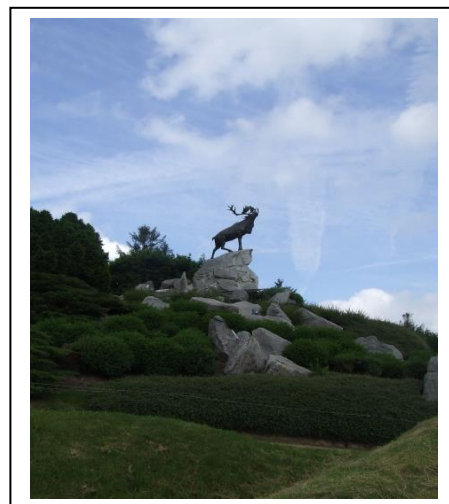




Private Arthur Henry Pittman (Regimental Number 3404), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Arthur Henry Pittman was a *Coaker Recruit** of the Eleventh Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on January 8 of 1917, before enlisting – *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attesting on that same day.



**W. F. Coaker was a politician, cabinet minister, and founder of the Fisherman's Protective Union. He eventually took it upon himself to recruit among the fishermen, and sixty-nine young men enlisted, to become known as Coaker Recruits. Ten of them died in service.*

Between the time of his enlistment and his departure overseas Private Pittman travelled home and then back to the capital via Grand Falls where he had boarded with a Mrs. George Ryan. His files hold the receipts for the three dollars and sixty cents that she charged him for twelve meals. The government also was charged five dollars for a return fare from Badger to Pilley's Island.

Private Pittman was one of the contingent of one-hundred four *other ranks* to leave St. John's on March 17, St. Patrick's Day of 1917, for the journey to Halifax. The means of their departure, however, is not clear: in one source, *The Fighting Newfoundlander*, the claim is that it was on board the Bowring Brothers vessel *Florizel*; the files of the soldiers themselves record that it was... *Embarked S.S. Train to Halifax 17/3/17...* presumably via Port-aux Basques and thence by ferry and train again to Halifax. Other sources have not proved helpful.

It was from Halifax that the detachment made its trans-Atlantic crossing in the company of Canadian troops on board His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right), sailing from Nova Scotia on March 28. Thus this draft was to reach the United Kingdom two weeks or so before the ill-fated *Windsor Draft** which had left Newfoundland at the end of January, some ten weeks earlier.



**This was the name given to the draft of about three-hundred twenty all ranks which had left St. John's on January 31, 1917, en route to Halifax from where they were to sail to the United Kingdom. This contingent would eventually make that voyage, but about thirteen weeks later than envisaged.*

(continued)

They were quarantined at Windsor as the result of a measles and mumps epidemic that claimed two of their number – and maybe a later third. In the meantime, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was running low on man-power.

Missanabie having docked in Liverpool on April 6, the Newfoundland contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence to serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for two years. It was from Ayr – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from Newfoundland were to be despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.

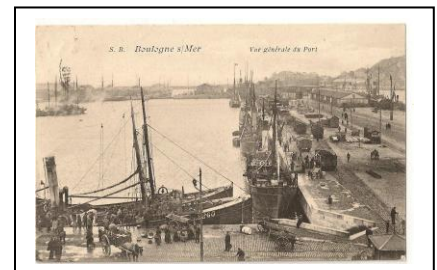


By the time that the Windsor Draft arrived at the Regimental Depot, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was becoming critically short of personnel.

(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on-Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

On June 3, the 24th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Private Pittman one of its number - passed through the English Channel port of Folkestone for the short sea-crossing to Boulogne on the French coast opposite.

From there the Newfoundlanders entrained to travel south to Rouen and to the large British Expeditionary Force Base established there, for final organization and training* before leaving to seek out 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *a view of the French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right: *the centre of the French city of Rouen with its venerable gothic cathedral at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



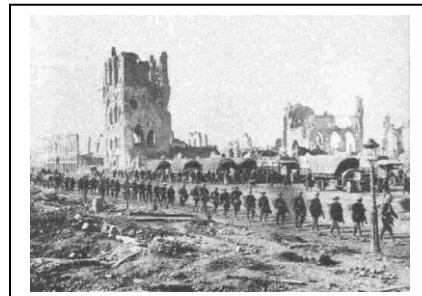
**Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

The records show that was on July 2 – the Regimental War Diary says, in fact, on the day before - that Private Pittman's contingent of two-hundred fifty *other ranks* reported to duty at *Caribou Camp*, behind the lines near Woesten – to the north-west of Ypres - in Belgium.

