



Private Almer (elsewhere *Elmer*) Dicks (Regimental Number 3539), 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 earning a monthly \$30.00, Almer Dicks was a recruit of the Fourteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination on March 12 of 1917 at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's, 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.

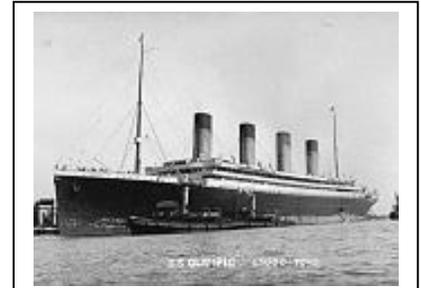
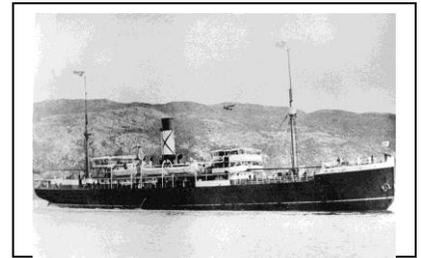
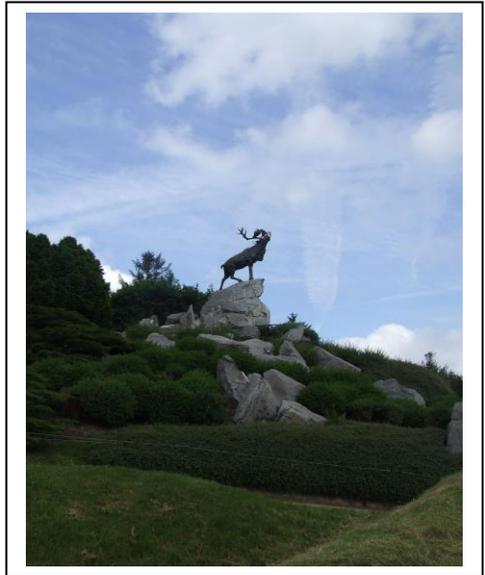
Private Dicks was not to depart from Newfoundland for overseas service until May 19, when the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) left en route to Halifax. His contingent of three officers and one-hundred eighty-two *other ranks*, and also ninety-nine recruits of the newly-formed Newfoundland Forestry Unit, then left Nova Scotia for the United Kingdom on board an unspecified* vessel, on May 29.

**The ship in question may well have been the White Star liner Olympic (right) – sister ship to Titanic – requisitioned as a troop transport during the war, which sailed on June 2 from Halifax with Canadian military personnel as well – there are no other departures on or about this date. May 29 may have been the date of embarkation by the Newfoundland contingent.*

Arriving in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on June 9 the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr* had already been in existence as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were being 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*)

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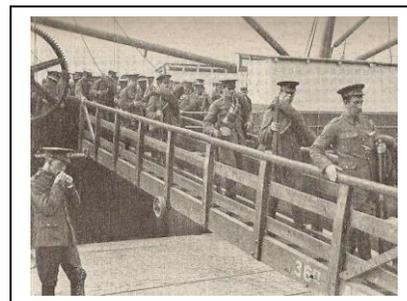


**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

It was not to be until on or about December 2 that Private Dicks was to take ship again, on this occasion on his way to the Continent, passing through the English south-coast port of Southampton, one of the one-hundred eleven *other ranks* of the 34th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr.

Most of those who had enlisted at the same time were already by now in France; however, Private Dicks had instead been admitted into Heathfield Hospital at Ayr from November 3 to 19 with suspected diphtheria.

The Newfoundlanders disembarked in Rouen on December 4 and made their way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot established there for a few days of final training and organization* before making their way to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



(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.*

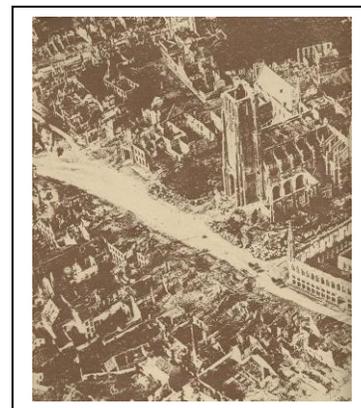
When Private Dicks' contingent of fifty-five *other ranks* reported to duty on December 11, 1st Battalion had left behind it – on December 4 - the theatre and the exertions of the *Battle of Cambrai*. On the day of the newcomers' arrival the unit was billeted in the vicinity of the community of Humbercourt, a number of kilometres just to the south-west of Arras. The Newfoundlanders remained there until the 18th when they marched to Fressin, some fifty kilometres to the north-west. There they were to spend both Christmas and New Year.

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, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences.

(Right: *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.

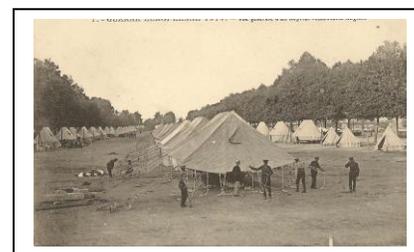
It was expected that the Germans would launch a spring offensive. In the interim the Newfoundlanders dug.

