

SENIOR . R.

Private Ralph Senior (Regimental Number 2880), 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 \$400.00, Ralph Senior was a recruit of the Tenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on June 15 of 1916, he also enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on that same day before attesting a day later, on June 16.

It was the 28th of August when Private Senior embarked for passage to the United Kingdom and it was on board 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**. Private Senior was a soldier of Section 12, Platoon 11, 'C' (Reserve) Company of 3rd Battalion (see *** below), and one of a draft of two-hundred forty-two personnel from Newfoundland in all.

**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.*

****3rd Battalion was based in St. John's, whereas 2nd (Reserve) Battalion – 'E', 'F', 'G' and 'H' Companies - was stationed in the United Kingdom. 1st 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 2nd (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 1st Battalion.



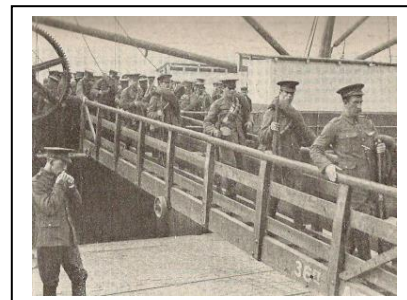
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-upon Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

During the winter of 1915-1916 the men of the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been lodged in several venues, at a nearby military camp at Gales, but also as far afield as Paisley Barracks, some sixty-five kilometres distant. However, by the spring of 1916 the difficulty had been overcome by housing the men in a requisitioned school, in a tented community and in the Ayr Racecourse Grandstand, all in the district of Newton-upon-Ayr.



(Right above: *the new race-course at 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*)

The 14th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Senior among its ranks - 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. It 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 1st Battalion.



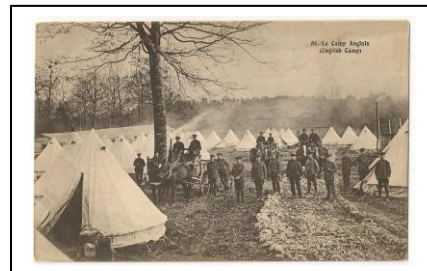
(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

**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.*

When that rendezvous was effected it was late in the day of December 11 – which is likely why it is recorded in the Regimental War Diary as occurring on the 12th. The parent unit had retired from the front on December 8, but many of the men had been seconded for work at Carnoy and Fricourt.

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Those spared had marched on to Méricourt l'Abbé which is where the one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Base Depot – Private Senior among that number - reported *to duty*. The newcomers were just in time for the six-week Christmas period to be spent well behind the lines in *Corps Reserve*, encamped near the city of Amiens.



(Right: a typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card)

After that Christmas respite, 1st Battalion *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23 of the New Year, 1917, although they had already been back in the trenches for several days and had suffered their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

The next five weeks were little different from those before Christmas: in and out of the trenches, the occasional dead, wounded and ill, and the occasional cold winter's day with its snow and ice - which did not seem to bother the Newfoundlanders.

Anything was better than rain and mud.

The only infantry activity involving 1st Battalion during that entire period – from the action in mid-October of 1916 at Gueudecourt, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action which brought this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.



(Above right: *The fighting during the time of the Battalion's posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time.* - photograph from 2009(?))

After the infantry affair at Sailly-Saillisel, the month of March was a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris (right), the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



On March 29, 1st 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, on to the village of Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right: *the remnants of the Grande Place in the city of Arras in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

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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.

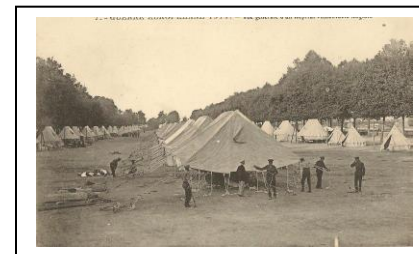
(Above right: *the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

1st 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 to be 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 today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community. The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

It was on April 14 at Monchy-le-Preux that Private Senior evacuated into the 19th Casualty Clearing Station at Agnez-les-Duisans, at first reported as *wounded*, a report later amended to that of suffering from an only recently-recognized – and often misunderstood - phenomenon: shell-shock*.



**It was often classified as LMF (Lack of Moral Fibre) or sometimes more charitably as NYD (Not Yet Determined) – which is what briefly happened in Private Senior's case.*

(Right above: *a British casualty clearing station – the one here pictured under canvas for mobility if or when necessary – being established somewhere of the Continent – from a vintage post-card*)

On April 17, Private Senior was transferred to the 6th Stationary Hospital at Frévent where he was to remain for just over two weeks until his discharge *to duty* – most likely to Base Depot at Rouen – on May 3. One document has him reporting *to duty* with 1st Battalion on May 3, directly from hospital, while a second source cites him as returning to his unit four days later, on the 7th – although the Regimental War Diary appears not record either event.

On the former date 1st Battalion was billeted in Arras; on the latter, the Newfoundlanders had just marched ten kilometres or so from Arras to the community of Berneville where they were then billeted for a week (see photograph below).

