

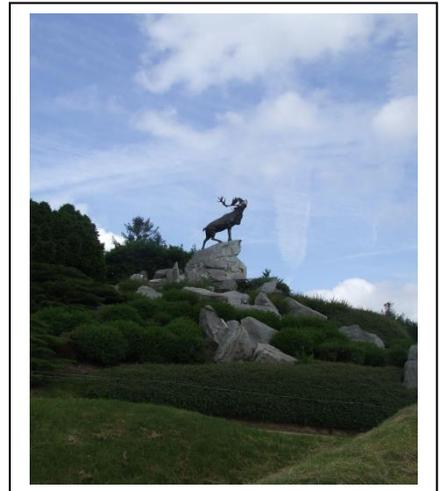


Lance Corporal Edward George Starks (Regimental Number 2559), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman earning an annual \$400.00, Edward George Starks was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on April 20, 1916, he enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on the same April 20, and then attested two days later, on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

*\*A second document records him attesting on the day of his enlistment.*

Private Starks sailed from St. John's on July 19 on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right). The ship - refitted some ten years previously to carry well over one thousand passengers - had left the Canadian port of Montreal on July 16, carrying Canadian military personnel.



It is likely that the troops disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool; however, it is *certain* that upon disembarkation the contingent journeyed north by train to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot.

*\*Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport during another conflict, carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War.*

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 the base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 1<sup>st</sup> 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*)

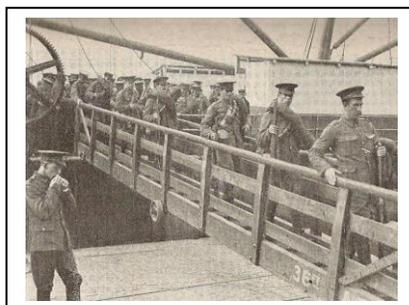
At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been billeted at Newton Park School and either in the grandstand or in a tented camp at the racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr.



(Right above: *the new race-course at Newton-upon-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 – photograph from 2012*)

The 12<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Starks among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 11 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front.

The contingent disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, October 12, 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right: *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.

Private Starks' contingent comprised a single officer and two-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* by the time it reported to duty at the Bernafay Wood Camp on October 22. Still in the area of Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been relieved in the front line three days before, on the 19<sup>th</sup>.



(Right: *Bernafay Wood a century later – not being close to the front lines, the wood may well have resembled what is seen here – photograph from 2014*)

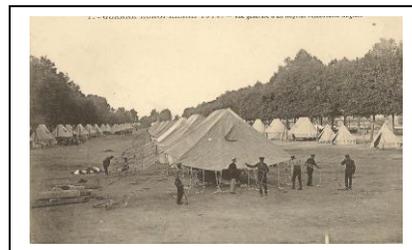
After the episode of October 12 at Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had remained in the same area of *the Somme* and was regularly into and out of the trenches. There were no infantry engagements, but the incessant artillery action ensured a steady stream of casualties.

The Newfoundlanders would be withdrawn from active service on or about December 12 and were to spend the following six weeks or so encamped well behind the lines and close to the city of Amiens.



(Preceding page: a *British encampment somewhere on the Continent, apparently during the winter season* – from a vintage post-card)

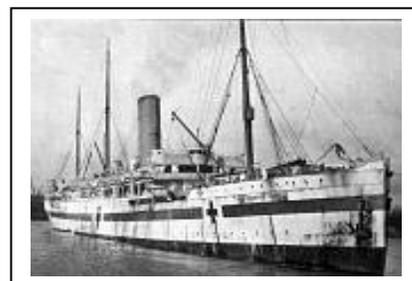
On December 13, however, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was still in the throes of retiring from the front-line positions to the rear and to *Corps Reserve* in which capacity it would spend the Christmas interlude. It was on that day that Private Starks was admitted into the 14<sup>th</sup> Camp Rest Station with ICT (*Inflammation of Connective Tissue*) of the third finger on his right hand: he had sliced it badly while opening a tin of bully-beef.



On December 17 Private Starks was transferred to the 36<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Heilly for further treatment, from there to be forwarded by the 14<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Train to the 2<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital in Le Havre, the port city at the mouth of the River Seine.

(Right above: a *British casualty clearing station* – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the earlier years of the War – from a vintage post-card)

Three days later, on December 22, he was embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Carisbrook Castle* (right) for the crossing back to the United Kingdom.



Upon arrival in England on the next day, he was admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. The wound, described as a laceration – or the infection – must have been serious: Private Starks was to remain hospitalized until February 10, 1917, some seven weeks later.

(Right: *The main building of what became 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital during the Great War was opened, on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines.* – photograph from 2010)



(Above far right: *Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing at 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital, Wandsworth* – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

On that February 10 he was granted the customary ten-day furlough granted to military personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom. This short period of leave was immediately succeeded by a posting back to the Regimental Depot in Scotland where Private Starks reported *to duty* on February 19.



His tour at Ayr lasted until June, during which time he received promotion – on May 14 – to the rank of lance corporal.

(Previous page: *the High Street in Ayr, dominated then as it still is today by the imposing Wallace Tower, as shown on a postcard of the time sent home by a Newfoundland soldier – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo*)

On June 3 the 24<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Lance Corporal Starks one of its non-commissioned officers - passed through the English Channel port of Folkestone on its way across to Boulogne; only hours later, upon debarkation, it then travelled southwards to the Base Depot at Rouen for those inevitable ten days or so of final preparation before leaving to seek out the parent unit.



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

Lance Corporal Starks re-joined 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on June 19 in the community of Bonneville, an NCO among the one-hundred eighteen *other ranks* from Rouen which reported *to duty* on that day.

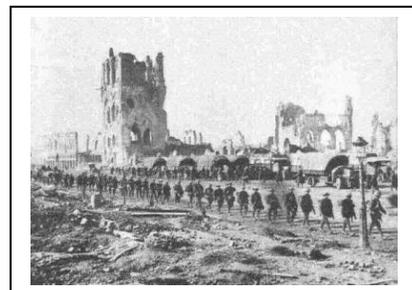
After the exertions in April of the *Battle of Arras* and the sacrifice at Monchy-le-Preux and its environs, May of 1917 had been a period when the Newfoundlanders had moved hither and thither on the Arras front, in and out of the trenches. Apart from the ever-present artillery, there had been little if any infantry activity – apart from 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, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had retired from the line to Bonneville and spent its time re-enforcing as witness the arrival of Lance Corporal Starks - re-organizing and training for the upcoming British offensive of the summer – and as it transpired, the autumn as well.

The Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion once again moved 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*, borrowing 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*)

1<sup>st</sup> 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. It may well be that Lance Corporal Starks served at the former: without a doubt he played his part at the latter.



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

The son of Hezekiah Starks, fisherman, and Emma Frances Starks (née *Norman*, deceased June of 1919) – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay and to whom he had willed his all - of King's Point, District Twillingate, he was also brother to Malcolm, to Charlotte, to Nellie, to Annie, to Mildred and to Gordon.



Private Starks was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 9, 1917, while serving with 'C' Company in the fighting at the *Broembeek*.

Back at home, it was the Reverend Elijah Mercer of King's Point who was requested to bear the news to his family.

Edward George Starks had enlisted at the age of nineteen years: date of birth, October 9, 1897).

(Right above: *A narrow, placid stream pictured here, in October of 1917 the Broembeek had burst its banks, transforming the surrounding area into a quagmire. – photograph from 2009*)

Lance Corporal Edward George Starks was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

