



Corporal William Coaker Christian (Regimental Number 3371) is buried in Terlincthun British Cemetery, Wimille – Grave reference VI. C. 39.

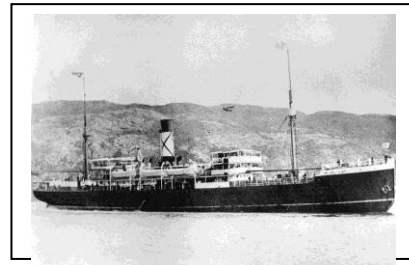
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a clerk, William Christian\* was a recruit – a *Coaker Recruit* - of the Eleventh Draft, and was also a former member of the *Church Lads Brigade*. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on November 11, 1916, he then later enlisted – *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attested, on January 2 of the New Year, 1917.

*\*He was a nephew of W. F. Coaker, politician, cabinet minister, and founder of the Fisherman's Protective Union. Coaker eventually took it upon himself to recruit among the fishermen – although his nephew appears to have been an exception to the rule – and sixty-nine young men enlisted, to become known as Coaker Recruits. Ten of them died in service.*

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Apparently Private Christian did not then leave Newfoundland for a whole year. What he did during that period seems not to be documented; what *is* recorded is that he was promoted twice: to the rank of lance-corporal on April 24 of 1917, and to that of (acting) corporal just over two months later, on June 14.

Corporal Christian was one of the draft which embarked on board the Bowring Brothers vessel *Florizel* (right) on January 29, 1918, in St. John's en route to Halifax, Nova Scotia, from where the detachment was to board another vessel – unspecified\* - for the trans-Atlantic journey to the United Kingdom.



*\*Apparently the only vessels sailing to the United Kingdom from Halifax at or about this time were Saxonia and Megantic which departed for Liverpool on February 21, arriving in port on March 4.*

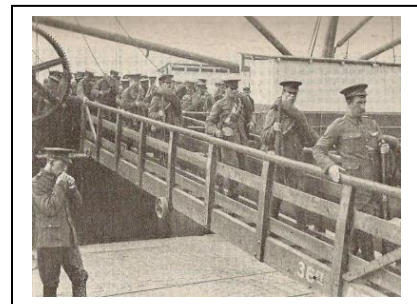
Arriving in England, the draft was forwarded to the new Regimental Depot at Hazely Down in southern England, close to the historic city of Winchester. The Newfoundlanders were to remain at Hazely until and beyond the end of the War.

2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had by that time moved quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer had been finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was there that Corporal Christian reported *to duty* with that draft from Newfoundland.



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

On July 2 Corporal Christian was a non-commissioned officer of a re-enforcement draft – either the 46<sup>th</sup> or 47<sup>th</sup> - from Hazely which embarked at the English Channel port of Folkestone and sailed to the French port of Rouen where the contingent arrived at the British Expeditionary Force Base Depot on the 5<sup>th</sup>. After a very brief period of training and organizing\* at the Depot established there, another detachment from there – this one comprising one-hundred twenty-eight *other ranks* - moved northwards to Equihen where it – Corporal Christian among that number – reported *to duty* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, the Newfoundland Regiment, on July 9.



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

(continued)

***\*Apparently the standard length of time for this final training had been ten days – although this was flexible - in areas that became known as the Bull Rings. By this stage in the War, however, the need for men was such that this time limit had become more flexible than previously.***

By that time the summer of 1918 was passing peaceably enough for most of the personnel of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. For the months of May, June and until early July, the unit had been 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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)***

The Newfoundlanders returned to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade of 9<sup>th</sup> Scottish Division. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today *Ingooigem*).



***(Right: British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days – from Illustration)***

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 again a conflict of movement.

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***\*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 3<sup>rd</sup> Somme.***

On October 14, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was involved in fighting just outside the village of Legeghem. It was on that day that Corporal Christian was wounded, suffering multiple gun-shot wounds and a fractured femur. The records seem not to indicate to where he was immediately evacuated, but by October 21 he had been admitted into the 8<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital at Wimereux – where he was deemed to be *dangerously ill* - for further treatment.



***(Above right: the re-constructed village of Ledeghem, Belgium, almost a century later – photograph from 2010)***

The only son of William L. Christian, clerk employed by *Job Brothers*, and Sarah Christian – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of 72, Hayward Avenue in St. John's, he also had at least one sibling, sister Doris.

Corporal Christian was reported as having *died of wounds* in the 8<sup>th</sup> British (Red Cross) Stationary Hospital at Wimereux on October 26, 1918. His apparently recent application for a cadetship in the Royal Air Force was never to be acted upon.



***(Right: The coastal resort of Wimereux – pictured here before the Great War – was to become a part of an important medical complex. – from a vintage post-card)***

William Coaker Christian had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and two months. He was buried with full military honours.



***(The photograph of Private has been Christian donated to the Grand Banks Genealogy site by Creative Printers & Publishers Limited)***

***(Right: A family memorial which stands in the Old Anglican Cemetery on Forest Road in St. John's commemorates the sacrifice of Corporal Christian. – photograph from 2015)***



***(continued)***

**Private William Christian was entitled to the British War Medal (centre) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

