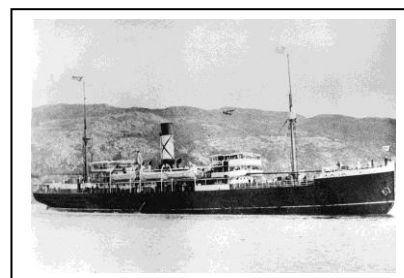




**Private Charles Bennett (elsewhere *Benoit*) (Regimental Number 4143) is interred in Dadizeele New British Cemetery – Grave reference VI. E. 1.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman and farmer working with his father, Charles Bennett was a recruit of the Seventeenth Draft. Having presented himself for examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on November 19, 1917, he then 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 Bennett did not embark for overseas service until some three weeks later again, the date December 11, when he boarded the Bowring Brothers' Red Cross Line vessel *Florizel* (right above) en route for Halifax.**

**(continued)**

But it was not from Halifax that Private Bennett sailed on His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right) to the United Kingdom. The draft embarked in the port of St. John, New Brunswick, on or about December 18 before departure on the morrow. *Missanabie* then docked in Glasgow on December 31, New Year's Eve.



Having disembarked in Scotland, the Newfoundland contingent entrained for the short journey to the Regimental Depot. By this time, the Depot at Ayr had already been in existence serving as the base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for well over two years, with a temporary move to the town of Barry in the summer of 1917. Private Bennett was to be in Ayr for just some two weeks before being transferred southward to another camp.



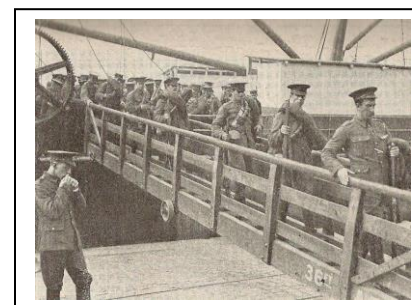
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

In the New Year of 1918, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion 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 be from Hazely Down that Private Bennett was to be despatched, in May, 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 May 25 the 46<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft of one-hundred twenty *other ranks*, from Hazely Down – Private Bennett one of that number - passed through the English Channel port of Folkestone and, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, two days later likely via Le Havre, arrived in the French city of Rouen where it made its way to the British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, for final training and organization\* before finding the way to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

(continued)

***\*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.***

Private Bennett is recorded as having reported *to duty* to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on May 31 at Écuire where the Newfoundlanders were stationed at the time. In fact, the date of his arrival was likely the day before – May 30 - as documented in the *Regimental War Diary* when an incoming contingent of one-hundred seventeen *other ranks* from Rouen is noted. The Diary also notes – on both days – *fine weather and enemy air-raids*.

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

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

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Étapes, 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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)***

This was, of course, both the time and place of Private Bennett's reporting *to duty in the field* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.***

(continued)

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 Équihen – 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.



(Right above: a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihen 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 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade of 9<sup>th</sup> Scottish Division. 1<sup>st</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.



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

(Right above: *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 3<sup>rd</sup> Somme.*

By October 3 the advance on the Newfoundlanders' front had begun to stall, albeit temporarily. At a place called Ledeghem the Germans gave notice that they were far from being a spent force. For five days attempts were made to take the village; on October 6, when 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion retired to rest, it was still in enemy hands.

The only son of James Bennett, fisherman and farmer, and Margaret (Maggie) Bennett\* – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of St. George (and later of Seal Rocks) in the District of St. George's – he was also step-brother to Josephine, Clara and Patrick, and brother to Francis (by adoption).



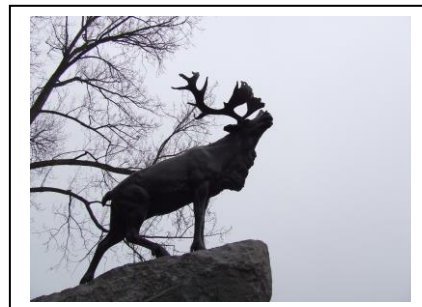
Private Bennett was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 3, 1918, while serving with either 'C' or 'D' Company during fighting in Belgium near the village of Ledeghem.

(Preceding page: *the re-constructed village of Ledeghem, Belgium, almost a century later – photograph from 2010*)

Originally buried in the once-German Military Cemetery at Waterdamhoek, to the south-east of Passchendaele, his remains were later transferred to where they repose today.

Born in the year 1900 (per 1911 Census), Charles Bennett had enlisted at the age of some seventeen years – his *declared* age was twenty years.

*\*The family name is still Benoit in the 1911 and 1921 Censuses. James was Maggie’s second husband - they married in 1897, after her first, husband, Frank Price, had died in 1896 - Josephine, Clara and Patrick (family name apparently – according to the census - Stephens) being older than Charles.*



(Right above: *The Caribou at Harlebeke – commemorates the crossing of the Lys Canal and the sacrifices of the last campaign of the War. – photograph from 2012*)

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



(continued on following page)

Winchester

Jan 18 - 1918

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that I am well hooping you ar all well at home and is you getting my money what I am sending home write and tell me if your or getting it all write & when you write tell me if you got them two letters that I wrote you in St Johns I never got no answer yet but I spose you will ancer this one all write I would like to hear from home now & when you write send me a couple of pears of socks and a cape & some tobacco & tell me how all the girls is & a good fine coam and soote of inside cloase and we is getting good wrobe hear hear better & we was getting in Scotland & give my love to all tell me all the nuse when you writes good by from your son Charley Bennet

4143 Pte Charley Bennet

C Company

2<sup>nd</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> NFD

Hazely Down Camp

Winchester England

C. C. Byrne Capt.

St Georges

Nov. 20. 1919

Dear Sir

I received your letter some time ago, I am sorry that you can't find his number out in the Record Office, London, well the right no of my poor son Charles Bennett pte 4143, please. Write for me again in London. I would like very much to get his clothes what is left and he had a good watch, it is the only son that we had and we would like to get his clothes for remembrance of my son, I heard the in others of there sons had the clothes sent so please try for me

From Mrs Maggie Bennett

St Georges

N.fld

**By return letter: ...no effects found to date and given time lapsed, none expected.**