



Private Zacharia Blake (Regimental Number 4055) lies in Magdalen Hill Cemetery, Winchester: Grave reference, Newfoundland Plot 6 NP..

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *labourer*, Zacharia Blake was a volunteer of the Seventeenth Recruitment Draft. He presented himself for medical examination on October 30 of 1917 at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury\** in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. It was a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*Fit for Foreign Service*.

(continued)

***\*The building was to serve as the Regimental Headquarters in Newfoundland for the duration of the conflict.***

It was to be on the day of that medical assessment, October 30, and at the same venue, that Zacharia Blake would enlist. He was thus engaged...*for the duration of the war\**...at the daily private soldier's rate of a single dollar to which was to be appended a ten-cent per diem Field Allowance.

***\*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. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.***

Only some twenty-four hours were now to follow before there subsequently came to pass - he having returned to the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road for the occasion - the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On the thirty-first day of that month of October he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, Zacharia Blake became...*a soldier of the King.*

Private Blake, Number 4055, was not to leave Newfoundland for overseas service for a further six weeks less a single day but how he was now to spend that prolonged interval after his attestation appears to have been only partially documented. As with many of his fellow-recruits, he was granted several days home leave, some of which he may have spent at his recorded home of Barr'd Islands in the District of Fogo. In Private Blake's case this was a ten-day period from November 16 until November 26 – although he apparently was not to return to St. John's until November 30, for which no reason is to be found among his papers, nor appear there to have been any consequences.

But both before and after this period of leave, Private Blake was likely quartered in barracks\* in the east end of the capital city.

***\*A number of the recruits, those whose home was not in St. John's or close to the capital city, or those who had no friends or family to offer them board and lodging, were to be quartered in the curling rink in the area of Fort William in St. John's, a building which was at the time to serve as barracks. It appears to have become the norm for the later recruits to have all been quartered there.***

As seen above, Private Blake was not to depart for overseas service from Newfoundland until forty-one days had passed after his enlistment. Thus it was on December 11 that he embarked in St. John's Harbour onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* for passage as far as Halifax, Nova Scotia – this was a part of her commercial run - from where he and his draft were to make the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom.

One single entry has him traversing the ocean on board the *Canadian Pacific* ship *Missanabie*. If this is correct, then Private Blake and those with whom he was travelling then journeyed on from Halifax\* to St. John, New Brunswick, to embark on or before

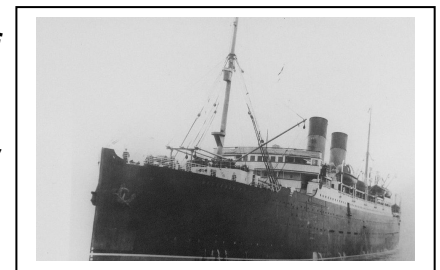
December 18. *Missanabie* sailed from there on the morrow, December 19, to dock in the Scottish port of Glasgow on the final day of the year 1917.

*\*This change of itinerary may well have happened since Halifax had suffered a cataclysmic disaster when on December 6 an ammunition ship, the 'Mont Blanc', had exploded after a collision with the 'Imo'.*

(Right: *Much of down-town Halifax had been obliterated and the harbour was unable to service the traffic that it had been handling up to that point. Saint John was the nearest alternative port, particularly as the St. Lawrence River would have been, by that time of the year, starting to freeze.*



(Right: *The image of Missanabie is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. A new vessel built in 1914, she was a ship of the Canadian Pacific (Railway) Company. She was one of many requisitioned larger ocean-going vessels to carry troops from Canada to overseas service in the United Kingdom unlike her sister-ship Metagama which continued to serve her commercial routes during the War. On September 9 of 1918, during a crossing from Liverpool to New York, Missanabie was torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Ireland with the loss of forty-five lives.)*



Having landed in the United Kingdom the Newfoundland contingent entrained for the Regimental Depot on the west coast of Scotland – from Glasgow, a distance of perhaps some seventy-five kilometres or just over forty-five miles.

