

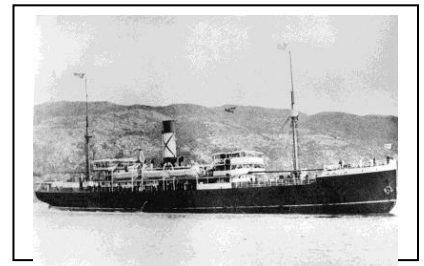


Private Matthew Bobbett (also spelt *Bobbitt* on his file) (Regimental Number 3541), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a sailor, Matthew Bobbett was a recruit of the Fifteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on March 12, 1917, he also enlisted - engaged *for the duration of the war* at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on that same day.



Private Bobbett did not leave St. John's until August 4 of that year. On that day he marched down to St. John's harbour and boarded the Bowring Brothers vessel, *Florizel* (right)*. The destination was Halifax, Nova Scotia, from where the Newfoundland draft now took ship – thus far un-identified: maybe *Missanabie* but this is far from certain - to cross the Atlantic to the United Kingdom.



**Albeit a second source claims that he... embarked St. John's train for Halifax N.S. 4/8/17: Both of these sources are in Private Bobbett's personal documents.*

Arriving in England the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence to serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home had been 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*)

Private Bobbett spent the five months succeeding his arrival in the United Kingdom at the Regimental Depot at Ayr and likely also at Barry*. In the latter half of January of the New Year, 1918, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was to move quarters from Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester.



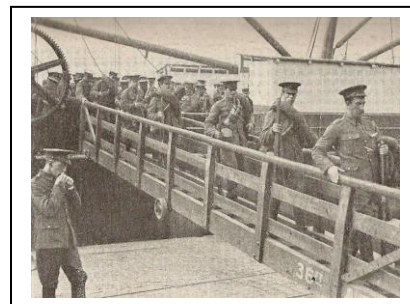
It was there that he would have been at the beginning of February when he was ordered to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.

**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been 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.*

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

On February 4, the 36th Re-enforcement Draft of two hundred *other ranks* from Hazely Down – Private Bobbett among its ranks - passed through the English port of Southampton on its way to the Continent. On the 6th the Newfoundlanders landed in the French port of Rouen for the inevitable final training and organization at the Base Depot before finding its way to the front.

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



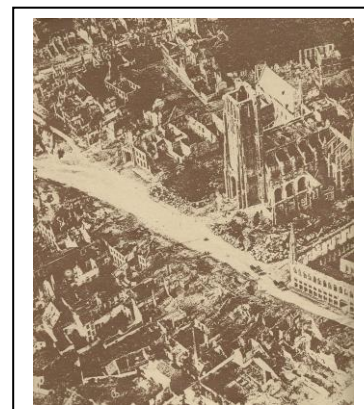
**Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

A detachment of one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Rouen – Private Bobbett among that number - reported to duty with 1st Battalion at Steenvoorde, Belgium, on the 15th of that February, the day before an inspection by Major-General Beauvoir de Lisle, Officer Commanding 29th Division, a parade complete with presentation of decorations and the announcement that the Newfoundland Regiment was to be designated as *Royal*.

Meanwhile, at the close of the *Battle of Cambrai* at the beginning of December of 1917, 1st Battalion – once again badly under-strength due to the heavy casualties incurred – had been withdrawn from the area of the front lines to re-enforce and to re-organize. The following weeks had been spent at first to the south-west of the city of Arras, at Humbercourt and then at some distance to the north-west, at Fressin.

The weather obliged and even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow, a bit too much at times apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, and after that snowy Christmas period spent to the west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had been ordered into Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time.



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There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences. It was during a period while 1st Battalion was out of the lines that Private Bobbett reported to *active service*.

(Previous page: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

Meanwhile, while the Allies built their defences, by the beginning of 1918 the Germans were preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them.



It was expected that the Germans would launch a spring offensive. While they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders continued to dig.

(Right above: *countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

On March 13, the Newfoundlanders were in the front-line and support trenches just beyond Zonnebeke, to the north-east of Ypres, having been posted there on March 7. The Regimental War Diary of that period makes no particular note of events on either the 12th or the 13th, and the entry of the 14th is minimal: *Battalion relieved by Lancs. Fusiliers, and moved to Haslar Camp. Total casualties during tour in line:- Killed in Action = 1 Officer, 11 Other Ranks, Missing B'ld K = 1 Other Rank, Wounded = 54 do.*

The son of John Bobbett, fisherman – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - and Rachel Bobbett (née Spencer, deceased December 19, 1909) of McCallum Harbour, Hermitage Bay, he was also brother to Robert, John, Arthur-Stephen and Emma*.



Private Bobbett was reported as having been *killed in action* in the trenches on March 13, 1918, during a heavy German artillery bombardment, while serving with 'D' Company.

Matthew Bobbett had enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years and seven months: he appears likely to have been younger.

**very likely but further confirmation suggested*

(Right above: *Oxford Road Cemetery is adjacent to the community of Wieltje, where 1st Battalion detrained en route to the posting of the last days of March, 1918. The spires of Ypres may be perceived on the western horizon. – photograph from 2013*)

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

