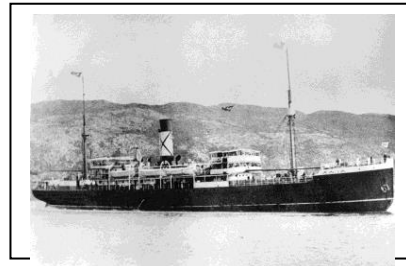


Private William Burbridge (Regimental Number 3882) is buried in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John's, in the Naval and Military Plot.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, William Burbridge 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 June 25, 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.

(continued)

Private Burbridge 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 Burbridge 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 Private Burbridge would have been stationed at the beginning of February when he was ordered to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.

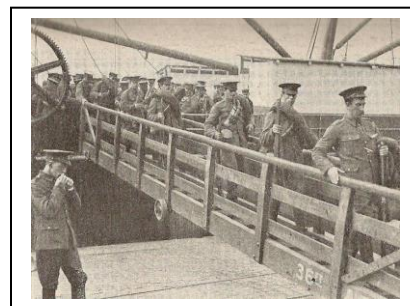
**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

(Right above: *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 Burbridge a soldier 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 their way to the front.

(continued)

(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.*

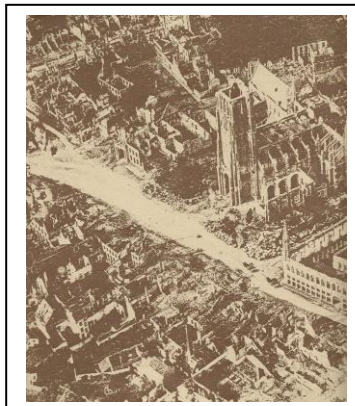
A detachment of one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Rouen – Private Burbridge among that number - reported *to duty* with 1st Battalion at Steenvoorde, on the Franco-Belgian frontier, on the 15th of that February, the day before an inspection by Major-General Beauvoir de Lisle, Officer Commanding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

Meanwhile, some ten weeks previous, at the close of the *Battle of Cambrai* at the beginning of December of 1917, 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment – 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.

There, as it was with 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 Burbridge reported to *active service*.



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

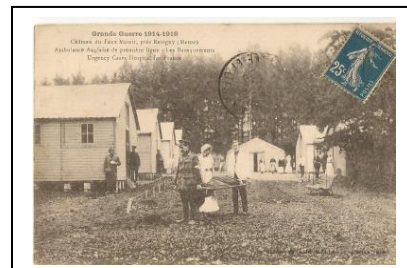
Meanwhile, while the Allies built their defences, by the beginning of 1918 the Germans were preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - 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.

(Previous page: *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*)

That is to say, *most* of the Newfoundlanders continued to dig – one exception being Private Burbridge. He was to enjoy – one may suppose - an eight-day reprieve from such activities as of March 6 when he was admitted into the 26th Field Ambulance with a sprained ankle. Transferred on the following day to the 87th Field Ambulance, he was to then spend a week in its care. On March 14 he was discharged and it was back to duty – and the shovel.



(Right above: *a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)

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 the day after the first heavy bombardments, April 10, as the Germans approached the towns of Armentières and Nieppe, troops were deployed to meet them. The Newfoundlanders, due to leave 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, some 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.

(continued)

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.



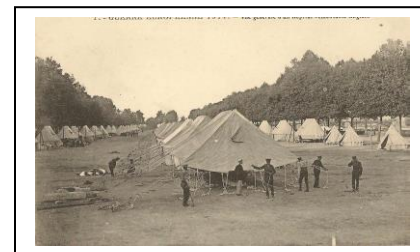
(Right above: *ground just to the east of Bailleul where 1st Battalion fought during the period April 12 to 21 – photograph from 2013*)

What exact role Private Burbridge played during this frenetic period is not known – it is apparently not even recorded of which Company he was a soldier - 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.



(Right above: *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(?)*)

However, it was during the fighting of April 13 – a second source has the day before - that Private Burbridge was wounded. Where he was taken immediately following the incident is not recorded; then again, maybe it was *directly* to the 64th Casualty Clearing Station at Mendinghem* where he was admitted on that same day. He had at least one machine-gun bullet in his back.



(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*)

**Several names such as Mendinghem, Bandagehem and Dozinghem were invented by the British troops as they resembled the Belgian and northern-French fashion of naming villages. These sites were occupied by medical facilities only – and the inevitable cemeteries which today remain. An exception seems to be the commune of Lozinghem – also a medical centre during the War - in that it is a real place – however much the name lends itself to the morbid spirit of the British soldier.*

(continued)

Two days later, on April 15, Private Burbridge was transferred to the 3rd Stationary Hospital at Rouen for further treatment. There it was decided that he should be invalided back to the United Kingdom. On April 18, Private Burbridge was embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. Andrew* (right) for the cross-Channel journey.



Upon arrival in England, he was transported to the 1st London General Hospital in Camberwell where he was admitted on April 19. There Private Burbridge remained for the best part of two months – until on or about June 13 - before being sent to Golders Green Auxiliary Hospital for convalescence. He was released from there on July 15 and granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded service personnel discharged from hospital in the United Kingdom before being immediately posted to 'A' Company at the 11th Command Depot at Perham Down.

Apparently Private Burbridge's condition was still not all that might have been desired as he was to spend only three weeks at the Depot before being posted to the Regimental Depot at Hazely Down, Winchester, on August 14. He had been *considered unsuitable for service* at the Command Depot.

On August 20 a Medical Board pronounced him as *permanently unfit for active service* and it was decided to send him home to be discharged.

Private Burbridge sailed from Southampton on September 23 of 1918 for Montreal*. It was to be some nineteen days – October 12 – before he arrived back in Newfoundland, reporting to the Regimental Depot in St. John's on the same day. For the next six days he lived in lodgings at 40 Young Street after which time he was then admitted into the Military Hospital for Infectious Diseases.



Private Burbridge had caught the 'flu.

**However, the closest match seems to be HMT City of Poona (above) which sailed on that September 23 from London to Montreal, arriving there on October 7.*

The son of George H. Burbridge, fisherman, and Charlotte Burbridge (deceased February 22, 1921) of Epworth, Burin, he was also brother to at least Charles and George - both of whom were to die at sea on August 24, 1927, and to sister Cassie.

Private Burbridge was reported as having *died of sickness* in the Military Infectious Diseases Hospital in St. John's of *pneumonia following influenza*, on October 19, 1918. He was buried on the following morning, the funeral taking place at eleven o'clock.

William Burbridge had enlisted at the age of twenty years and five months (date of birth, February 6, 1894 - according to a discharge form – however, *Vital Statistics* has him passing away at the age of twenty-one years).

(continued)

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