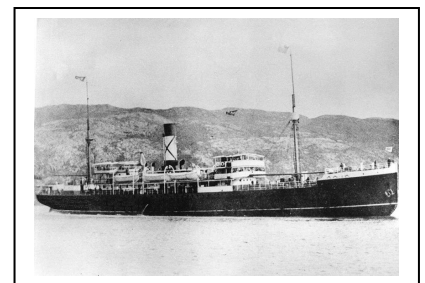
\* \* \* \* \*

Some three years and three months prior to that month of January of 1918 when Private Blake was to find himself in Scotland, in the late summer and early autumn of 1914 the newly-formed Newfoundland Regiment's first recruits had undergone a period of training of five weeks on the shores of *Quidi Vidi Lake* in the east end of St. John's and elsewhere in the city, and were formed into 'A' and 'B' Companies.

During that same period the various authorities had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

(Right below: *The image of 'Florizel' at anchor in the harbour at St. John's in October of 1914 is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.)*

This first Newfoundland contingent was to embark on October 3, in some cases only days after a recruit's enlistment and/ or attestation. To become known to history as the *First Five Hundred* and also as the *Blue Puttees*, on that day they had boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* awaiting in St. John's Harbour.



(continued)



The ship had sailed for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division overseas, off the south coast of the Island. Once having disembarked in the United Kingdom this first Newfoundland contingent was to train in three venues during the late autumn of 1914 and then the winter of 1914-1915: firstly in southern England on the *Salisbury Plain*; then in Scotland at *Fort George* – on the *Moray Firth* close to Inverness; and lastly at *Edinburgh Castle* – where it was to provide the first garrison from outside the British Isles.



(Right above: *Fort George, constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, still serves the British Army to this day. – photograph from 2011*)

Only days after ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies had taken up their posting there, on February 16 of 1915, ‘C’ Company – the first re-enforcements for the original contingent - would arrive directly – through Liverpool of course - from Newfoundland. On the final day of the month of March it had been the turn of ‘D’ Company to arrive – it via Halifax as well as Liverpool – to report...*to duty*...at Edinburgh, and then ‘E’ Company five weeks less a day later again, on May 4\*.

*\*These five Companies, while a contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment, was not yet a battalion and would not be so for a further five months – as will be seen below.*

(Right: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the Scottish capital from its hill in the centre of the city. – photograph from 2011*)



Seven days after the arrival of ‘E’ Company in the Scottish capital, on May 11 the entire Newfoundland contingent had been ordered elsewhere. On that day, seven weeks into spring – although in Scotland there was apparently still snow - the unit had been dispatched to *Stobs Camp*, under canvas and south-eastwards of Edinburgh, close to the town of Hawick.

(Right: *The Newfoundland Regiment marches past on the training ground at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915. – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and of Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)



Two months less a day later, on July 10, ‘F’ Company would march into *Stobs Camp*.

This had been an all-important moment: the Company’s arrival was to bring the Newfoundland Regiment’s numbers up to some fifteen hundred, establishment strength\* of a battalion which could be posted on...*active service*.



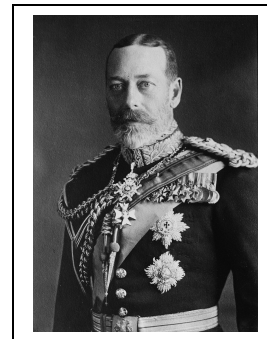


**\*A number sufficient for four 'fighting' companies, two re-enforcement companies and a headquarters staff.**

**(Preceding page: *The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles. – original photograph from the Provincial Archives*)**

**From *Stobs Camp*, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the four senior Companies, having by that time become the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, had been transferred to *Aldershot Camp* in southern England.**

**There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before the Battalion's departure to the Middle East and to the fighting on the *Gallipoli Peninsula*.**



**(Right above: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – the photograph is taken from the Bain News Services as presented by the Wikipedia web-site.*)**

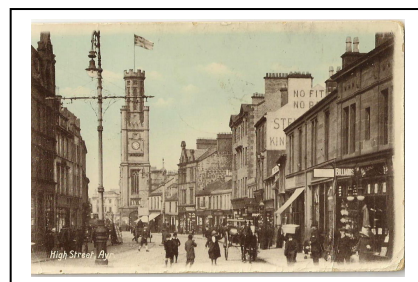
**The later arrivals to the United Kingdom, 'E' and 'F' Companies, were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were eventually to form the nucleus of the first re-enforcements to be dispatched to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.**



