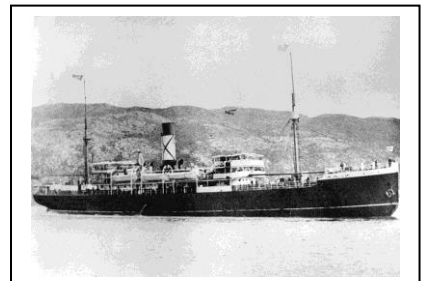




Private Willis Gordon Burton (Regimental Number 3199) lies in Bard Cottage Cemetery – Grave reference II. K. 2.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman earning an annual four hundred dollars, Willis Burton was a recruit of the Twelfth Draft. Having been examined medically on November 2 of 1916, he then also enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – *for the duration of the war* and engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on that same November 2.

Private Burton was one of the approximately three hundred twenty *all ranks* to leave St. John's for *overseas service* on the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right), bound for Halifax, on January 31, 1917, from there to take ship to the United Kingdom.

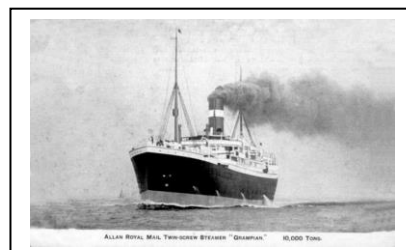


(continued)

Immediately upon its arrival in Nova Scotia, however, this detachment was forwarded to accommodation in the town of Windsor where it was soon to be quarantined because of an epidemic of measles and mumps.

It was not before a lapse of some two-and-a-half months after its arrival that transport could be arranged for the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom for the so-called *Windsor Draft* – minus the twenty-five or so personnel still unable to travel.

On April 16, Private Burton embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Grampian* (right), one of three ships carrying the Newfoundlanders to sail two days later, in a convoy from Halifax. The vessels were also carrying Canadian reinforcements to the English west-coast port of Liverpool, where the ships docked on April 29.



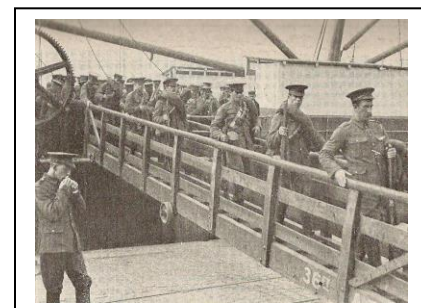
Arriving in England the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence to serve as the base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from Newfoundland were to be despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



By the time that the Windsor Draft arrived at the Regimental Depot, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion was becoming critically short of personnel.

(Right above: *the new race-course at Ayr – opened in 1907 – where men of the Regiment were billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photo from 2012*)

On June 11, 1917, the 25<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Burton among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to France. On the following day, June 12, the contingent disembarked in the Norman capital, Rouen, where time was spent at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, to be organized and to undergo final training\* before moving onward to its eventual rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

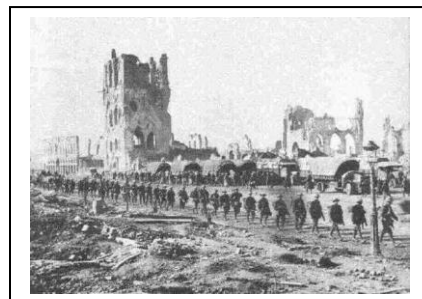
*\*Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*



The records show that was on July 2 – the Regimental War Diary says, in fact, on the day before - that Private Gillespie's contingent of two-hundred fifty *other ranks* reported to duty at *Caribou Camp*, behind the lines near Woesten – to the north-west of Ypres - in Belgium.

For the next few days – and nights – 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion supplied working parties for road-mending and for the construction of infantry tracks.

Only days prior to Private Burton's arrival, at the end of June, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had once again moved north into Belgium and once again to the area of *the Ypres Salient*. This had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right above: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

Only eight days after the arrival of Private Burton at the front, on July 10, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was in positions on the east bank of the Yser Canal to the north of Ypres, the Regimental War Diarist making note of just a single wounded. However, on the evening of the day before, the 9<sup>th</sup>, he had made mention of the following... *At about 11.30 pm, Germans open a heavy Barrage on Trout & Support Trenches and Canal Bank Total Killed 6 wounded nineteen...*



Given the lateness of the hour of that incident, the casualties were likely left un-noted until the following day, the 10<sup>th</sup>, on which day that single *wounded* was also recorded.

(Right above: *the Yser Canal to the north of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) – In July of 1917 the Newfoundlanders were stationed near to this spot, 'A', 'C' and 'D' Companies in the front line and the immediate reserve on the east bank (to the right in the photograph), with 'B' Company and HQ on the western side. – photograph from 2013*)

The only offspring of Joseph Burton, fisherman, and Selina Burton – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Ward's Harbour (today *Beaumont North*) Notre Dame Bay, Private Burton was reported as having been *killed in action* on July 10, 1917, while serving with 'B' Company in trenches on the Yser Canal to the north of Ypres.



Willis Burton had enlisted at the age of twenty-one years and seven months.

(Right above: *Bard Cottage Cemetery just to the north of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *The War Memorial at Beaumont North honours the sacrifice of Private Burton.* – photograph from 2014)



(Far right: *the family memorial to Willis Burton to be found in the United Church Cemetery in Beaumont North (formerly Ward's Harbour)* – photograph from 2014)



Private Willis Gordon Burton was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



Hon. R. A. Squires  
St Johns

Ward's Hr  
Aug 28<sup>th</sup> 1917

Dear Sir

Your letter of the 31<sup>st</sup> July was received. And I desire to sincerely thank you for your very kind expressions of sympathy for the loss of my dear Boy Willis Gordon who was killed on the 10<sup>th</sup> July. The blow was very very hard indeed as he was our all but we trust that the effort undertaken by him will be carried out to a successful end. Again thanking you for your kind words and trusting that Gods Blessing will be yours

We are yours sorrowfully  
Mr & Mrs Joseph Burton