

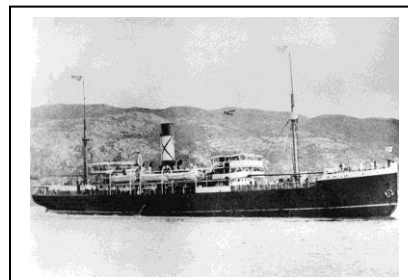


**Lance Corporal Ellwood Reid (Regimental Number 3160) is interred in Étapes Military Cemetery – Grave reference LXV. E. 4.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a school teacher earning an annual \$300.00, Ellwood Reid was a recruit of the Twelfth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on October 17 of 1916, he then both enlisted – *for the duration of the war* and engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on that same October 17.**

**(continued)**

Private Reid was one of the approximately three hundred twenty *all ranks* to leave St. John's for *overseas service* on the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right), bound for Halifax, on January 31, 1917, from there to take ship to the United Kingdom.

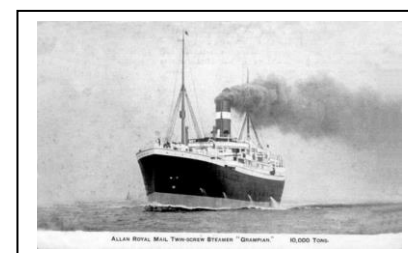


Immediately upon its arrival in Nova Scotia, however, this detachment was forwarded to accommodation in the town of Windsor where it was soon to be quarantined because of an epidemic of measles and mumps.

In fact, during that period at Windsor, Private Reid was one of those who fell victim to the mumps virus and he became a patient at the Military Hospital at Windsor where he remained for treatment from March 8 to the 19<sup>th</sup>.

It was not before a lapse of some two-and-a-half months after its arrival that transport could be arranged for the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom for the so-called *Windsor Draft* – minus the twenty-five or so personnel still unable to travel.

On April 16, Private Reid embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Grampian* (right), one of three ships carrying the Newfoundlanders to sail two days later, in a convoy from Halifax. The vessels were also carrying Canadian reinforcements to the English west-coast port of Liverpool, where the ships docked on April 29.



Arriving in England the 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 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for two years. It was from here – 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

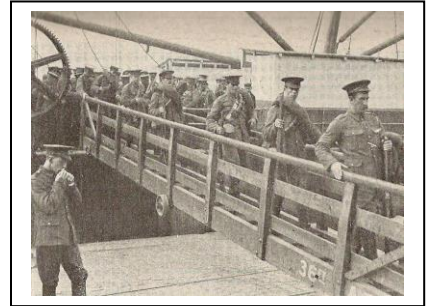


By the time that the Windsor Draft arrived at the Regimental Depot, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion was becoming critically short of personnel.

(Right above: *the new race-course at Ayr – opened in 1907 – where men of the Regiment were billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photo from 2012*)

(continued)

On June 11, 1917, the 25<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Reid among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to France. On the following day, June 12, the contingent disembarked in the Norman capital, Rouen, where time was spent at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, to be organized and to undergo final training\* before moving onward to its eventual rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

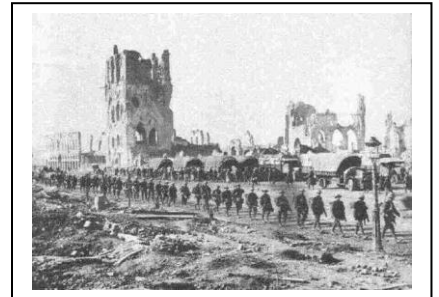


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

*\*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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

The records show that it was on July 2 – the *Regimental War Diary* says, in fact, on the day before - that Private Reid's contingent of two-hundred fifty *other ranks* reported to duty at Caribou Camp, behind the lines near Woesten in Belgium. For the next few days – and nights – 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion supplied working parties for road-mending and for the construction of infantry tracks.

Only days before Private Reid's arrival, at the end of June, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had once again moved 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.



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

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion remained in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army which floundered its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders. Notably it fought in two major engagements, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



While likely having served at the former action, Private Reid was not to be present at the latter.

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

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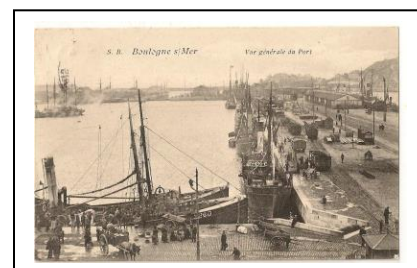
The Regimental War Diary entry for August 25 is a composite report for the entire tour spent in the trenches by 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion from that date until the 29<sup>th</sup>. There follow two excerpts: *During tour in line there were 34 Casualties viz: 7 killed & 27 wounded – all other Ranks. Enemy aircraft were very active all the time & flew very low. Gas shells were used by enemy frequently...*

There was also the habitual artillery activity.



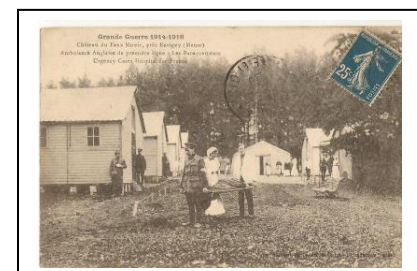
(Right above: *the Yser Canal to the north of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) – In September of 1917 the Newfoundlanders were stationed near to this spot, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on the east bank (to the right in the photograph). – photograph from 2013*)

Private Reid was wounded on September 28 and was taken immediately to the 87<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance with *mild* injuries from shrapnel to the right hand. He was transferred on the following day and admitted into the 51<sup>st</sup> General Hospital in Boulogne. From there he was released on October 5 to the 7<sup>th</sup> Convalescent Depot, from there to duty at the Base Depot in Rouen on October 14, before re-joining 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion *in the field* on the 25<sup>th</sup>.