**(Right: *An aerial view of Ayr, likely from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr, where were quartered the 'other ranks', is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough, where were housed the officers, is to the right. – by courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)**

***Ayr was a small town on the west coast of Scotland whose history precedes the year 1205 when it was established as a Royal Burgh (Borough) by the crown of Scotland, an appointment which emphasized the importance of the town as a harbour, market and, later, administrative centre.***

***By the time of the Great War centuries later it was expanding and the River Ayr which had once marked the northern boundary of the place was now flowing through its centre; a new town to the north (Newton-on-Ayr), its population fast-increasing, perhaps encouraged by the coming of the railway, was soon to be housing the majority of the personnel of the Newfoundland Regimental Depot.***



**(Right above: *The High Street in Ayr as shown on a postcard of the time, the imposing Wallace Tower – it stands to this day (2017) - dominating the scene – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo.***

**(continued)**

That November 15 of 1915 was to see not only the departure of the 1<sup>st</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr to the Middle East and to the fighting of the *Gallipoli Campaign* but also, only five days prior, the arrival from Newfoundland of 'G' Company which would be obliged to take up quarters at *Gailes Camp*, some sixteen kilometres up the coast from Ayr itself – but just over sixty if one went by road.

A further seven weeks plus a day were now to pass before the first one-hundred personnel of 'H' Company, having sailed in mid-December as recorded in an earlier paragraph, were to present themselves at the Regimental Depot on January 4, some of them to be affected, even fatally, by an ongoing measles epidemic of the time.

After that there was then to be an interlude of three months plus several days before the second detachment of 'H' Company reported on April 9, 1916, to the Regimental Depot.

*Note: Until as late as the spring of 1916 it had been the intention to form a 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment to fight on the Continent. In fact it would seem that the last-mentioned contingent of one-hundred sixty-three recruits was to form the nucleus of that unit, while the personnel already at the Depot by this time would form a reserve battalion to serve as a re-enforcement pool for both the fighting units.*

*It could not have been long before a change of plan came about as very soon men of that designated contingent (the second half of 'H' Company) were being sent to strengthen the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Battalion already on the Continent – maybe Beaumont-Hamel had something to do with it.*

A further draft from Newfoundland arrived at Ayr towards mid-summer, this comprising a two-company detachment and some naval reservists, sailors who, having disembarked from *Sicilian* in Devonport, were to remain there in England.

Some weeks later again *Sicilian* would sail from Newfoundland once more to arrive in England in the first week in September, 1916, with two-hundred forty-two recruits on board. By the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the month the new-comers, formerly 'C' Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion stationed back in St. John's, had reported to the Regimental Depot.

There was now to be a particularly protracted interval before any large numbers re-enforcements were to arrive from Newfoundland – a problem which was later to affect the capabilities of the parent 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion fighting on the Continent.

The main cause of the difficulty, as seen further above, would be those troops which had been dispatched from St. John's and had reached Halifax on board *Florizel* at the end of January, 1917, only to be then held there for some three months before they were to arrive in Scotland where the regulation fourteen weeks of training then awaited them – although in the case of most of this draft, this period was to be much shorter than prescribed.

Another fifty or so recruits would arrive a week later, perhaps on *Olympic*, from Halifax via Liverpool and yet a further one-hundred eighty-five at the beginning of June, but already by this time the lack of young men forthcoming to the recruiting stations in Newfoundland was beginning to prove problematic.

(continued)

Two months subsequent to this June detachment, a draft of one-hundred four *other ranks*, departed St. John's on August 4, 1917, and reported to Ayr late in that same month. It was not to be followed until October 14 when the next contingent from home arrived.

Then, as recorded in an above paragraph, it was on or towards the end of the month of December before any further re-enforcements for the Newfoundland unit set foot in the United Kingdom and before Private Blake would report...*to duty*...to the Regimental Depot at Ayr.