Private Dicks, however, instead of digging, on January 27 of the New Year, 1918, went to the 89th Field Ambulance instead, with a common problem: PUO (*Pain of Unknown Origin*). On the same day he was forwarded to the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearing Station at the Rémy Sidings, Poperinghe.

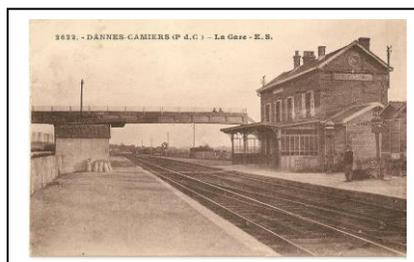


(Right above: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right: *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*)



From the CCS, Private Dicks was transferred to the 20th General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers on February 3, to be sent to the 6th Convalescent Depot a week later, on the 10th. Apparently he was again forwarded, on to the 14th Convalescent Depot at Trouville, on February 13.



Presumably by now his problem had been diagnosed, although his files still seem to give no hint of any medical complaint.

(Right above: *the railway station of the conjoint centres of Dannes and Camiers, though which many thousands of sick or wounded – or convalescent – military personnel passed during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Joining Base Depot in Rouen from convalescence on either March 27 or 29, about a week later, on April 4, Private Dicks re-joined 1st Battalion, by then at *Haslar Camp*, to the north-east of Ypres and not far removed from the village of Passchendaele. The troops in the north of France and in Belgium were expecting an almost imminent German attack.

The Germans then 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 to be unstoppable.

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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: *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 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 above: *the area of La Crèche - 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.

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 Dicks played at this time is not known – even the Company in which he served seems not to be recorded - 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.



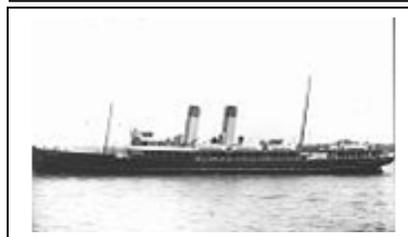
(Right above: *These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving 1st Battalion on April 12 -13, 1918. Today there are several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

By April 20 the fighting was over for the Newfoundlanders and on the following day, by then relieved by French troops, they marched to the rear in the vicinity of the community of Steenvoorde. However, Private Dicks was no longer with 1st Battalion, having been evacuated to the 62nd Casualty Clearing Station at Watten, suffering with pyrexia (high fever) on April 19, the day before.

Diagnosed as having mumps, he was then forwarded to the 14th Stationary Hospital at Wimereux on either the 20th or 22nd of April. There it was decided to evacuate him back to the United Kingdom and, on May 2, having been removed from the *seriously ill* list only four days previously, Private Dicks was placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. Denis* (right) for the cross-Channel journey.



(Right above: *the French coastal resort of Wimereux which, in conjunction with nearby Boulogne was to be an important medical complex during the conflict, here at some time just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



Once having arrived in England, his schedule was no less hectic: to 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth on the same day; to Grove Military Hospital in Tooting – a neighbouring London suburb – on the morrow: thirty-three days in all.

Discharged on June 5 to be granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded service personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom, Private Dicks was finally posted to 'H' Company at the new Regimental Depot near Winchester on June 14.

(Right: *The main building of what became 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War was opened, on July 1st, 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010*)



(Above far right: *Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing at 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

2nd (Reserve) Battalion by then had 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 so it was to there that Private Dicks was posted – and from there that he received his orders to re-join the British Expeditionary Force and 1st Battalion.



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

On September 23 Private Dicks passed, a soldier of the 52nd Re-enforcement Draft, from Hazely Down, once again through Southampton and Rouen – and those almost-inevitable days of final preparation - on his way back to the Western Front. He reported for duty on October 6, just as 1st Battalion were pulling back out of the line after days of fierce fighting in the vicinity of the village of Ledeghem.

In the meantime, some two weeks before Private Dick's return to active duty, the Newfoundlanders had 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 (today *Ingooigem*).



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

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 a conflict of movement.

**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.*

The advance, despite fierce resistance at times, was relentless. On the night of October 19-20, 1st Battalion crossed the Lys Canal under fire just to the east of Courtrai – today Kortrijk - on barrel bridges and on the morrow was advancing towards the village of Vichte.



(Right: *the Lys – both canal and river – at a point not far from the crossing-place – right to left - of October 19-20, 1918 - The Harlebeke Caribou stands about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

The son of Frederick Dicks*, fisherman, and Clara Dicks (deceased March 9, 1904) – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Harbour Buffett, Placentia Bay, he was reported as *missing in action* on October 25, 1918, in fighting in-between the Belgian villages of Vichte and Inghoyghem.

Some thirty weeks later, on May 27, 1919, he was officially *presumed dead*. (His file also cites *believed killed in action*.)

Almer Dicks had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and five months. He died on the day before 1st Battalion marched away from the front line for the last time.

**His second wife was Sarah – the couple married before 1915 - with whom he had two daughters, Annie and Harriett: this needs confirmation.*

(Right: *The Caribou at Harlebeke – commemorates the crossing of the Lys Canal and the sacrifices of the last campaign of the War. – photograph from 2012*)

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

