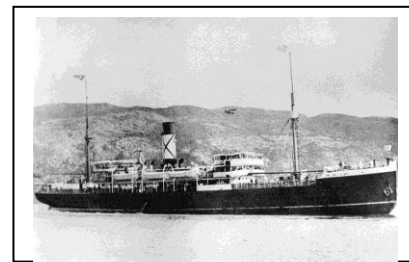


Private Ross Strong (Regimental Number 3786) is buried in Boulogne Eastern Cemetery – Grave reference VIII. I. 201.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a mechanic, Ross Strong was a recruit of the Fifteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on May 16, 1917, he 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 Strong did not leave St. John's until August 4 of that year. On that day he marched down to St. John's harbour and boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel, *Florizel* (right)\*. The destination was Halifax, Nova Scotia, from where the Newfoundland draft now took ship – thus far un-identified: maybe *Missanabie* but this is far from certain - to cross the Atlantic to the United Kingdom.



***\*Albeit a second source claims that he... embarked St. John's train for Halifax N.S. 4/8/17: Both of these sources are in Private Strong's personal documents.***

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 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home had been 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*)

Private Strong spent the five months succeeding his arrival in the United Kingdom at the Regimental Depot at Ayr and likely also at Barry\*.

*\*During the summer months of 1917, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been 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.*

Private Strong may well have been, before his enlistment, employed by the *Dominion Iron & Steel Company* on Bell Island, and a member of the *Dominion Fire Brigade*, as his papers show that his former colleagues saw fit to send him a gift of one pound sterling that Christmas while he was in Scotland. What he eventually spent it on is *not* recorded.

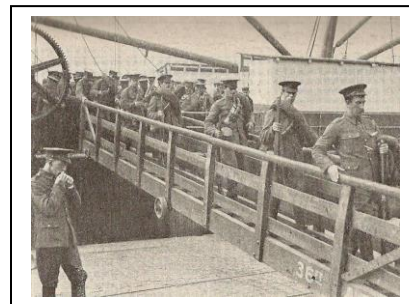
In the latter half of January of the New Year, 1918, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion was to move quarters from Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester.



It was there that Private Strong would have been stationed at the beginning of February when he was ordered to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.

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

On February 4, the 36<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft of two hundred *other ranks* from Hazely Down – Private Strong among its ranks - passed through the English port of Southampton on its way to the Continent. On the 6<sup>th</sup> the Newfoundlanders landed in the French port of Rouen for the inevitable final training and organization\* at the Base Depot before finding their way to the front.



(continued)

(Page preceding: *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.*

A detachment of one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Rouen – Private Strong among that number - reported to *duty* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at Steenvoorde, just on the Franco-Belgian frontier, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that February, the day before an inspection by Major-General Beauvoir de Lisle, Officer Commanding 29<sup>th</sup> Division, a parade complete with presentation of decorations and the announcement that the Newfoundland Regiment was to be designated as *Royal*.

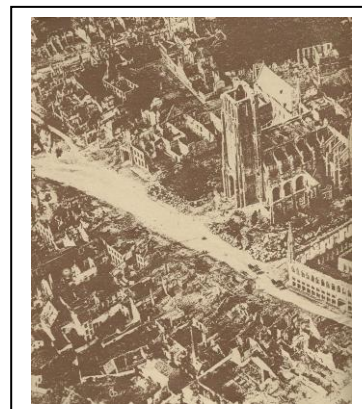
Meanwhile, at the close of the *Battle of Cambrai* at the beginning of December of 1917, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion – once again badly under-strength due to the heavy casualties incurred – had been withdrawn from the area of the front lines to re-enforce and to re-organize.

The following weeks had been 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 even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow, a bit too much at times apparently.

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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had been ordered into 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. It was during a period while 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was out of the lines that Private Strong reported to *active service*.



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

Meanwhile, 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.

(continued)

**(Right above: 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)**

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

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



**(Right: 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 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

On April 13, during the defensive action 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: ground just to the east of Bailleul where 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013)**

(continued)

What exact role Private Strong played is not known - it is recorded only that he was a soldier of 'B' Company - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's personnel. Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.



(Right above: *These are the De Seule crossroads almost one-hundred years later, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, and also the scene of fierce fighting involving 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

The exact date of his wounding seems not to be recorded, but what *is* documented is that Private Strong – a soldier of 'B' Company - was admitted into the 83<sup>rd</sup> General Hospital at Boulogne on April 14. He was suffering from head injuries inflicted by gun-shot. On the following day, his condition was deemed to be *serious*.



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

The son of William Joseph Armstrong Strong, former fisherman, and Sarah Ann Knight Strong (née *Langdon*) of Jackson's Cove, Green Bay, Notre Dame Bay, he was also brother to at least Charles-Gordon, to whom he allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay, and to Mahala-Fanny-Mabel (Mrs. John Pynn) of Bell Island.

Private Strong was reported as having *died of wounds* on April 16, 1918, in the same 83<sup>rd</sup> General Hospital.

Ross Strong had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and four months.

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