\* \* \* \* \*

*There was to be only a single exception to the above sequence of departures of re-enforcement contingents from Newfoundland and their arrival at the Regimental Depot in Scotland and that was the draft of March 17. Because of the quarantine in Windsor, Nova Scotia, imposed upon those who had sailed from home on January 31 of 1917, this subsequent contingent, comprising for the most part the Eleventh Recruitment Draft, had thus leap-frogged the Windsor Draft to dock in Liverpool and report to Ayr three weeks and two days ahead of it.*

*By this time the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment serving on the Continent, particularly after the fighting of April 14 at Monchy-le-Preux (see further below), was becoming critically short of personnel and the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was becoming hard-pressed to find replacements for these losses.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, and was to eventually 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 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right above: *Wellington Square seen here almost a century after it hosted the officers of the Newfoundland Regiment – photograph from 2012*)

At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to be able to accommodate the number of new arrivals – plus men from other British regiments which were still being billeted in the area...and a measles epidemic which was to claim the life of several Regiment personnel – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in the town-centre of Ayr itself, and the *other ranks* had been billeted at Newton Park School and if not, in the grandstand or a tented camp at the newly-built racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr.





(Preceding page: *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*)

During the summer months of 1917, as of early July the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment and the Regimental Depot had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry. 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.

However, both the Regimental Depot and the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion were very soon to move quarters from the Royal Burgh of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to *Hazely Down Camp*, in the county of Hampshire and not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, so hardly had Private Blake arrived in Scotland before he should have been packing his bags once more.



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

It would not be long – in early February - before the first Newfoundland re-enforcement draft from *Hazely Down* was to make its way across the English Channel to join the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the by-then Royal Newfoundland Regiment.

However, for Private Blake, this was not to be. He was admitted on January 25 of 1918 into the Military Hospital at *Chiseldon Camp* to undergo treatment for a venereal complaint. On February 13 – or 16 – he was released to become an outpatient until April 11. When eventually discharged...*to duty...*, Private Blake was seconded to the 616<sup>th</sup> Employment Company at Chiseldon. However, during this period he was hospitalized again, into *Hazely Down Camp Military Hospital* from March 3 until March 22, suffering from an unrecorded problem.

On May 21, Private Blake was sent to *Hazely Down Hospital* once more, the complaint on this third occasion diagnosed as *pterygium*, a problem of the cornea. He was forwarded on the next day to the Military Hospital at Winchester where he remained for a week – until the 28<sup>th</sup> – before, upon medical recommendation, being transferred to the *Royal Victorian Hospital* at Netley in the vicinity of the port-city of Southampton.



There he remained until August 5 when he was released to re-join his unit.

(Right above: *The construction of the Royal Victorian Hospital began in 1856 and the last buildings were demolished in 1978. The image is from Wikipedia.*)

Having thereupon re-joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion, Private Blake was admitted for a final time for medical attention into *Hazely Down Military Hospital* on October 16, this further infliction being diagnosed as broncho-pneumonia.

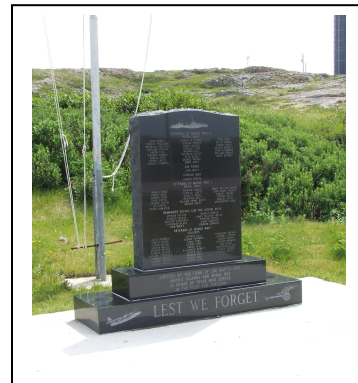
(Right: *The Newfoundland Plot at Magdalen Hill Cemetery* – photograph from 2011)



The son of John Blake, fisherman – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - and of Jane Blake (née *Cull*\*, deceased of paralysis on December 2, 1916) of Barr'd Islands in the District of Fogo, he was also brother to Levi and to Arthur-Samuel.

*\*The couple had married on November 18 of 1890.*

Private Blake was reported as having...*died of sickness...* – of heart failure as a consequence of broncho-pneumonia - at *Hazely Down Military Hospital*, Winchester at two-thirty in the afternoon of November 6, 1918. He was interred three days later, on November 9.



Zacharia Blake had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-two years and three months: date of birth at Barr'd Islands, Newfoundland, March 8, 1893 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

(Right above: *The sacrifice of Private Blake is honoured on the War Memorial at Joe Batt's Arm.* – photograph from 2013)

Private Zacharia Blake was awarded the British War Medal for his *overseas service*.

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 31, 2023.

