



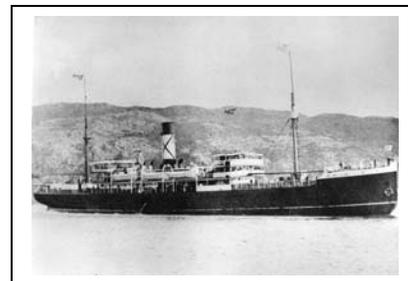
Private William James Healey* (Regimental Number 2984) is interred in Dadizeele New British Cemetery – Grave reference VI. D. 5.

**According to a family source, the name has today reverted to Haley.*

His occupation prior to military service that of an office clerk earning a monthly fifteen dollars, William James Healey was a recruit of the Twelfth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John’s on July 24 of 1916, he then both enlisted *for the duration of hostilities* – engaged at the private soldier’s rate of \$1.10 per diem - and attested on the following day, July 25th.

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Private Healey was one of the approximately three hundred twenty *all ranks* to leave St. John's for *overseas service* on the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel*, bound for Halifax, on January 31, 1917, from there to take ship to the United Kingdom.



(Right above: *The photograph of Florizel is by courtesy of the Admiralty House Museum in Mount Pearl.*)

Immediately upon its arrival in Nova Scotia, however, this detachment was forwarded to accommodation in the town of Windsor where it was soon to be quarantined because of an epidemic of measles and mumps.

It was not before a lapse of some two-and-a-half months since its arrival that transport could be arranged for the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom for the so-called *Windsor Draft* – minus the twenty-five or so personnel still unable to travel.

On April 17, Private Healey embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Northland* – originally the Dutch ship *Zeeland* - one of the three ships carrying the Newfoundland Contingent which sailed on the following day in a convoy from Halifax. The three were carrying Canadian re-enforcements to the English west-coast port of Liverpool, where the ships docked on April 29.



(Right above: *The photograph of the SS Northland is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-site.*)

Private Healey and his draft were not to travel alone on *Northland*. Taking passage on the vessel were also Canadian troops: a part of the 210th Battalion; the entire 229th Battalion; Part 1 of the 232nd Battalion; and the Nova Scotia Company of the 256th Battalion. All were units of Canadian Infantry.

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



By the time that the Windsor Draft arrived at the Regimental Depot, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was becoming critically short of personnel.

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

On June 11, 1917, the 25th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Healey in its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to France. On the following day, June 12, the contingent disembarked in the Norman capital, Rouen, where time was spent at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, to be organized and to undergo final training* before moving onward to its eventual rendezvous with 1st Battalion.

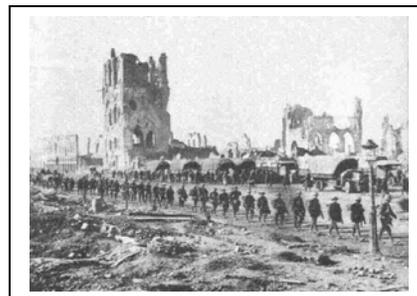


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

**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, Le Havre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

The records show that it was on July 2 – the *Regimental War Diary* says, in fact, on the day before - that Private Healey's contingent of two-hundred fifty *other ranks* reported to duty at Caribou Camp, behind the lines near Woesten in Belgium. For the next few days – and nights – 1st Battalion supplied working parties for road-mending and for the construction of infantry tracks.

Only days before, at the end of June, the Newfoundlanders of the 1st Battalion had once again moved north into Belgium 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*)

On September 27, only two days after having moved up to the front lines for the first time, Private Healey was admitted into the 87th Field Ambulance for treatment to a gun-shot wound to the scalp. On that same day he was then forwarded to the 14th Corps Rest Station where he remained for one week. Presumably the injury had not been a severe one, because his next stop, on October 4, was back to *duty* with 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *a British field ambulance – this one of a more permanent nature than some – in eastern France towards the end of the conflict – from a vintage post-card*)

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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.

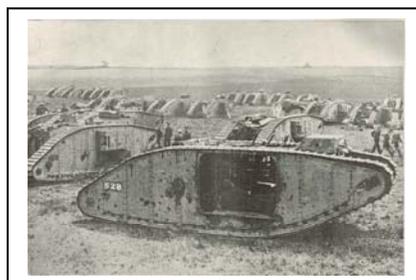


(Right: *an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

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.

