



Private Neville Samson (Regimental Number 3544), 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 earning an annual \$300.00, Neville Samson was a recruit – and also a *Coaker* recruit* - of the Fourteenth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on March 16, 1917, also enlisting - engaged for the duration of the war at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10** per diem – and 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 – although there were several exceptions to this rule – and sixty-nine young men enlisted, to become known as Coaker Recruits. Ten of them died in service.*

***One dollar was his daily pay plus a ten-cent field allowance.*

Private Samson was not to depart from Newfoundland for overseas service until May 19, 1917, when the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) left en route to Halifax. His contingent of three officers and one-hundred eighty-two other ranks, and also ninety-nine recruits of the newly-formed Newfoundland Forestry Unit, then left Nova Scotia for the United Kingdom on board an unspecified* vessel, on May 29.



**The ship in question may well have been the White Star liner Olympic (right) – sister ship to Titanic – requisitioned as a troop transport during the war, which sailed on June 2 from Halifax with Canadian military personnel as well – there are no other departures on or about this date. May 29 may have been the date of embarkation by the Newfoundland contingent.*



Arriving in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on June 9 the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr* had already been in existence as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were to be despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of the 1st Battalion.



(Previous page: *an aerial view of Ayr – most likely 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*)

Private Samson did not spend all the summer at Ayr – or Barry*, to where the Regimental Depot was transferred, temporarily, as it transpired – as he was hospitalized for two weeks. Suffering from ICT (*Inflammation of the Connective Tissues*) of the left hand, he was admitted for treatment into the Dundee War Hospital from July 30(?) to August 13.

**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was 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.*

It was not to be until November 6, 1917, that Private Samson took ship again; on this occasion he was on his way to the Continent, passing through the English south-coast port of Southampton as one of the one-hundred eleven *other ranks* of the 32nd Draft from Ayr. The Newfoundlanders disembarked in Rouen on the following day and made their way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot there for a few days of final training and organizing* before making their way to a rendezvous with the 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops 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.*

By that time, the 1st Battalion had been withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign, on October 17, in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: the *1st Battle of Cambrai*. It had been ordered back south from Belgium into northern France to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of Berles-au-Bois, a rural community a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of Arras.



(Right above: *The City Hall of Arras and its bell-tower looked like this by the spring of 1918 after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery. – from a vintage post-card*)

It was there that, on November 14, four officers and one-hundred forty-one *other ranks* – one of them Private Samson – reported from Rouen *to duty* with 1st Battalion.

That new offensive, 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.



(Right: In 1917 the British formed the Tank Corps, a force which became ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again 'somewhere in France' – from *Illustration*)

The 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.



(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)

The son of Thomas Edward Samson, and Martha Jane Samson (née *Hancock*) to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Flat Island, Bonavista Bay, he was also brother to Albert-Edward, Soloman (sic), Donald, Edwin, Willis, Gilbert, Francis and to Hyacinth-Mollie, his only sister*.

Private Samson was at first reported as *missing in action* on December 3, 1917, during the fighting retreat near Marcoing.



However, a subsequent official German list, dated March 14, 1918, forwarded to London through the offices of the *Geneva Red Cross*, reported the identification and then burial of Private Samson in the German military cemetery at Seranvilles*. His personal file was thus amended so as to read *killed in action 3/12/17*.

Neville Samson had enlisted at the age of nineteen years.

**It is possible that this cemetery was later destroyed in subsequent fighting. Apparently it has never been identified.*

(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 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether this was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012)



(The photograph of Private Samson is from the *Provincial Archives*.)

(Preceding page: *The sacrifice of Private Neville Samson is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Eastport.* – photograph from 2013)

Private Neville Samson was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

**The information about Private Neville's family – which corrected some earlier errors – was kindly provided by his great-niece, Pamela Butler. My sincere thanks to her for her contribution to this site.*



Flat Island
Bonavista Bay
Jan. 26th 1918

Admiralty
London. S.W.

My son Neville Samson No. 3544 of Newfoundland Regiment has been missing since December 3rd 1917. Failing to locate him by making enquiries by our Newfoundland Authorities it may be that my son is alive in some German prison, and your exertions to find him may meet with success and consequently dispell (sic) great anxiety.

Yours very sincerely
Thomas E. Samson

Return Address Thomas E. Samson
 Flat Island
 Bonavista Bay
 Newfoundland