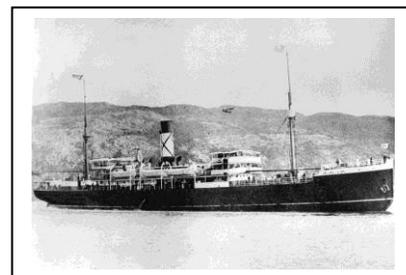




Private William E. Rees (Regimental Number 4088) is interred in Duhallow A.D.S. Cemetery – Grave reference IV. I. 17.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an engine-driver, William Rees was a recruit of the Seventeenth Draft. Presenting himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on November 8, 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 on that same day.



Private Rees did not embark for overseas service until some five weeks later again, the date December 11, when he boarded the Bowring Brothers' Red Cross Line vessel *Florizel* (right above) en route for Halifax.

(continued)

But it was not from Halifax that Private Rees sailed on His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right) to the United Kingdom. The draft embarked in the port of St. John, New Brunswick, on or about December 18 before departure on the morrow. *Missanabie* then docked in Glasgow on December 31, New Year's Eve.



Having disembarked in Scotland, the Newfoundland contingent entrained for the short journey to the Regimental Depot. By this time, the Depot at Ayr had already been in existence serving as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for well over two years, with a temporary move to the town of Barry in the summer of 1917. Private Rees was to be in Ayr for just some two weeks longer before being transferred southward to another camp.



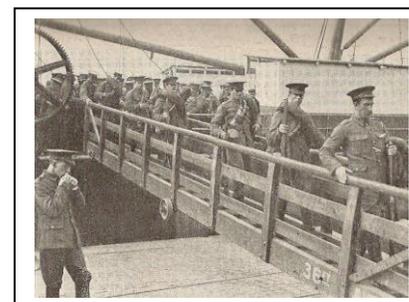
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

In the New Year of 1918, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion moved quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was to be from Hazely Down that Private Rees was to be despatched, in May, to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.



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

On May 25 the 46th Re-enforcement Draft of one-hundred twenty *other ranks*, from Hazely Down – Private Rees one of that number - passed through the English Channel port of Folkestone and, on the 27th, two days later likely via Le Havre, arrived in the French city of Rouen where it made its way to the British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, for final training and organization* before finding the way to 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *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.*

Private Rees is recorded as having reported *to duty* to 1st Battalion on May 31 at Écuire where the Newfoundlanders were stationed at the time. In fact, the date of his arrival was likely the day before – May 30 - as documented in the *Regimental War Diary* when an incoming contingent of one-hundred seventeen *other ranks* from Rouen is noted. The Diary also notes – on both days – *fine weather and enemy air-raids*.

Meanwhile, just days after the crisis of the German spring offensive had passed, on April 24 – and some five weeks before Private Rees' arrival at Écuire - 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 would later 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 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 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*)

This was, of course, both the time and place of Private Rees' reporting *to duty in the field* with 1st Battalion.

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.



(continued)

(Preceding page: a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équièhen 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 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 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 at a distance of about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010)

It was on October 25 that Private Rees was wounded during the fighting in-between the two villages of Vichte and Inghoyghem. He was evacuated from the field and eventually admitted into the 44th Casualty Clearing Station at Brielen, having suffered gun-shot injuries to the head.



(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)

(continued)

The son of George Rees*, carpenter – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - and Amelia Ann Rees of Lance Cove, Bell Island, Private Rees was reported as having *died of wounds* in the same 44th CCS on October 27, 1918.



William Rees had enlisted at the age of nineteen years.

**The 1921 Census records a single George Rees in Lance Cove of the appropriate status to have been Private Rees' father. If this is the correct family, then William was brother to Eugene, Solomon, Edward, Mary-L., Belinda and Richard. But this requires confirmation.*

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

(*The photograph of Private Rees is from the Provincial Archives.*)

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



Private William E. Rees was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

