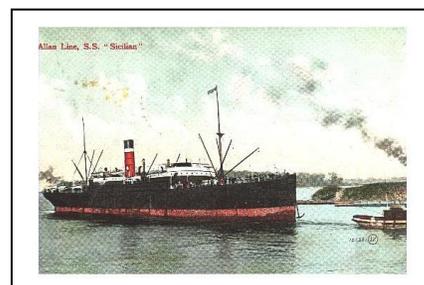




Private John Benjamin Ridgley (Regimental Number 2950) is buried in Duisans British Cemetery – Grave reference III. B. 6.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman earning four hundred dollars per annum, John Benjamin Ridgley was a recruit of the Tenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination on July 10 of 19126 at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road in St. John's, he also enlisted – engaged *for the duration of the war* at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – and attested on the same day.

It was the 28<sup>th</sup> of August before Private Ridgley embarked for passage to the United Kingdom and it was on His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right) that he was to make the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom. This was the third such voyage that the ship was to make in 1916, the Newfoundlanders likely sharing the vessel with Canadian personnel\*\*. He sailed as a soldier of 12<sup>th</sup> Platoon, Section 15, of 'C' Company of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion\*\*\*.



***\*Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War.***

***\*\*Sicilian had been re-fitted in 1906 to carry just under twelve-hundred passengers, thus her journey to St. John's in March of 1916 was likely followed by the short passage to Halifax to embark Canadian military personnel. Likewise, in July, she had sailed from Montreal on July 16 with Canadians to embark the Newfoundlanders awaiting passage overseas.***

***\*\*\*3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was based in St. John's, whereas 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion – 'E', 'F', 'G' and 'H' Companies - was stationed in the United Kingdom. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was the edge of the sword – 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies – and was posted to the front.***

Upon arrival in the United Kingdom, the ship docked in the south-coast naval port of Devonport from where the Newfoundlanders entrained for the journey north to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot where each newcomer was delegated to one of the four resident companies - and the where the somewhat confusing title of 'C' Company was abandoned.

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



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

At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been billeted at Newton Park School and either in the grandstand or in a tented camp at the racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr.



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

**(continued)**

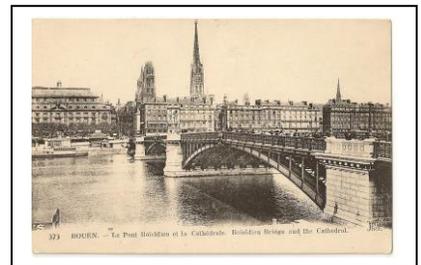
The 14<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Ridgley among that contingent - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on November 30 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front. The contingent disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, December 1, and spent time at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, in final training and organization\*, before making its way to a rendezvous with 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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Only two days having arrived in France, Private Ridgley was admitted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Stationary Hospital in Rouen needing medical attention for venereal disease. It was not until January 21 of the New Year, 1919, that he was discharged from there to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convalescent Depot. A mere two days afterwards, on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, he apparently returned to the same hospital before finally being released to Base Depot at Rouen on February 9.



(Right above: *the River Seine flowing through the French port-city of Rouen – with the spires of its venerable gothic cathedral showing – at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

On and about March 6 was a busy time at the Army Camp near to the community of Meaulté, there being a number of arrivals: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had itself only just arrived the day before, having been withdrawn from the fighting at Sailly-Saillisel; and on March 6, a draft of a single officer and thirty-one *other ranks* from Rouen – Private Ridgley one of that number – also reported *to duty*.

For the Newfoundlanders, the month of March was to prove to be a quiet period\*. Having departed from the trenches, they spent their time near the community of Meaulté re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even enjoyed the novelty of a visit from the Regimental Band from Scotland - as of that same March 6 - and a second, from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris (right), on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



*\*Apart from the sharp action at Sailly-Saillisel at the beginning of the month after which the Newfoundlanders had retired to Meaulté.*

On March 29, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, the march to end in the remnants of a village by the name of Monchy-le-Preux.

(Right: *the rubble of the Grande Place in the city of Arras at the time of the Great War – from Illustration*)



On April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties it was the most expensive operation of the War for the British, its only positive episode being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday. The French offensive was a disaster.



(Right above: *the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

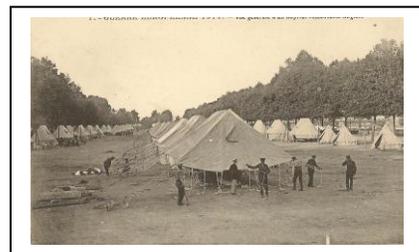
1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part in the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at a place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, Monchy-le-Preux was to prove the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 alone.



(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen, almost a century later, 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*)

It was on April 14, while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux, that Private Ridgley was wounded, suffering injuries by gun-fire to his chest. He was evacuated from the field and taken to the 8<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Agnez-les-Duisans.

(Right: *a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card*)



The son of Joseph Ridgley, fisherman, and Mary E. Ridgley – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Little Bay West, Fortune Bay, he was also brother to Thomas, Daisy G., and William Aaron.

(continued)

Private Ridgley was reported as having *died of wounds* on April 16, 1917, in the same 8<sup>th</sup> CCS. At home, it was the Reverend G. S. Templeton of Belleoram who was requested to bear the news to his family.

John Benjamin Ridgley had enlisted at the age of twenty-one years and four months.



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

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



The Dept. – Malitia  
St – John's  
Nfld

Little Bay West  
June 21 19

Dear Sir:- Yours to hand and would be pleased to get my galliant sons grave fixed as your letter says. My sons Name. Was. Ptr. John. B. Ridgely No 2850. First Newfoundland Regiment C. Company Died 16<sup>th</sup> April 1917. Would be Pleased to get this forwarded at Once. And get the Photograph at their Earliest Convenience.

I am yours  
Truly.  
Mr. Joseph Ridgely  
Little Bay West  
Via Harbor Briton