



Private Max (Mac) Thompson (Regimental Number 4318) lies buried in Magdalen Hill Cemetery, Winchester: Grave reference Newfoundland, Plot 3..

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *cable-operator*, Max Thompson was likely a volunteer of the Nineteenth Recruitment Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the *Church Lads Brigade Armoury* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on January 18, 1918. 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, January 18, and at the same venue, that Max Thompson 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 few hours were now to follow before there subsequently came to pass, while still at the *CLB Armoury* on Harvey Road, the final formality of his enlistment: attestation. On the same eighteenth day of that month of January he pledged his allegiance to the reigning monarch, George V, whereupon, at that moment, Max Thompson became...*a soldier of the King**.

****Although a further official paper documents that his attestation was not to take place until December 30.***

Private Thompson, Number 4318, was not leave Newfoundland for overseas service until ten weeks less a day later, the date March 28 of 1918, when he would board a train en route for Halifax, Nova Scotia, via Port aux Basques and North Sydney.

Thus that sixty-nine day interval was to pass but how he would spend that intermission after attestation appears to have been only partially documented. As was the case with many of his fellow-recruits he was to be granted several days home leave and therefore was likely to have travelled to his family home in the community of Bonavista in the District of the same name.

However, the records do not precisely document Bonavista to be his destination, and thus it may have to remain a matter of speculation.

But if he did, then both before and after this period of leave - or if he did not, then the entire interval until his departure for the United Kingdom - was likely to have been passed 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 in the beginning 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.***

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Having arrived in Nova Scotia, a province of a foreign country at the time, he embarked onto an unspecified troop-ship* to the United Kingdom** on or about April 8, before disembarking in Liverpool on April 19.

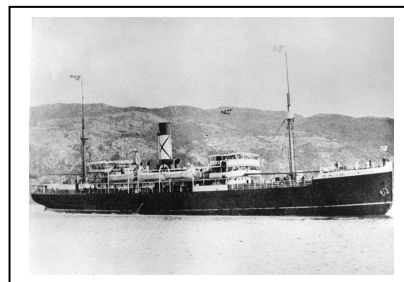
**The troop transport 'Ulua' sailed in convoy from Halifax on April 9 to arrive in Liverpool on the 20th. She is recorded as having embarked... B.E.F. Recruits, Windsor, N.S. The Royal Newfoundland Regiment was, of course, a unit of the 29th Division of the British Expeditionary Force, not the Canadian Expeditionary Force, at that time.*

***Up until that time, since early in the previous year, the re-enforcements had been sent to Halifax on board the Bowring Brothers vessel Florizel. She had been wrecked near Cappahayden just the month previous to his departure while en route to Halifax and incurred a large loss of life.*

After the date of his arrival in England on that April 19 there appears to be no further information about the doings of Private Thompson for a lengthy period. It will be assumed, however, that he and his fellow recruits were to be transported promptly from Liverpool southwards to the site of the Second (Reserve) Battalion Headquarters and Regimental Depot where Private Thompson was then to serve for the remainder of his all-too short military career.

* * * * *

Some three years and seven months prior to that spring of 1918 when Private Thompson was to find himself in southern England, 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 on both sides of the ocean had also been preparing for the Regiment's transfer overseas.

(Right above: 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.

The ship had sailed for the United Kingdom on the morrow, October 4, 1914, to its rendezvous with the convoy carrying the 1st 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 below: *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 – they 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.*

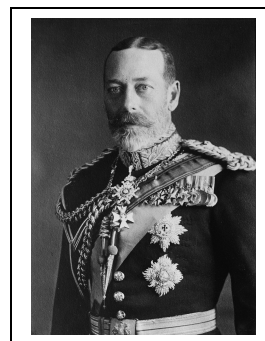
(Right above: *The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles. – original photograph from the Provincial Archives*)

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 1st 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: *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 reinforcements to be dispatched to the 1st 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 below: *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.

That November 15 of 1915 was to see not only the departure of the 1st 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 2nd 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 1st 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 5th day of the month the new-comers, formerly 'C' Company of the 3rd 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 1st 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 the number of potential recruits to be found in Newfoundland was by now diminishing.

One-hundred four, having departed St. John's on August 4, 1917, reported to Ayr late in that same month, not to be followed until October 14 by the next draft and then later again, on December 19, by the newcomers of the Seventeenth Recruitment Draft.

The Eighteenth Recruitment Draft was next, surely in the following February – the exact date is not clear - by which time both the Regimental Depot and the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had moved quarters from Scotland (see further below).

And, of course, as has already been discerned further above, the Nineteenth(?) Recruitment Draft of which Private Thompson was a soldier, was to disembark in the

United Kingdom on April 19, in the port-city of Liverpool whence he was to make his way to *Hazely Down Camp*.

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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 1st 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 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was becoming hard-pressed to find replacements for these losses.

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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 2nd (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 1st Battalion.



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

(Right: *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*)

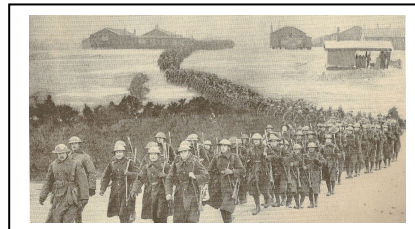


At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to be able to accommodate the number of new arrivals – plus men from other British regiments which were still being billeted in the area...and a measles epidemic which was to claim the life of several Regiment personnel – but by the spring of 1916, things 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.

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During the summer months of 1917, as of early July the 2nd (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 2nd (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. It was a transfer which was to be finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and some three months before Private Thompson's disembarkation in England.



(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 was also there that, on April 26, only a single week after his arrival, that he was admitted into the *Hazely Down Camp Military Hospital*, for medical attention to a case of measles. Private Thompson had reportedly been *doing well* until the sixth day of hospitalization when he was then further diagnosed as by then suffering from *broncho-pneumonia*.

As a consequence his heart apparently subsequently soon began to fail despite treatment with stimulants.

(Right above: *The War Memorial in Bonavista honours the sacrifice of Private Thompson. – photograph from 2011*)

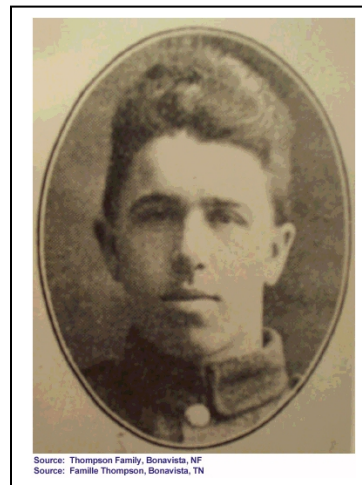
The son of Joseph Thompson, former wharfinger (manager of a commercial wharf), deceased of apoplexy on June 15, 1919, and of Lydia Thompson – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Bonavista, he was also brother to Hilda who had died at the age of ten years in 1905 and who lies in the family cemetery plot.

Private Thompson was reported as having...*died of sickness*...- of bronchial pneumonia following measles - on May 7, 1918, in the afore-mentioned *Military Hospital at Hazely Down Camp*.

He was laid to rest in Magdalen Hill Cemetery two days later, on May 9.

Maxse Thompson had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty years and six months: date of birth in Bonavista, Newfoundland, June 8, 1897 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register - as is the Christian name Maxse).

(continued)



Source: Thompson Family, Bonavista, NF
Source: Famille Thompson, Bonavista, TN

(Preceding page: *The photograph of Private Thompson is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial to which it has been donated by the Thompson family of Bonavista.*)

Private Max Thompson was entitled to 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. Last updated – January 31, 2023.