(continued)

For the next few days – and nights – 1st Battalion supplied working parties for road-mending and for the construction of infantry tracks. For that purpose, several of the Newfoundlanders were attached temporarily – until July 20 - to the 173rd Company of the Royal Engineers.

Only days before Private Pittman's arrival, at the end of the month of June, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion were once again ordered north into Belgium and once again to the area of *the Ypres Salient*. This had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was one of the British Army's objectives.



(Above right: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

The entry for July 13 in the Regimental War Diary is a blank line. 1st Battalion had been relieved in the front line and had retired at different times during the previous evening and night. It was on that morning, as his company retired from the front line, that Private Pittman was injured.

Excerpt from a report: **On the morning of the 13/7/17 when moving from the firing-line with his Company, Private A. H. Pittman was knocked down by a passing Motor Lorry, the wheel crushing his hand. The Lorry was moving in same direction as company.**



The injury, to the left hand, was deemed to be severe.

(Right above: *The Yser Canal: the front line was on the eastern side (to the right of the image), the injury to Private Pittman happening on the western side as 1st Battalion retired. – photograph from 2013*)

Taken immediately at first to a dressing station, Private Pittman was next evacuated, on the same July 13, to the 63rd Casualty Clearing Station at Haringhe (*Bandaghem**), to the north-west of Poperinghe. Four days later he was forwarded to the 18th General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers on the French west coast. On August 1, he was released to the 6th Convalescent Depot at Étaples, then to another depot in Rouen (either the 3rd or the 5th) on August 5.



(Right above: *the railway-station, serving the two communes of Dannes and Camiers, through which passed many a wounded or sick soldier on his way to one of the several hospitals nearby – a vintage postcard*)

**Several names such as Mendinghem, Bandaghem and Dozinghem were invented by the British troops as they resembled the Belgian and northern-French fashion of naming villages. These sites were occupied by medical facilities only – and the inevitable cemeteries which today remain. However, Lozinghem seems to be an exception in that it is a real place – however much the name lends itself to the morbid spirit of the British soldier.*

Next discharged *to duty* at the Base Depot in Rouen on September 1, Private Pittman was ordered back *to duty* to 1st Battalion *in the field* just over a week later, on the 9th. 1st Battalion was out of the line at the time, preparing for the resumption of the fighting after a respite of about four weeks. For the Newfoundlanders the action was to recommence some two weeks later.

1st Battalion, still in Belgium at this time, was to remain in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army which floundered its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders. Notably it had already fought in one major engagement, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and was to do likewise at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



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

A week after the encounter of October 9 at the *Broembeek*, the Newfoundlanders were withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: *Cambrai*. They were ordered back south from Belgium into northern France on October 17 to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of Berles-au-Bois, a small rural community a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of Arras – some personnel even having been granted at the time a ten-day furlough back to the United Kingdom.

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 directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle began well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered and by its close the British had relinquished as much territory as they had gained. 1st Battalion was again dealt with severely, at Marcoing and at Masnières - where a Caribou stands today: of the total of five-hundred fifty-eight officers and men who went into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of the second day.



(Above 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*)

(continued)

The son of Charles Pittman, labourer, and Mary Pittman – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Head's Harbour, Pilley's Island, in the District of Twillingate, he was also brother to at least Francis-John, to Leonard, to Thomas, Frederick, Edward and to Minnie.

Private Pittman was at first reported as *missing in action* on December 3, 1917, during the last engagement of the *Battle of Cambrai*, a fighting retreat back across the *Canal St-Quentin*.

However, a subsequent German report forwarded to London via the offices of the Red Cross in Geneva and dated March 14, 1918, documented the identification and burial of Private Pittman's remains by the Germans in the cemetery at Seranvilles. His personal record was thus amended so as to read *killed in action or died of wounds on 3/12/18 or shortly thereafter*.

Arthur Pittman had enlisted at the age of twenty years and nine months.

(Right: *The Caribou at Masnières stands high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether this was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012)*



(Below left: *The War Memorial on Pilley's Island honours the sacrifice of Private Pittman. – photograph from 2014)*

Private Arthur Pittman was entitled to the British War Medal (centre image) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

