

RUSSELL, JOHN

Private John Russell (Regimental Number 4358), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

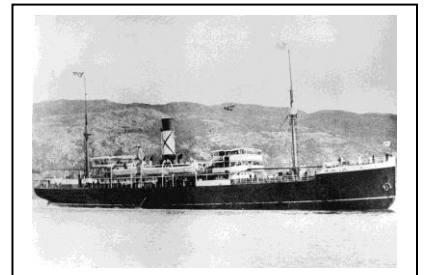
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, John Russell presented himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on February 28 of 1918. He then enlisted - engaged *for the duration of the war* at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attested, all on that same day.



Private Russell did not leave Newfoundland for overseas service until some nine weeks later, the date March 28 of 1918, when he boarded a train en route for Halifax via Port aux Basques and North Sydney. From there he sailed on an unspecified troop-ship* to the United Kingdom** on April 8, disembarking in Liverpool on April 19.

**The troop transport Ulua sailed in convoy from Halifax on April 9 to arrive in Liverpool on the 20th. She is recorded as having embarked... B.E.F. Recruits, Windsor, N.S. The Royal Newfoundland Regiment was, of course, a unit of the 29th Division of the British Expeditionary Force at that time.*

***Up until that time, since early in the previous year, the re-enforcements had been sent to Halifax on board the Bowring Brothers vessel Florizel (right). She had been wrecked near Cappahayden just the month previously en route to Halifax, with a large loss of life.*

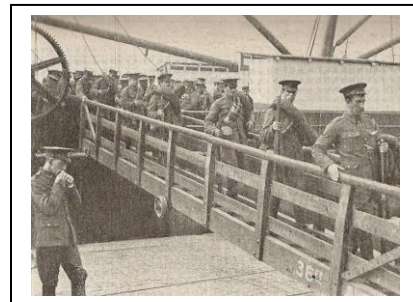


In the New Year of 1918, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had moved quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was *to* there that Private Russell reported upon arrival in England, and *from* there that he was despatched to join the British Expeditionary Force.



(continued)

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



On or about August 31, the 51st Re-enforcement Draft – Private Russell one of this contingent - from Hazely Down, passed through the English-Channel town of Folkestone en route to the French city of Rouen*, for final training and organization** at the British Expeditionary Force Depot there, before finding its way to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.

Only days afterwards – his record says September 5 – Private Russell reported to duty with the Newfoundland parent unit at Équihen on the French west coast.

(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front.* – from *Illustration*)

**If not, the detachment would have disembarked – apparently on the same day - in Boulogne or Le Havre and taken a train to the Base Depot at Rouen or the one at Étapes.*

***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.*

The summer of 1918 had passed peaceably enough for most of the personnel of 1st Battalion. For the months of May, June and until early July, the unit had been 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.



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It was at the end of this period that Private Russell reported to duty with 1st Battalion: the summer was drawing to a close.

(Preceding page: a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équihehen 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 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 (today *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.



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 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)

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The son of John Russell, fisherman, and Annie Russell – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Country Road, Bay Roberts, he was also brother to Cassie.

Private Russell was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 20, 1918, while serving with 'C' Company in fighting during the assault on the Belgian village of Vichte.

John Russell had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and one month.



(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)

(Right: *The Bay Roberts War Memorial honours the sacrifice of Private Russell.* – photograph from 2011)



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