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

The re-union with his unit was apparently short-lived: less than a single day. Private Reid was admitted on that same October 25 into the 88<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance for what was soon determined to be an epileptic attack. Four days later, however, on the 29<sup>th</sup>, he was again back with his unit.



(Right: *a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)

A week after the encounter of October 9 at the *Broembek*, 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. It was here that Private Reid reported *to duty* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on October 29.

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.

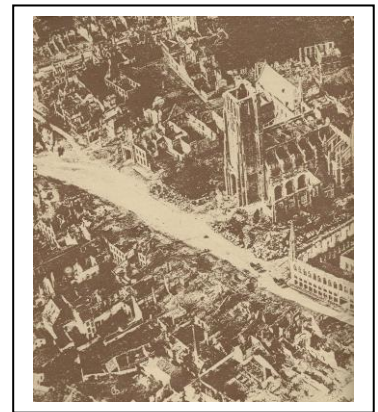
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The battle began well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered and by its close the British had relinquished as much territory as they had gained. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was again dealt 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*)

At the close of the *Battle of Cambrai*, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion – once again badly under-strength due to the heavy casualties incurred – had been withdrawn from the area of the front lines to re-enforce and to re-organize. The following weeks were spent at first to the south-west of the city of Arras, at Humbercourt and then at some distance to the north-west, at Fressin. The weather obliged and allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow, a bit too much at times, apparently.



In fact, it was during this period that Private Reid was elevated to the rank of lance corporal.

At the beginning of January of 1918, and after that snowy Christmas period spent to the west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were ordered 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.

(Above right: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

While the Allies built their defences, by the beginning of 1918 the Germans were preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them.



(Right above: *countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

(continued)

It was expected that the Germans would launch a spring offensive. While they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders continued to dig. That sense of urgency in the fields of Flanders notwithstanding, in the middle of March Lance Corporal Reid was granted a ten-day furlough back to the United Kingdom from where he sent a telegraph back home requesting money – five pounds to be exact.

Then the Germans did as was expected of them. Ludendorff's armies had already launched a powerful thrust on March 21, striking at first in the area of *the Somme*, overrunning the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while the advance seemed unstoppable.

(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)



A second offensive, *Georgette*, was then launched in the northern sector of the front, in Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders were stationed: the date was April 9. Within two days the situation of the Allies was desperate.

On, April 10, the day after the first heavy bombardments, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due at the time to come out of the line and move back to *the Somme* to stem the German flow there, boarded buses at three o'clock in the afternoon but then were suddenly directed southward, towards Nieppe. They were in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, three hours later.



(Right above: *the area of La 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 were pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

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



On April 13, during the defensive confrontation near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening - were equally heavily involved.

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



What exact role Lance Corporal Reid played is not known - it is recorded only that he was a soldier of 'B' Company - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's personnel.

Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.

On April 24, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 29<sup>th</sup> Division; it would later be deployed to another unit, but for the moment – and for most of the summer - it was to move a world away from the Front and take up residence on the west coast of France.

The following day was the occasion of a farewell parade complete with speeches from Brigadier-General Freyberg, and on the 29<sup>th</sup> the Newfoundlanders began their withdrawal, entraining in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étaples, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening. They still had a two-hour march to their new quarters.

By May 23, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was well-established at Écuire for it had been posted to the Headquarters of Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the recently-proclaimed *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* was no longer capable of serving in the field.

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

*\*Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that 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. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

The Regimental War Diary for the month of May of that 1918 is a litany of fine days – and occasional rain - and also of comings and goings of Battalion personnel. There is no mention of Lance Corporal Reid or of the fact that, on May 23, some of the men had gone swimming...

(continued)

**I was on Duty at the Railway Station at about 6.10 pm when it was reported to me that No 3160 L Cpl EC Reid 'B' Company, Royal Newfoundland Regiment had dived into the River and had not been seen afterwards.**

**- Supt. Military Police**

**A statement by #3778 Pte. E. Stickland: 'That at Montreuil on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1918 at about 6.30 p.m. I was bathing in the Canch. I swam across the river and called to L/Cpl. Reid to come over to me. He jumped in and when he came up he splashed about with his hands I thought he was fooling but when he went down again. I jumped in and swam to him catching hold of him by the wrist and started swimming to the bank. He pulled me under but I managed to hang on to him and bring him up again but I was unable to keep hold of him. I just had enough strength to get ashore myself. L/Cpl Reid told me he could swim a little.**

*Sgd. Peter Stickland*

The son of Alfred G. Reid, fisherman, and Asenath Reid (née *Simmons*) – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Green's Harbour, Trinity Bay, he was also brother to George, Mary-Ann and Sarah-Susie.



Lance Corporal Reid, non-commissioned officer of 'B' Company, *accidentally drowned* while bathing on May 23, 1918.

Ellwood Reid had enlisted at the age of twenty-one years and eight months (date of birth: 15/2/1895).

(Right above: *Étaples Military Cemetery is the last resting-place for just fewer than eleven thousand soldiers of the Great War and is the largest British Military Cemetery in France – photograph from 2011*)

Lance Corporal Ellwood Reid was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

