

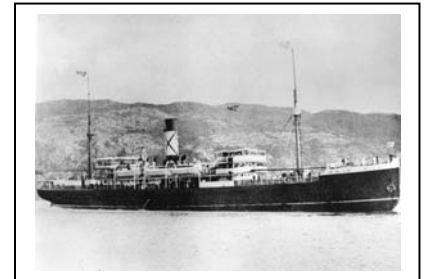


Private James Joseph Collins (Regimental Number 567), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.



His employment prior to military service recorded as being that of a labourer working for \$1.50 per day, James Collins enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of \$1.10 - on September 21, 1914, being recruited during the First Draft.

Attesting some two weeks later, on October 3, he then embarked on that same day onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right – courtesy of *Admiralty House Museum*). The ship set sail on the following day, the 4th, in order to join the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas. The Newfoundlanders arrived in the south-coast English port of Devonport on October 14 and then sat on board the ship until the 20th.



Having disembarked in the United Kingdom, Private Collins trained with the Battalion: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland at Fort George (right); at Edinburgh Castle; and for some three months at Stobs Camp near the Scottish town of Hawick.



(Far right above: *The Newfoundland Regiment parades at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915.* – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

At the beginning of August, Private Collins was transferred with the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', to southern England, to Aldershot, for some two weeks of final training and a royal inspection in preparation for active service at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea at Gallipoli.

'E' and 'F' Companies, the last arrivals, were instead sent to the new Regimental Depot. There they were to form the nucleus of the newly-formed 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

It was while at Aldershot that, on August 13, Private Collins was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion for the *duration of the war**.

****At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.***

On August 20, 1915, Private Collins took ship on board the requisitioned passenger liner *Megantic* (right above) for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting in Gallipoli where, a month later – of which two weeks had been spent billeted at the British barracks at Abbassia, near the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, 1st Battalion landed on the beach at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

(Right: Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros, either *Megantic* on August 29, *Ausonia* on September 18, or *Prince Abbas* on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on Gallipoli. – from Provincial Archives)

(Right: ‘Kangaroo Beach’, where the men of 1st Battalion landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on ‘A’ Beach. – photograph from 2011)

(Right: a century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where Private Collins served during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

On the night of December 19-20, the British abandoned their positions and withdrew from Suvla Bay, the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, forming a part of the rear-guard for the occasion. Two days later, 1st Battalion was transferred two days later to Cape Helles on the western tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula. They were soon, on the night of January 8-9, to be abandoning Cape Helles as well.

(Right: Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed *Achi Baba*, positions which were never breached. The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011)

(Right: ‘W’ Beach at Cape Helles as it was days before the final British evacuation – from *Illustration*)

(continued)



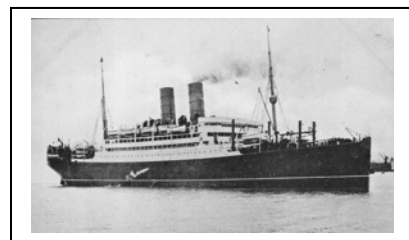
(Right: 'W' Beach almost a century after its abandonment by British forces and by the Newfoundlanders who were the last soldiers to leave the beach: vestiges of the wharves in the black-and-white picture above are still to be seen – photograph from 2011)



(Right below: The British destroy their supplies during the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The Newfoundlanders, employed as the rear-guard, were among the last to leave on two occasions. – photograph taken from the battleship Cornwallis from Illustration)



When the British evacuated the entire Gallipoli Peninsula in January of 1916, 1st Battalion was sent to Alexandria, arriving there on the 15th of that month. From there the Newfoundlanders were transferred, almost immediately, south to Suez where they were to await further orders. To that point it seems that the theatre of the future posting of 29th Division was still uncertain.



On March 14, the officers and men of 1st Battalion embarked through Port Tewfiq at the southern end of the Suez Canal onto His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia* for the voyage to the French Mediterranean port of Marseilles, en route to the *Western Front*.



(Right above: The ship on which the personnel of the Newfoundland Regiment travelled was sunk after hitting a mine on October 19, 1916. The photograph of the vessel is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

(Right above: A tranquil Port Tewfiq at some time just before the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

(Right: British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles. – from a vintage post-card)

Some three days after the unit's disembarkation on March 22, the Battalion's train arrived at the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy. It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for them travelling unused in a separate wagon. De-training at the station at two in the morning the Newfoundlanders still had a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l'Abbé.



It is doubtful that any of those tired soldiers paid much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge that they passed on their way from the station. Some three months later *the Somme* would be a part of their history.

(Right: *the Somme seen from the bridge at Pont-Rémy as it passes through the community – photograph from 2010*)

On April 13, 1st Battalion entered into the village of Englebelmer – three kilometres behind the lines and perhaps some fifty kilometres in all distant from Pont-Rémy – where the Newfoundlanders were billeted, welcomed re-enforcements on the 15th and, on the evening of that same day, were introduced into the British lines of the *Western Front*, there to be immediately set to work to improve the communication trenches.

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for that same meandering river, *the Somme*.

(Right: *A part of the re-constructed trench system in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)

Private Collins was one of the many to be wounded at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*. On the following day, July 2, he was taken to the 87th Field Ambulance near the village of Mailly-Maillet, suffering from gun-shot wounds to his left thigh, part of a projectile having passed through it.

