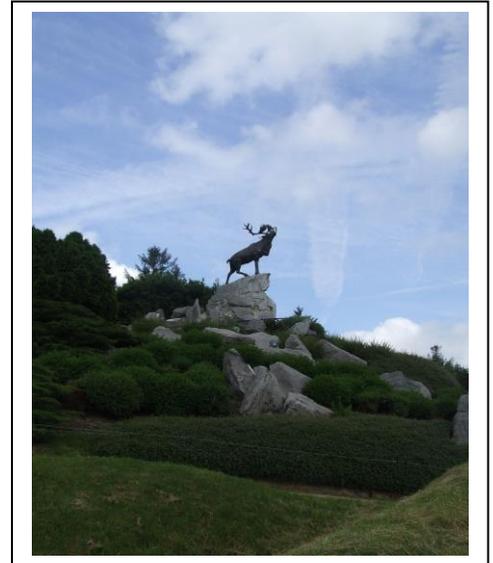
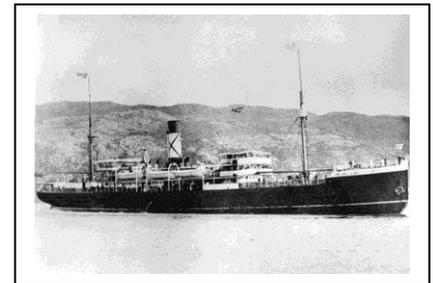


Private Charles Hobbs (Regimental Number 4284), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Charles Hobbs was a recruit of the Eighteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on December 31, 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 New Year's Eve.



Private Hobbs did not embark for overseas service until January 29 of 1918, some six weeks later, when he boarded the Bowring Brothers' Red Cross Line vessel *Florizel* (right) en route for Halifax. From there he sailed on an unspecified troop-ship to the United Kingdom.



*\*This draft may even have travelled on to Québec or Montréal where ships were still apparently sailing even at this late time.*

In the latter part of January of the New Year of 1918, the Regimental Depot which served the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred 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 was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was to Hazely Down that Private Hobbs reported *to duty* from Newfoundland; it was also to be *from* there that he was then later despatched to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.



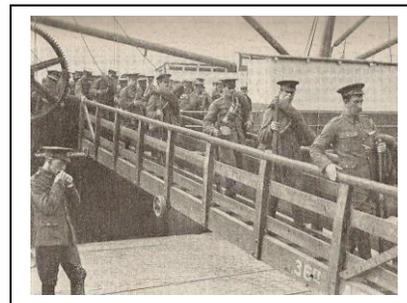
(Right: a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from *The War Illustrated*)

He was not to leave for the Continent, however, before receiving medical attention for mumps in the Hazely Camp Military Hospital. There Private Hobbs spent some two weeks and two days – from May 9 until May 25 – before being discharged *to duty*.

On or about July 2, either the 47<sup>th</sup> or the 48<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Hobbs one of this contingent - from Hazely Down, passed through the English port of Folkestone and, on the 5<sup>th</sup>, arrived at the French city of Rouen, for final training and organization\* at the British Expeditionary Force Depot there, before finding its way to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

Only days afterwards, on July 8 – although *his* file says the 9<sup>th</sup> - he was surely one of the detachment of one-hundred twenty-eight *other ranks* from Rouen that reported *to duty* with the Newfoundland parent unit at Équièhen on the French west coast.

(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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Meanwhile, just days after the crisis of the German spring offensive had passed, on April 24 – and some eleven weeks before Private Hobbs' arrival at Équièhen - the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion officially had said farewell to their comrades-in-arms of 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 29<sup>th</sup> Division and on the morrow had participated in a recessional parade attended by the officer commanding 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Brigadier Freyberg.

They were later to be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to move a world away from Flanders where it had just fought, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four other ranks - took train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étapes, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening. For now, for them, the fighting was a thing of the past.

The summer of 1918 was to pass 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 was 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.*

(continued)

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 Équihen – 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.



This was, of course, both the time and place of Private Hobbs' reporting *to duty in the field* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

(Right above: *a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihen at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Re-enforced, 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 would finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (*Ingooigem*).

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 once again to be a conflict of movement.

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

*\*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.*

The advance, despite fierce resistance at times, was relentless. On the night of October 19-20, 1<sup>st</sup> 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 at a distance of about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

(continued)

The son of John William Hobbs, fisherman, and Maria Jane Hobbs (née *Taylor*) – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Redcliffe, Bonavista Bay, he was also brother to Catharine Jane\*, to Kenneth\* and to Robert.



*\*Catharine Jane is likely his sister, born 1885; there are two Kenneth, born 1889 and 1891 – the records do not show if the former died soon after birth.*

(Right above: *the valley of the Scheldt as seen from Ingoyghem, the Newfoundlanders' furthest point of advance on October 26, 1918 – photograph from 2010*)

Private Hobbs was reported as *wounded and missing in action* on October 20, 1918, in the assault on the Belgian village of Vichte. Some thirty weeks later, on May 17, 1919, he was officially *presumed dead*.



Later again, however, on an unrecorded date, his file was apparently amended so as to read *killed in action*.

Charles Hobbs had enlisted at the age of twenty-four years and seven months.

(Right above: *The sacrifice of Private Hobbs is honoured on the War Memorial which stands near Summerville. – photograph from 2011*)

(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*)



Extract from a letter to the Reverend S. A. Dawson of *The Parsonage, King's Cove*, the contents of which he was requested to relay to the family of Private Hobbs:

**...a message has been received from the Record Office, London which states that No. 3808, Corp. Ralph was interviewed and states he saw No. 4284, Pte. Chas Hobbs wounded in the side by two machine gun bullets, and subsequently by sniper bullets. Ralph stated that when he left him, Hobbs was dead...**

Private Charles Hobbs was awarded the British War Medal (on left) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

