

ROBERTS, T. S.

Private Thomas Stephen Roberts (Regimental Number 3875), 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, Thomas Stephen Teed Roberts was a recruit of the Fifteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road in St. John's on June 25, 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 day.

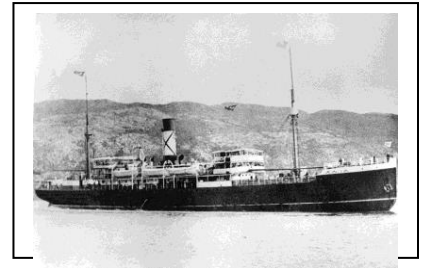
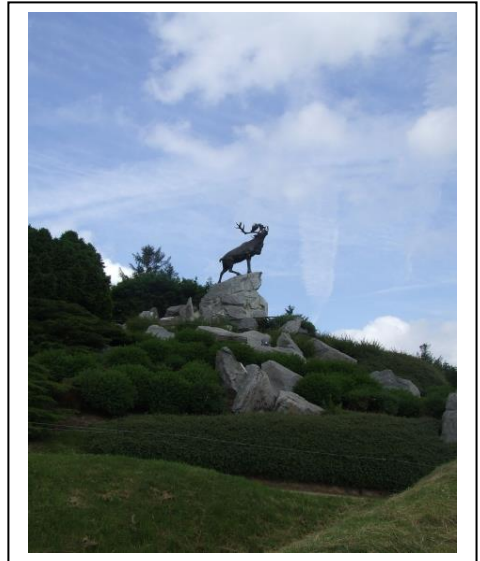
Private Roberts did not leave St. John's until August 4 of that year. On that day he marched down to St. John's harbour and boarded the Bowring Brothers' vessel, *Florizel* (right)*. The destination was Halifax, Nova Scotia, from where the Newfoundland draft now took ship - thus far un-identified: maybe *Missanabie* but this is far from certain - to cross the Atlantic to the United Kingdom.

**Albeit a second source claims that the contingent left St. John's by train.*

Arriving 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 - as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 - that the new-comers from home had been 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*)

Private Roberts spent the five months succeeding his arrival in the United Kingdom at the Regimental Depot at Ayr and likely also at Barry*. In the latter half of January of the New Year, 1918, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was to move quarters from Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester.

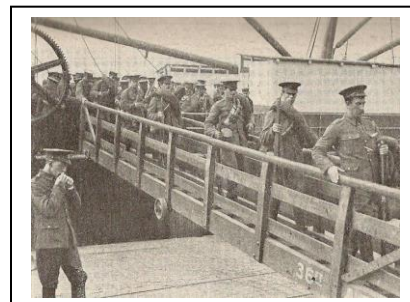


It was there that Private Roberts would have been stationed at the beginning of the month of May when he was ordered to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.

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

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

It was not until on or about May 10-11 of 1918 that either the 44th or 45th Re-enforcement Draft from Hazely Down - with Private Roberts a soldier among its ranks - passed through the English port of Southampton (or possibly Folkestone) and, on the 13th, two days later, reported to the British Expeditionary Force Depot in the vicinity of the French city of Rouen for final training and organization* before finding its way to 1st Battalion.



In the case of this particular contingent, apparently less time than usual was spent at the Base Depot as Private Roberts is recorded as reporting *to duty* to 1st Battalion on May 17, one of a draft of thirty-five *other ranks* to do so on that day.

(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.*

Some three weeks earlier, on April 24, 1st Battalion had officially said farewell to its 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. It would later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 it was to move a world away from Flanders where it had just fought during the crisis of the German spring offensive, 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.



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It was during this posting, on May 17, that Private Roberts and his detachment joined 1st Battalion.

(Preceding page: *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 Équihe – 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 Équihe 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 (*Ingoogem*).

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.*



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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.



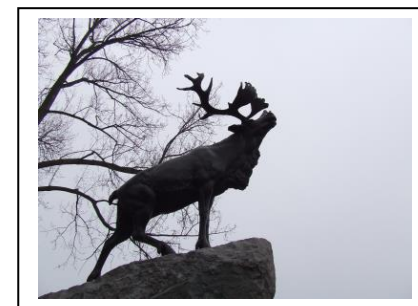
(Right: *the Lys – both canal and river – at a point not far from the crossing-place – right to left - of October 19-20, 1918 - The Harlebeke Caribou stands about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

The son of Thomas Roberts, fisherman, and Mary Roberts – to whom he had allotted a daily seventy cents from his pay - of Epworth, Burin, he was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 25, 1918, while serving with ‘C’ Company during fighting near the Belgian villages of Vichte and Ingoyghem (today *Ingooigem*).



On the evening of the following day, the men and officers of 1st Battalion turned and marched away from the front for the last time.

Thomas Stephen Roberts had enlisted at the age of eighteen years.



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

(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*)

(Right: *The War Memorial which stands in the community of Epworth honours the sacrifice of Private Frederick Bugden.– photograph from 2015*)

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

