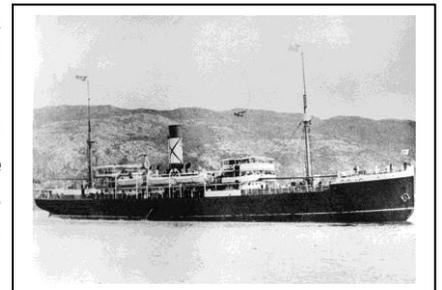




Private Rance Bengier (Regimental Number 4230) is interred in the Church of England Cemetery in Amherst Cove, Bonavista Bay.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Rance Bengier presented himself for medical examination on December 8 of 1917 at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road in St. John's. He then enlisted – *engaged for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 daily – and also attested on the same day – although this apparently became *effective* only on the 11th, three days later.



(continued)

Private Benger did not embark for overseas service until some seven weeks later, the date January 29 of 1918, when he boarded the Bowring Brothers' Red Cross Line vessel *Florizel* (right above – courtesy of *Admiralty House Museum*) en route for Halifax. From there he sailed on an unspecified troop-ship to the United Kingdom.

In the early New Year of 1918, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had moved quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was to there that he reported from Newfoundland, and *from* there that Private Benger was eventually despatched to join the British Expeditionary Force.



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

On or about July 2, either the 47th or the 48th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Benger one of this contingent - from Hazely Down, passed through the English port of Folkestone and, on the 5th, arrived at the French city of Rouen, for final training and organization* at the British Expeditionary Force Depot there, before finding its way to 1st Battalion.

Only days afterwards, on July 8 – although *his* file says the 9th - he was surely one of the detachment of one-hundred twenty-eight *other ranks* from Rouen that reported *to duty* with the Newfoundland parent unit at Équièhen on the French west coast.



(Right: *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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the *Bull Rings*.

Meanwhile, just days after the crisis of the German spring offensive had passed, on April 24 – and some eleven weeks before Private Benger's arrival at Équièhen - the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion officially had said farewell to their comrades-in-arms of 88th Brigade and 29th Division and on the morrow had participated in a recessional parade attended by the officer commanding 88th Brigade, Brigadier Freyberg.

They were later to be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 1st Battalion was to move a world away from Flanders where it had just fought, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

(continued)

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – 1st Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four other ranks - took train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étaples, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening. For now, for them, the fighting was a thing of the past.

The summer of 1918 was to pass peaceably enough for most of the personnel of 1st Battalion. For the months of May, June and until early July, the unit was posted to Écuire, to the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



(Right: *Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ – from Illustration*)

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1st Battalion of the recently-proclaimed *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* was no longer capable of serving in the field.

**Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that 1st Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

The posting to Écuire completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders were encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équihe – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.



This was, of course, both the time and place of Private Benger's likely reporting *to duty in the field* with 1st Battalion.

(Right above: *a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihe at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Re-enforced, the Newfoundlanders returned to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28th Brigade of 9th Scottish Division. 1st Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it would finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (*Ingooigem*).

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2nd British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive**. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge.



(continued)

After almost four years of stalemate, it was once again to be a conflict of movement.

(Previous page: *British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days – from Illustration*)

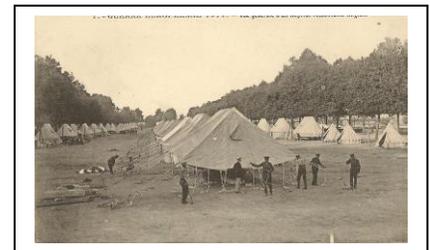
**This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3rd Somme.*

The advance, despite fierce resistance at times, was relentless. On October 14, 1st Battalion, having been rested for a week after heavy fighting near Ledeghem, returned to the front for a new drive to commence on that day. The Newfoundlanders were to push along the northern bank of the River-Canal Lys, itself north of the city of Courtrai (today *Kortrijk*) which they were to bypass. The advance of the 14th was successful - but the cost again high - only three hundred reporting for muster at dawn on the following morning.



(Right above: *the Lys – both canal and river – at a point not far from the crossing-place towards which the Newfoundlanders were advancing on October 14 - The Harlebeke Caribou stands about at a distance of about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

It was on October 14 that Private Benger was wounded. Having incurred a mild shrapnel wound to the shoulder and chest, he was evacuated almost immediately to the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearing Station – possibly by then close to the community of Dadizeele – and on the following day, the 15th, was forwarded to the 32nd Stationary Hospital (*Australian Voluntary Hospital*) at Wimereux for further treatment.



