

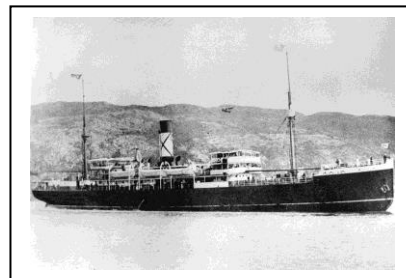


Private Edgar Rees (Regimental Number 4163) is buried in Terlincthun British Cemetery, Wimille – Grave reference VI. A. 45.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a miner, Edgar Rees 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 November 28 of 1917, he then enlisted - engaged *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attested that same day.

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Private Rees did not embark for overseas service until January 29 of 1918, some nine 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 troopship 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 2nd (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 Rees 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.

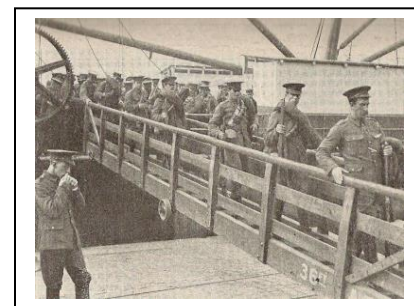


(Right: a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from *The War Illustrated*)

During the period spent at Hazely he was admitted on two occasions into the Camp Military Hospital (on consecutive dates): on March 23 until April 15 it was for treatment for a case of mumps; and on the same April 15 until the 27th of the month, for medical attention because of scabies.

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

Only days afterwards, on July 8 – although *his* file says the 9th - 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.*

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

They were later to be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 1st 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 – 1st 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 Étaples, 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 1st 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 1st 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 1st 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 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 Rees' reporting *to duty in the field* with 1st 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*)

(continued)

Re-enforced, the Newfoundlanders 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 (*Ingooigem*).

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 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 3rd Somme.*

The advance, despite fierce resistance at times, was relentless. On October 14, 1st Battalion, having been rested for a week after heavy fighting near Ledeghem, returned to the front for a new drive to commence on that day. The Newfoundlanders were to push along the northern bank of the River-Canal Lys, itself north of the city of Courtrai (Kortrijk) which they were to bypass. The advance of the 14th was successful - but the cost again high: only three hundred reporting for muster at dawn on the following morning.



(Right above: *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*)

The date of Private Rees being wounded seems not to be recorded, nor is the place where he received his preliminary medical attention. But he is later reported as having been admitted into the 8th Stationary Hospital at Wimereux, on October 17, having incurred gun-shot injuries to both legs and to his right thigh. Both his right leg and thigh were subsequently amputated.



(Right above: *The French coastal resort of Wimereux – seen here in pre-war times – became part of an important medical centre during the conflict. – from a vintage post-card*)

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The son of Thomas Rees, farmer, and Elizabeth Rees – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - of Bell Island East, Conception Bay, he was also brother to (at least) Malcolm, May, W(?) and Hazel.

Private Rees was reported as having *died of wounds* in the 8th Stationary Hospital on October 21, 1918.

Edgar Rees had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty years and eight months (elsewhere documented as nineteen years old at the time of his death).



(Right above: *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 Edgar Rees was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

