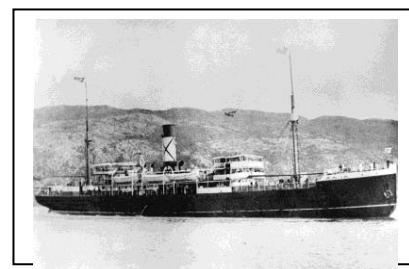




Private Thomas Henry Brinton (Regimental Number 3907) is interred in Dadizeele New British Cemetery – Grave reference V. F. 4.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Thomas Brinton was a recruit of the Fifteenth Draft. Presenting himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on July 12, 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 Brinton 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 the contingent left St. John's by train.*

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 Brinton spent the five months succeeding his arrival in the United Kingdom at the Regimental Depot at Ayr and likely also at Barry*.

**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.*

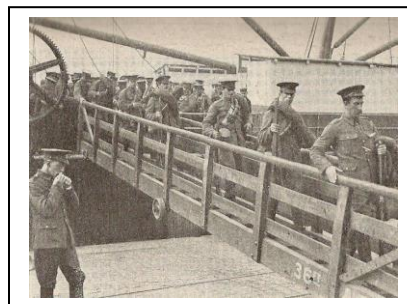
In the latter half of January of the New Year, 1918, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was to move quarters from Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester.

It was there that Private Brinton would have been stationed at the beginning of the month of April when he was ordered to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.



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

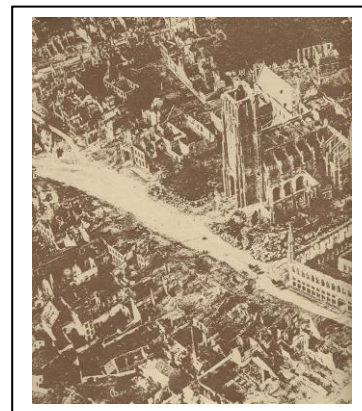
On April 3, the small 41st Re-enforcement Draft, from Hazely Down Camp – Private Brinton a soldier among that contingent of only ten *other ranks* - passed through the English port of Southampton on its way to France and, on the 6th, some two or three days later, reported to the British Expeditionary Base Depot at the French city of Rouen for final training and organization* before finding its way to 1st Battalion.



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

**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, Étamples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

In the case of Private Brinton and his comrades-in-arms, less time was apparently spent than usual at Rouen. He is recorded in his documents as having reported *to duty* with 1st Battalion on April 12. The Regimental Diary makes no mention of any reinforcements arriving on that day, not surprising perhaps, given the critical situation at the time.



Three months prior to Private Brinton's arrival, some seventeen days into the month of January of 1918, after a snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had returned to Belgium, to the Ypres Salient, for a third time. There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.

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

In the meantime, the Germans had been 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 they would launch a spring offensive.



In the interim, 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*)

Then the Germans did as was expected of them. Ludendorff's armies had already launched a powerful thrust on March 21, striking at first in the area of *the Somme*, overrunning the battlefields of 1916 and beyond; for a while the advance seemed unstoppable. Then a second offensive, *Georgette*, was launched in the northern sector of the front, in Flanders, where the Newfoundlanders were stationed: the date was April 9. Within two days the situation of the Allies was desperate.



(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

On April 10, the day after the first heavy bombardments, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due to come out of the line and move back to the Somme, boarded buses at three o'clock in the afternoon and were suddenly directed southward, towards Nieppe.

They were in action, attempting to stem this latest offensive, three hours later.

(Right: *the area of La Crêche - the buildings in the background - where the Newfoundlanders de-bussed on April 10 to meet the Germans in the area of Steenwerck and its railway station – photograph from 2010.*)



The British were pushed back to the frontier area of France and Belgium. On the 12th of April 1st Battalion, fighting in companies rather than as a single entity, was making a series of stands.

Whether or not Private Brinton, having arrived on April 12, was sent immediately to a fighting company is not recorded, but it is not difficult to imagine that, sooner rather than later, he was pressed into action, particularly given that 1st Battalion incurred almost two hundred casualties on April 13 alone.

Besides, there was nowhere else to go with the Germans advancing along the entire front: the British, the Empire (*Commonwealth*) troops, and their allies were making a desperate last stand - and the Germans so close to winning the whole thing.

On April 13, during the defensive action near the De Seule crossroads on the Franco-Belgian border, one platoon of 'C' Company was obliterated while trying to check the German advance. The remainder of 'C' Company took up defensive positions along a light railway line and, with 'A' Company, stopped a later enemy attack. 'B' and 'D' Companies – in a failed counter-attack on that evening - were equally heavily involved.



(Right above: *ground just to the east of Bailleul where 1st Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

What *exact* role Private Brinton played during this frenetic period is not known, except in a curt entry by the Regimental War Diarist (see immediately below) – it is recorded only that he was a soldier of 'A' Company - but from April 10 to 21 was to be a difficult eleven days for all of 1st Battalion's personnel.



Nevertheless, somehow, the German breakthrough never materialised and the front finally stabilised.

The Regimental War Diary cites *...the remainder of 'C' Coy. under Capt. Paterson, M.C. and Hqrs. took up a position along a light railway line and prepared to fight to a finish. ...there can be no doubt that it was Hqrs., 'A' & 'C' Coys. that by their resistance saved what would have been at least a very serious position for the whole 34th Division*.*

(continued)

****88th Brigade – therefore 1st Battalion – was seconded from 29th Division to the 34th Division during this critical period.***

(Previous page: These are the De Seule crossroads almost one-hundred years later, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, and also the scene of fierce fighting involving 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?))

Just days after the crisis had passed, on April 24, 1st Battalion officially said farewell to its comrades-in-arms of 88th Brigade and 29th Division and on the morrow participated in a recessional parade attended by the officer commanding 88th Brigade, Brigadier Freyberg. It would later 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 during the German spring offensive, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

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.



(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)

(continued)

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 (*Ingoigem*).

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

(Right: *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.*



On October 14, 1st Battalion, having been rested for a week after heavy fighting near Ledeghem, had 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 (Kortrijk) which they were to bypass. The advance of the 14th was successful in gains - 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 – right to left - of October 19-20, 1918 – 1st Battalion had advanced towards the camera along the far bank. The Harlebeke Caribou (below) stands about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

The son of Henry Brinton, fisherman, and Ellen (*Helen*) Brinton (*Brenton* elsewhere but father signs *Brinton*) of Bulls Cove, Burin, he was also brother to John, Annie, Pricella (sic - 1921 Census) and Etta M..

Private Brinton was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 14, 1918, while serving with 'A' Company during the fighting of the day in the Ledeghem-Drie Masten area.



Thomas Brinton had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and six months.

(continued)

(Previous page: *The Caribou at Courtrai – today Kortrijk – commemorates the eventual crossing of the Lys Canal on October 19-20, 1918, and the sacrifice of the Hundred Days Offensive. – photograph from 2012*)

(Right: *A family memorial erected by their parents in commemoration of the sacrifice of Henry Thomas Brinton (Brenton) and Henry Thomas* Brinton (Brenton) stands in the Anglican Cemetery in Ship Cove. – photograph from 2015*)

****Some two years after the death of Private Brinton in 1918, a son was born to his parents, a boy whom they baptized Thomas Henry. He was killed through enemy action at sea, on February 13, 1941, during the Second World War while serving in the Canadian Merchant Navy on the tanker S.S. Arthur S. Corwin. The ship was torpedoed and the crew of forty-six all perished.***

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