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: *The Tank Corps had been formed in July of 1917 and would eventually comprise twenty-five Battalions – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)

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*)

In the meantime, in early December of 1917, at the close of the *Battle of Cambrai*, 1st Battalion – once again badly under-strength due to the heavy casualties incurred – had been withdrawn from the area of the front lines to re-enforce and to re-organize. The following weeks were spent at first to the south-west of the city of Arras, at Humbercourt and then at some distance to the north-west, at Fressin. The weather obliged and allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow, a bit too much at times, apparently.



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(Previous page: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

At the beginning of January of 1918, and after that snowy Christmas period spent to the west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion returned to Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time.

There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.

While the Allies built their defences, by the beginning of 1918 the Germans were preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them.

It was expected that the Germans would launch a spring offensive. While they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders continued to dig.

(Right: *countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)



Then the Germans did as was expected of them. Ludendorff's armies had already launched a powerful thrust on March 21, striking at first in the area of *the Somme*, overrunning the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while the advance seemed unstoppable.



Then a second offensive, *Georgette*, was launched in the northern sector of the front, in Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders were stationed: the date was April 9. Within two days the situation of the Allies was desperate.

(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

Only three days prior to the German onslaught, on April 6, the 42nd (or 43rd) Reinforcement Draft from Hazely Down passed through Southampton on its way to the Continent. Less time than usual was spent at the Base Depot in Rouen as the Allied military situation grew more and more precarious. The new-comers were hurried north, to report *to duty* on April 13.

On, April 10, the day after the first heavy bombardments, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due at the time to come out of the line and move back to *the Somme* to stem the German flow there, boarded buses at three o'clock in the afternoon but then were suddenly directed southward, towards Nieppe.



They were in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, three hours later.

(Preceding page: *the area of La Crêche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station – photograph from 2010.*)

The British were pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12th of April, the 1st Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of desperate stands.

(Right: *ground just to the east of Bailleul where 1st Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)



On April 13, during the defensive confrontation near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening - were equally heavily involved.



(Right above: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving 1st Battalion on April 12 -14, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

What exact role Private Healey played is not known (but see paragraph below) - it is only recorded that he was a soldier of 'A' Company - however, from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1st Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally was stabilised.

The Regimental War Diary cites *...the remainder of 'C' Coy. under Capt. Paterson, M.C. and Hqrs. took up a position along a light railway line and prepared to fight to a finish. ...there can be no doubt that it was Hqrs., 'A' & 'C' Coys. that by their resistance saved what would have been at least a very serious position for the whole 34th Division*.*

**88th Brigade – therefore 1st Battalion – was seconded from 29th Division to the 34th Division during this critical period.*

On April 24, 1st Battalion said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of 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.

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The summer of 1918 was to pass peaceably enough for the majority 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. – from Illustration*)



The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 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 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 above: *a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihe at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

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 *Ingoogem*).



(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 – including the entire Canadian Corps - near Amiens in what would also become known as 3rd Somme.*

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The son of John Thomas Healey*, baker with *A.H. Harvey & Co.*, and Jane Moriah Healey (née *Perin*) – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of 39, Merrymeeting Road in St. John's (formerly of Topsail), he was also brother to at least Clare-Florence (*Clara*), Thomas-George, Rita-Mildred and Enid-Violet (*Eva* in the 1921 Census).

**At the time of his son's baptism in Topsail, John Healey was recorded as being a farmer. Three years before Private Healey's enlistment, there was only a single Healey of Merrymeeting Road registered in the 1913 Business Directory, this citing John Healey employed as above.*

Private Healey was reported as having been *killed in action* near the village of Ledeghem, Belgium, on October 3, 1918 while serving with 'A' Company. At home, it was the Reverend J. Brinton of *Clergy House* who was requested to bear the news to his family.

(Right: *almost a century later, the re-constructed village of Ledeghem, Belgium* – photograph from 2010)



Private Healey's remains were originally buried in the German Military Cemetery of Waterdamhoek to the south-east of Passchendaele, from where they were later transferred to where they repose today.

William James Healey (*Healy* in the copy of Topsail Parish Records) had apparently enlisted at the age of sixteen years and two months: birth date May 7, 1900. He had declared his age as being *eighteen* years and two months. His date of birth at St. John's (from the copy of Topsail Parish Records), Newfoundland, May 7, 1900.

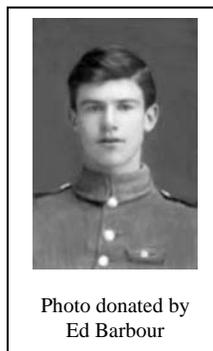


Photo donated by Ed Barbour

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

Private William James Healey was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

