

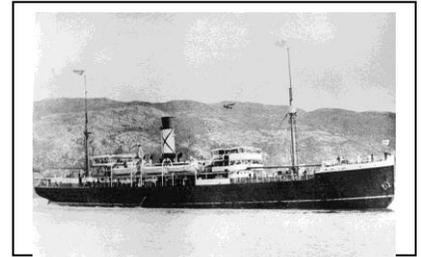
SAUNDERS, J.

Private Abner John Saunders (Regimental Number 3577), 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 \$800.00, John Saunders was a recruit of the Fourteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on April 10, 1917, he then enlisted - engaged *for the duration of the war* at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem - and also attested on that same day.



Private Saunders was not to depart from Newfoundland for overseas service until May 19, 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 being despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.



(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*)

(continued)

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

By that time, 1st Battalion had been withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign, on October 17, in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: *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.

It was there that, on November 14, four officers and one-hundred forty-one *other ranks* – one of them Private Saunders – 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. 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*)

The son of James Saunders, fisherman, and of Sarah Anne Saunders (née *Sweetapple*) – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Glovertown, Alexander Bay, he was also brother to George, to Giles, to Jessie E., Jane, Lillian and to Harriett.



Private Saunders was reported as *missing in action* on December 3, 1917, during the fighting retreat near Marcoing and Masnières. Some thirty weeks later, on July 1, 1918, he was officially *presumed dead*.

Abner John Saunders had enlisted at the age of twenty-three years and three months (date of birth: October 29, 1893).

(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*)



(Right: *The War Memorial in Glovertown honours the sacrifice of Private Saunders. – photograph from 2013*)

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



Pay & Record Office
London:-

Glovertown
July 5th/18

Dear Sir:-

To my regret I received a message from St. John's yesterday saying my dear son is presumed to be dead. I imagine it is an answer to my letter of recent date.

(continued)

I feel very thankful for your interest in my case but still I am not fully convinced that he is gone as the message said:- presumed dead.

Should you at any time you hear anything, or trace his whereabouts I shall be more than thankful for such information.

I feel it so very much and it seems oh so hard! To realize that he is numbered with the slain.

Any information of any kind would be comforting to my mind.

Trusting to hear something true of him at a later date, and again thanking you for past favours,

I remain

Yours sincerely

Mrs. James Saunders

Glovertown

Alex. Bay

Bonavista Bay