\*.

*\*This date is from the Newfoundland Vital Statistics (original) register; another source has April 20 and his headstone records April 10.*

His wife continued to live at 12, Pilot's Hill in St. John's until after her husband's death when she returned to England.

Leo Francis Jesso, cited in his papers as having been born in Boston, Massachusetts, had enlisted at the *declared* age of nineteen years: date of birth, September 19, 1996 (from the Massachusetts Birth Register).

Private Leo Francis Jesso was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – February 4, 2023.