

BENNETT, C.

Private Chesley Bennett (Regimental Number 3519), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a lumberman and fisherman earning a monthly twenty dollars working for a William Osbourne of the *A. E. Reed(?) Company*, Chesley Bennett was a recruit of the Fourteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on March 6 of 1917, he also enlisted – *for the duration of the war* at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on the same day.

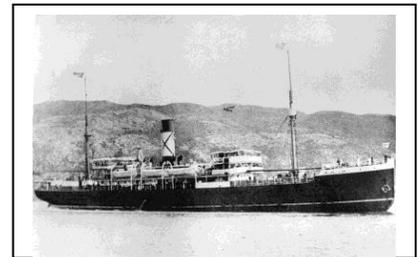
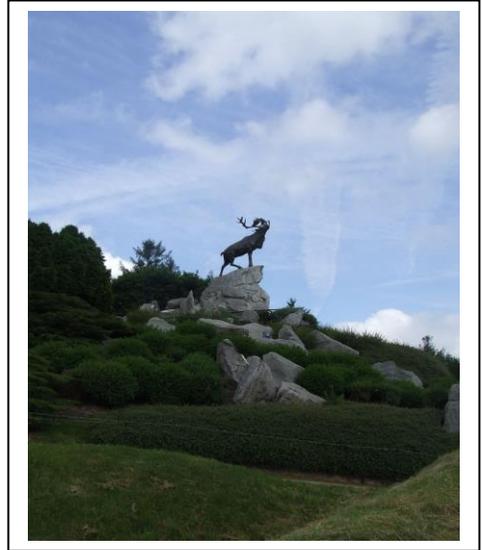
Private Bennett was not to depart from Newfoundland until May 19, when the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) left en route to Halifax. His contingent of three officers and one-hundred eighty-two *other ranks*, and also ninety-nine recruits of the newly-formed Newfoundland Forestry Unit, then left Nova Scotia for the United Kingdom on board an unspecified* vessel, on May 29.

**The ship in question may well have been the White Star liner Olympic (right) – sister ship to Titanic – requisitioned as a troop transport during the war, which sailed on June 2 from Halifax with Canadian military personnel as well – there are no other departures on or about this date. May 29 may have been the date of embarkation by the Newfoundland contingent.*

Arriving in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on June 9 the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr* had already been in existence as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were being despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.

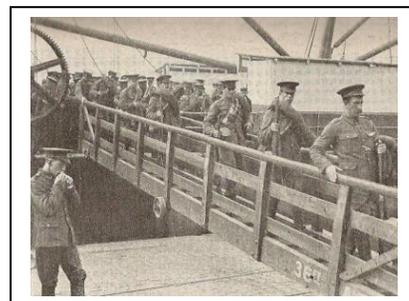
(Right above: an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)

(continued)



**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. 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.*

It was not to be until November 6, 1917, that Private Bennett took ship again; on this occasion he was on his way to the Continent, passing through the English south-coast port of Southampton as one of the one-hundred eleven *other ranks* of the 32nd Draft from Ayr. The Newfoundlanders disembarked in Rouen on the following day and made their way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot there for a few days of final training and organizing* before making their way to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *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.*

By that time, 1st Battalion had been withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign, on October 17, in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive. It had been ordered back south from Belgium into northern France to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of Berles-au-Bois, a rural community a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of Arras.

It was there that, on November 14, four officers and one-hundred forty-one *other ranks* – one of them Private Bennett – reported from Rouen *to duty* with 1st Battalion.

That new offensive, the so-called *Battle of Cambrai* was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle began well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered and by its close the British had relinquished as much territory as they had gained. 1st Battalion was again dealt with severely, at Marcoing and at Masnières - where a Caribou stands today: of the total of five-hundred fifty-eight officers and men who went into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of the second day.



(Above right: *the Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

The son of William James Bennett, labourer, and Alice Bennett (née *Brenton*) – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Indian Arm, Lewisporte, he was also brother to William, Stewart, James, Cecil, Maud, Fanny, Elsie, Pearl, Elda and to Myrtle.

Private Bennett was at first reported as *missing in action* on November 20, 1917, during the first day of fighting near the French villages of Marcoing and Masnières. Some thirty weeks later, on June 18 of 1918, he was officially *presumed dead*.*



Chesley Bennett had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and eight months.

**A second source has him reported as killed in action, but his papers show no authority for this amendment.*

(Right above: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether this was ever achieved is at best controversial.* – photograph from 2012)

(Right: *A plaque on the wall of the municipal building in Lewisporte and the community's War Memorial commemorate and honour the sacrifice of Private Bennett.* – photograph from 2013)



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