(Right: *A further area of the reconstituted battle-field at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007*)

From the 87th FA Private Collins was transferred on the same day, July 2, to an unspecified casualty clearance station from where – here it is the *date* that seems not to be recorded – he was eventually forwarded to the 1st General Hospital in the coastal town of Etretat.

Further documentation cites Private Collins having been placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Asturias* (right above) and transferred to England on July 9. On the 11th he was admitted to the Military Hospital in Endell Street, London, for further treatment.



Upon his discharge from hospital – a medical board suggesting that he would be once more fit for overseas service in three months' time - he was granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded to military personnel upon release from hospital. This leave commenced on August 23, a period that he apparently* spent in Scotland, staying at the Waverley Hotel in Edinburgh, where troops were offered special rates. From there Private Collins was posted to 'H' Company at the Regimental Depot, reporting *to duty* there on September 2.



(Right above: *The photograph of the Waverly Hotel in the Scottish capital is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

**There is also evidence suggesting that Private Collins received a railway pass for the journey from Folkestone, on the Channel coast, to Ayr, on September 9, and that he may have reported to duty on the 13th, four days later again.*

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

On February 14, 1917, five months after his arrival at Ayr, Private Collins was on his way to the Western Front as a soldier of the 18th Re-enforcement Draft, embarking through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the large British Expeditionary Base at Rouen, the capital city of Normandy. His unit disembarked there on the next day, the 15th, making its way to the Base for final training* and organization before moving on 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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

(continued)

It was on March 6 that Private Collins reported to duty with 1st Battalion in the village of Meaulté. His draft of one officer and thirty-one other ranks were not the only arrivals on that day: the Regimental Band had also made the journey from Ayr.

(Right: Some six months after its visit to 1st Battalion in March of 1917, the Battalion Band on parade in the Chelsea Barracks in London at some time in September, led by the Regimental mascot, Sable – photograph from Provincial Archives)



The Newfoundlanders had officially returned to active service after a six-week Christmas reprieve on January 23, although they had been back in the trenches already just before that date and had incurred their first casualties of the New Year.

The only infantry activity involving 1st Battalion during the entire period – from mid-October, 1916, until April – yet to come - of 1917, some five weeks after Private Collins return – had been the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and beginning of March, an action which brought this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of the Somme - to a close.



1st Battalion had arrived at Meaulté from the area of Sailly-Saillisel on only the day before Private Collins arrival on the 6th. Sailly-Saillisel had been a small-scale action, nothing like Beaumont-Hamel or Gueudecort, but it had been intense, lasting three days and nights.

(Right above: 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 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 that 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, their march to finish amid the rubble of the village of Monchy-le-Preux.

(Right: the remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras at the time of the Great War – from Illustration)



(continued)

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, one of the few positive episode being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday, and later Canadian efforts.



While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive was a disaster.

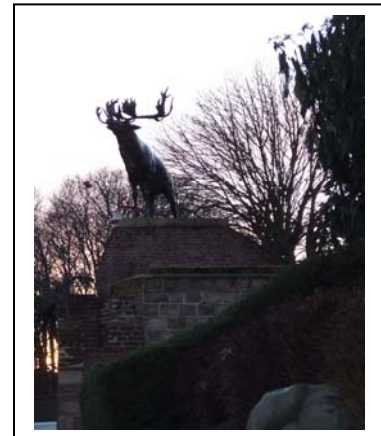
(Right above: *the Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

The 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 the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, all told suffering four-hundred eighty-seven casualties.



(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 of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

The son of John Robert Collins, lobster fisherman and official for His Majesty's Customs (apparently deceased between the time of his son's enlistment and that of the 1921 census), and Elizabeth Collins (née *Bruce*) of Jersey Side, Placentia, he was also brother to Francis-Peter (see below), to John-Joseph, to Sarah-Joseph, to Albert, to Cyril, and to Francis J. who died in infancy. As well, he was nephew to Mrs. A. Harvey of 128, George Street, St. John's, to whom he had allotted a weekly four dollars from his pay.



Private Collins was reported *missing in action* while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting of April 14 at Monchy-le-Preux. Some thirty weeks later, on November 17, he was officially *presumed dead*.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands in the centre of the village on top of the vestiges of a German strong-point. – photograph from 2012*)

However, a subsequent report of the discovery, the identification and then interment of his remains on or about July 2, 1917, was submitted by the Burial Officer of VI Corps. Private Collin's record was thus amended so as to read *killed in action 14/4/17*.

(continued)

James Joseph Collins had enlisted at age eighteen – date of birth, August 16, 1896.

His brother, Lieutenant Francis Peter Collins, was also killed during the Great War, while serving with the Canadian Pioneers, on July 23, 1917. He is buried – his grave shown to the right - in Aix-Noulette Communal Cemetery Extension. A second brother also served with the Canadians and survived the conflict*.

**Variously documented as Sapper and Driver, John Joseph Collins as a driver served with the 1st Section of the 5th (Canadian) Division Ammunition Column at Witley Camp in the English county of Surrey. Unless transferred to another Division, Driver (Sapper) Collins did not see action on the Continent, as the 5th Canadian Division remained in England.*

(Right: The Placentia War Memorial honours the sacrifice of Private Collins and of Lieutenant Collins. – photograph from 2013)

(The photograph of Private Collins is by courtesy of the Grand Banks Genealogy web-site.)

Private James Joseph Collins was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).

