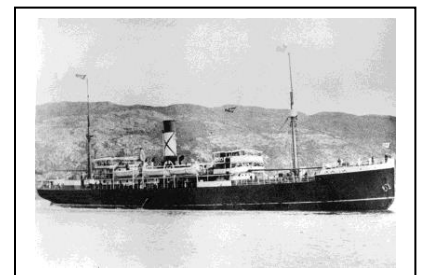




Private Thomas Ricketts (Regimental Number 4020) is interred in Dadizeele New British Cemetery – Grave reference V. E. 26.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Thomas Ricketts was a recruit of the Seventeenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on October 25, 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 Ricketts did not embark for overseas service until some seven 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 Ricketts 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 Ricketts was to be in Ayr for just some two weeks longer before being transferred southward to another camp.



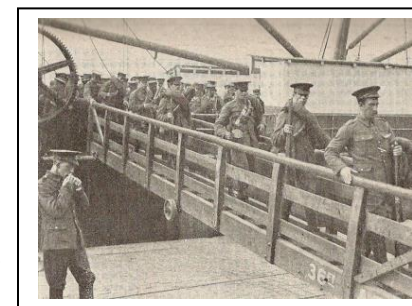
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

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 Ricketts 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 Ricketts 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*)

(continued)

**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 Ricketts 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 probably 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 Ricketts' 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 Ricketts' 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.*

(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.



(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 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: *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.*

On October 14, 1st Battalion, having been rested for a week after heavy fighting near Ledeghem, had 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 – 1st Battalion had advanced towards the camera along the far bank. The Harlebeke Caribou (page following) stands about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

(continued)

The son of Cornelius Ricketts (deceased May 27, 1905) and Elizabeth Ricketts (née *Stuckless*, she later to become the second wife of Alfred Pittman of Sop's Island) of Western Cove (later re-named West Port), White Bay, he was also brother to Alexander of West Port - to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - and to at least one un-named sister and possibly a step-sister.



Private Ricketts was reported as having been *killed in action* in fighting in the Ledeghem-Drie Masten area of Belgium on October 14, 1918.

Originally interred near Ledeghem, his remains were later transferred to lie where they repose today.

Thomas Ricketts had enlisted at the age of twenty-three years and one month.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Courtrai* – today Kortrijk – commemorates the eventual crossing of the Lys Canal on October 19-20, 1918, and the sacrifice of the Hundred Days Offensive. – photograph from 2012)



The photograph of Private Ricketts is from the *Provincial Archives*.

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

(continued on following page)



Sopp's Island
White Bay
Oct 13th 1921

Dear sir, you send me to say what he was a soldier is number was 4020 (in the royal newfoundland regt Thomas Ricketts, what money I want is money enough to keep is sistr until she gets old enough to take care of herself; and I would be glady please that you would be able to get it for me, he have to sister to look out to and no one to take care of they and why shouden I get some money to maintain them until they are able to look out to there selves so I think I have said all hoping to here from you soon I will be tanksful if you try to get it for me

from Mrs Elizabeth
Pittman
Sopps Island