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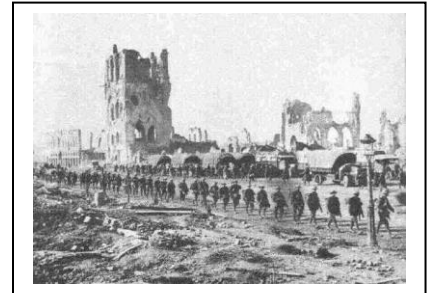
In contrast to that hard fighting at Monchy-le-Preux in April, May of 1917 was to be a period when the Newfoundlanders were ordered hither and thither on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches. Apart from the ever-present artillery, there was to be little infantry activity – except for the marching.

(Right: *Newfoundland troops on the march in the community of Berneville in early May of 1917 – from *The War Illustrated**)



At the beginning of June, 1st Battalion retired from the line to Bonneville and spent its time re-enforcing, re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

The Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion were once again ordered north into Belgium – at the end of June - 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**)

1st 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.



(Above 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.

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. 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 above: *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*)

On the first day, November 20, of the fighting at Masnières and Marcoing, Private Senior was once more wounded and on the following day was admitted for treatment to injuries to a leg and to his right thigh, into the 37th Field Ambulance. It may be that it was directly from the 60th FA that, on November 23, he was invalided onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. George* (right) for the cross-Channel voyage back to the United Kingdom.



Having been disembarked in England, Private Senior was immediately transferred to the New End Military Hospital at Hampstead on the outskirts of London and admitted on the 24th. There he remained for treatment and convalescence – the latter part of this period apparently spent at the Garden Suburb Auxiliary Hospital, Golders Green, in northern London - until January 5 of the New Year, 1918, when he was released and granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded to military personnel upon discharge from hospital in the United Kingdom.

It was a furlough that he spent in London during which time he apparently managed to lose his kit-bag and all its contents.

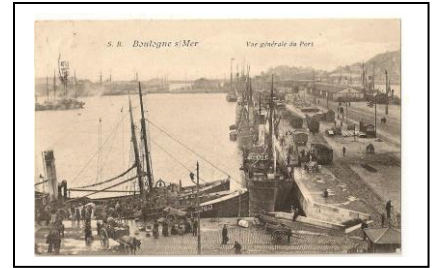
After this period of leave Private Senior next reported *to duty* to the 11th Command Depot on January 15, thence to the 7th Command Depot at Ripon in eastern England on January 21. There he remained for three months before moving in early May to the new Regimental Depot at Hazely Down.

2nd (Reserve) Battalion had by that time moved quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer had been finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was there that Private Senior would have been stationed during the summer of that year when he received orders to re-join the British Expeditionary Force.



(Right above: *a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from The War Illustrated*)

Reporting to Hazely Down from Ripon on May 24, it was not until the last day of August that Private Senior – now a soldier of the 51st Re-enforcement Draft, from Hazely Down – embarked in the English Channel port of Folkestone and sailed for the Continent. Disembarking in Boulogne on the same day only hours later, Private Senior reported to duty with 1st Battalion only 5 days later, on September 5.



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

More than some four months earlier, on April 24, 1st Battalion had said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of the three previous years, 88th Brigade and 29th Division. It would later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 it was to move a world away from Flanders where it had just fought during the crisis of the German spring offensive, to be stationed on the west coast of France. On April 29, the Newfoundlanders took train in Belgium for Étaples, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening.

The summer of 1918 was to pass peaceably enough for most of the personnel of 1st Battalion. For the months of May, June and until early July, the unit had been posted to Écuire, to the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



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

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

**Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that 1st Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before a battalion of even reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

The posting to Écuire completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders were encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihe – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.



(Right: *a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihe at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

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The Newfoundlanders returned to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28th Brigade of 9th Scottish Division. 1st Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today *Ingooigem*).



(Right: *British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days – from Illustration*)

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2nd British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive**. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge. After almost four years of stalemate, it was once again a conflict of movement.

**This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3rd Somme.*

The advance, despite fierce resistance at times, was relentless. On the night of October 19-20, 1st Battalion crossed the Lys Canal under fire just to the east of Courtrai – today Kortrijk - on barrel bridges and on the morrow was advancing towards the village of Vichte.



(Right: *the Lys – both canal and river – at a point not far from the crossing-place – right to left - of October 19-20, 1918 - The Harlebeke Caribou stands about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right below: *The Caribou at Harlebeke, standing today at a busy cross-roads, commemorates the crossing of the Lys Canal and the sacrifices of the last campaign of the War. – photograph from 2012*)

The son of William Henry Senior and Jane Eliza Senior (née *Joyce*) – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Flat Island, Placentia Bay – also found in some Burin District records, he was also brother to Flora, to George William, to Levenia (sic) and to Heber-Ernest.



Private Senior was reported as *missing in action* on October 25, 1918, while serving with 'D' Company during fighting between the Belgian villages of Vichte and Inghoyghem (today Ingooigem). Some thirty weeks later, on May 22, 1919, he was officially *presumed dead*.

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Ralph Senior had enlisted at the age of nineteen years and six months.

(Right: The Newfoundlanders' furthest point of advance was to about this spot on October 25/26 – just outside and south of Inghoyghem - from where they were overlooking the valley of the River Scheldt. That evening they retired from battle – and the War. – photograph from 2010)



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

