

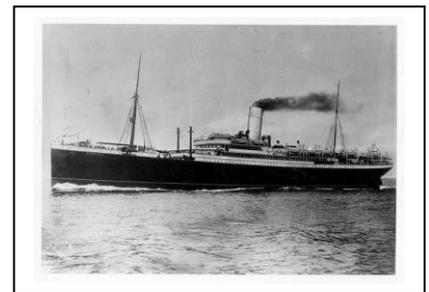


**Private Richard Spurrell (Regimental Number 1745) lies in St-Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen – Grave reference O. 4. G. 9.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Richard Spurrell was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on July 27, 1915, and then both enlisted – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – and attested two days later, on the 29<sup>th</sup>.**

***\*A second source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.***

**Private Spurrell and the other personnel of 'G' Company – apparently in the company of several naval reservists and also some German prisoners (these latter to remain in Canada) - left St. John's by train on October 27, to cross the island to Port aux Basques. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry, and proceeded by train from North Sydney to Quebec City.**



**(continued)**

At Québec the Newfoundlanders boarded His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* (preceding page) for the trans-Atlantic passage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9.

By the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> the new arrivals had travelled by train and had gone north to Scotland. There they had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gailles, not far removed from the new Regimental Depot where accommodation for the contingent was as yet not available.

That new Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland to serve as a 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 sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently 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*)

It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that on May 24, a month before his departure to France on *active service*, Private Spurrell was prevailed upon to re-enlist *for the duration of the War*.\*.

*\*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.*

On June 25, the 7<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, Private Spurrell among its ranks, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent. On the morrow, the 26<sup>th</sup>, the detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot which had been established there. There the draft spent time in final training and organization\* before proceeding on to its rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> 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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

(continued)

This meeting was effected on July 11 (recorded elsewhere as the 12<sup>th</sup>) while the parent unit was just behind the line, being quartered in huts in the remnants of the village of Mailly-Maillet. It was here that Private Spurrell and another one-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen reported *to duty*.

Even with this additional man-power, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion still numbered only *11 officers and 260 rifles* after the disaster of Beaumont-Hamel, a quarter of regulation battalion strength.



(Right above: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John's East. – photograph from 2009*)

On July 27-28 of 1916, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still under battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after re-enforcement - moved north and entered into Belgium for the first time. It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel on July 1. *The Salient* was relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there, yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number of them fatal.



On October 8, after ten weeks in Belgium, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved south back to France and back to the area - and battle - of *the Somme*.

(Right above: *the entrance to 'A' Company's quarters in the ramparts of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *the city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – and eight months before the Newfoundlanders were posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)



Four days after its return to France, on October 12, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion went again to the offensive at a place called Gueudecourt, some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel. It proved to be another costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.

(Right: *This is the ground over which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)

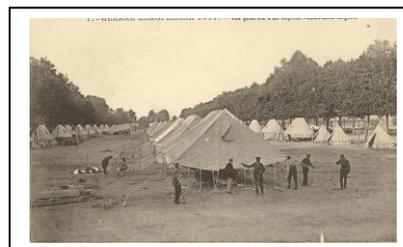


It was on November 20 that Private Spurrell was wounded by enemy artillery. 'D' Company had been serving in the firing-line from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> inclusive, before having retired to the support trench where it was nonetheless yet again heavily shelled. All four companies of the Battalion were in the sector until the 21<sup>st</sup>, during which period the Newfoundlanders had suffered five dead and eight wounded.



(Right above: *the Guards Cemetery at LesBœufs and the ground beyond where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in the trenches from November 14 to 21 – photograph from 2009*)

On that same November 20 Private Spurrell was evacuated to an unspecified casualty clearing station. From there on the 27<sup>th</sup> he was transferred to the 12<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in Rouen for treatment to gun-shot wounds to the left thigh. On December 3 all seemed well: the report cites *seriously ill (improving)*. Then on December 21 he was deemed as being *dangerously ill*.



On January 4 of the New Year, 1917, Private Spurrell was to undergo the amputation of his thigh.

(Right above: *a British casualty clearing station – the one shown here under canvas for mobility if necessary – being established during the early years of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The son of Moses Spurrell, fisherman, and Mary Ann Spurrell - to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of fifty cents from his pay - of Butter Cove, Random, Trinity Bay, and he himself cited as native to (Little?) Heart's Ease, also Trinity Bay, he was also brother to at least Edward and Isabella, Alexander and Edgar.

Private Spurrell was reported as having *died of wounds* on the operating table of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, Rouen, on that January 4, 1917. A telegraph was sent to the Reverend W. A. Butler of Hodge's Cove requesting that he bear the news to the family.



Richard Spurrell had enlisted at twenty years and five months of age.

(Right above: *the memorial which stands in Butter Cove to honour the sacrifice of Private Spurrell – photograph from – and with many thanks to - Stephanie Sparkes*)

(continued)

**Private Richard Spurrell was awarded the British War Medal (on left) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