(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 early years of the War – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right: *The French seaside resort of Wimereux – soon to become a part of a major medical centre – at some time just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



Apparently only a single day later again, Private Benger was discharged from hospital to be transferred to the 1st Convalescent Depot. A single source has him going from there on the same day to the 5th Rest Camp, while others report him being there until his moving once more, on November 11, to the 10th Convalescent Depot at Escault.

(continued)

He reported back *to duty* to the Base Details Camp at Terlincthun, just along the coast from Boulogne, on December 11, from where he was then posted back to 1st Battalion on January 5 of the New Year, 1919.

By that time, of course, the Great War had come to an end with the coming into force of the Armistice. The one to involve the Newfoundlanders and the soldiers of the *Western Front* was that of the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918*.

**There were several armistices negotiated between the various belligerents during this time.*

1st Battalion had retired from the fighting on the Western Front on October 26th. The place was Ingoyghem, Belgium, and 1st Battalion remained in that country – on one occasion being part of a victory parade in Brussels as representatives of all Dominion and Colonial troops in front of the Belgian King and Queen - until it later crossed the frontier and marched into Germany.

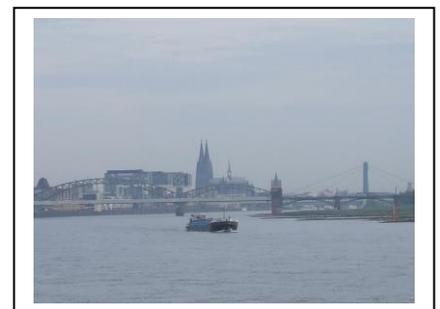


(Right above: *the valley of the Scheldt as seen from Ingoyghem, the Newfoundlanders' furthest point of advance on October 26, 1918 – photograph from 2010*)



(Above: *The caption has it that included in this contingent of British Army troops are... English, Scottish and Newfoundlanders. This is the victory parade held in the city of Brussels on November 22, 1918. – from Illustration*)

On December 4, 1st Battalion had traversed the frontier between Belgium and Germany, the day before Private Benger's Attachment back to the Newfoundland unit. The Newfoundlanders were to be a unit of the Allied Army of Occupation in the defeated country. On December 8, they reached the Rhine at Cologne, from where they continued their march to their destination, Hilden, in-between the large industrial centres of Mulheim and Dusseldorf.

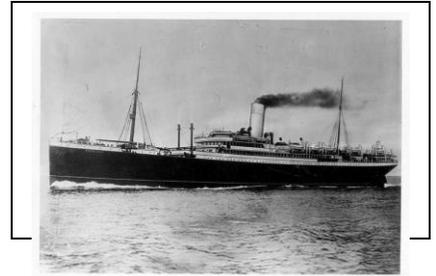


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(Preceding page: *the Rhine river flowing through the city of Köln (Cologne) - with the spires of its gothic cathedral showing - where 1st Battalion was stationed in late 1918 and early 1919 – photograph from 2012*)

1st Battalion was withdrawn from Germany in February of 1919 and sent to the British Expeditionary Force Depot in Rouen. From there Private Bengier was one of the detachment to return to Hazely Down Camp on April 23, just in time to be admitted into the camp hospital, from March 29 to April 13, to be treated for mumps.

It was to be over a month later again before Private Bengier was repatriated. His contingent embarked for Newfoundland from the port of Liverpool on May 22 on board His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* (right). The ship berthed in St. John's ten days later, on June 1, and he reported *to duty* at Headquarters in St. John's. One month further on, on July 4, Private Bengier was discharged from service with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.



Rance Bengier was now eligible to receive a War Service Gratuity. He also at the time made known his intention to resume his pre-War occupation of fisherman. However, unfortunately, any such activity was to be short-lived.

The son of John Bengier, former fisherman but by this time incapacitated by a stroke – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay – and Elizabeth Bengier of Amherst Cove, Bonavista Bay, he was also brother to Phœbe and Isabel.

Rance Bengier was reported as having *died of wounds* on May 20 of 1921 – from the effects of a piece of shrapnel still lodged in his lung.

He had enlisted at the age of eighteen years: date of birth, August 3, 1900.

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

