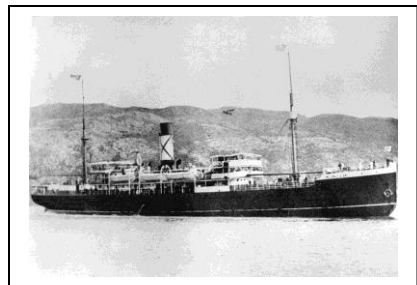




Private Ernest Fisher (Regimental Number 3516) is buried in the Rocquigny-Équancourt Road British Cemetery – Grave reference IV. A. 26.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a butcher, Ernest Fisher was a recruit of the Thirteenth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on March 6 of 1917, enlisting – *for the duration of the war* at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attesting on that same day.

It was on April 7 of 1917, that Private Fisher boarded either the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) for Halifax, or a train* in St. John's for the cross-island journey to Port aux Basques from where a ferry and another train would have transported Private Fisher and his co-travellers to Halifax – the files are contradictory. Apparently it had been hoped that the fifty personnel of this draft would be joining the *Windsor Draft*** on April 16 or 17 when it was to board one of the three transports awaiting in Halifax harbour and sail to the United Kingdom.



**The records of Private Fisher and also those of other personnel cite... 'Embarked St. John's S.S. Train to Halifax 7/4/17' ...while other sources hint that the passage to Nova Scotia may have been by ship: nevertheless, a personal memo of a Private Yetman mentions the Florizel.*

***This was the name given to the draft of about three-hundred twenty all ranks which had left St. John's on January 31, 1917, en route to Halifax from where they were to sail to the United Kingdom. This contingent would eventually make that voyage, but about thirteen weeks later than envisaged. They were quarantined at Windsor as the result of a measles and mumps epidemic that claimed two of their number – and maybe a later third. In the meantime, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was running low on man-power.*

This plan, however, was not to be, for whatever the reason – perhaps lack of space as the ships were carrying Canadian reinforcements overseas - and it was not until the final day* of the month that this small contingent – Private Fisher still one of its number - finally sailed from Halifax. They may, in fact, have embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* (right) – sister-ship of *Titanic* – which sailed at that time from Halifax with Canadian troops to the United Kingdom.



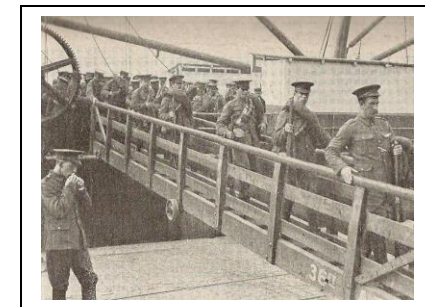
**If it were on Olympic that the contingent embarked – she appears to have been the only ship sailing on or about that time - then the Newfoundlanders sailed from Halifax on April 29 to arrive in Liverpool on May 7.*

Having arrived 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 – 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*)

On September 22, 1917, the 30th Re-enforcement Draft from Barry* – Private Fisher among its fifty *other ranks* – was on its way to France through the English south-coast port of Southampton. On the next day the contingent disembarked in the Norman capital, Rouen, where time was spent at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, for final organization and training** before moving onward to its eventual rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



(continued)

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

**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of the city 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.*

**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.*

Private Fisher joined 1st Battalion *in the field* – not in France but in Belgium - three days after the engagement at the *Broembeek* (see below). Following their exertions, the Newfoundlanders had retired to *Swindon Camp* in the area of the community of Poperinghe, and it was there that the ninety-four *other ranks* of Private Fisher's detachment from Rouen reported *to duty* on October 12.

1st Battalion had by this time been serving in Belgium for better than three months in the campaign which came to be known simply as *Passchendaele*. A small cog in the machinery of the British Army which floundered its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders, notably the unit had fought in two major infantry engagements, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



(Above right: *an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

A week after that encounter of October 9 at the *Broembeek*, the Newfoundlanders were withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: *Cambrai*. They were ordered back south from Belgium into northern France on October 17 to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of Berles-au-Bois, a small rural community a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of Arras – some personnel even having been granted at the time a ten-day furlough back to the United Kingdom.

The so-called *Battle of Cambrai* was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders directly involved at all times during that period.

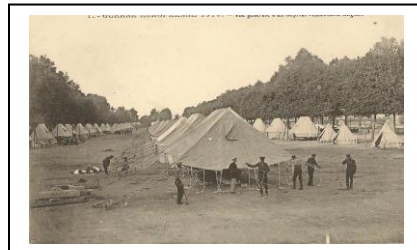
The battle began well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered and by its close the British had relinquished as much territory as they had gained. 1st Battalion was again dealt with severely, at Marcoing and at Masnières - where a Caribou stands today: of the total of five-hundred fifty-eight officers and men who went into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of the second day.



(Previous page: *the Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

On either the first or the second day of the fighting at Masnières, Private Fisher suffered a gun-shot wound to the chest. He was evacuated from the field and eventually to the 21st Casualty Clearing Station at Ytres on that same November 21 for treatment.

(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*)



The son of Robert Fisher, labourer, and Hannah Fisher – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay - of 69, Merrymeeting Road (perhaps later of 23, Hayward Avenue) in St. John's, he was also brother to Henrietta and William.

Private Fisher was reported as having *died of wounds* on November 29, 1917, in the same 21st CCS.

Ernest Fisher had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and eleven months.



(Right above: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether this was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012*)

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

