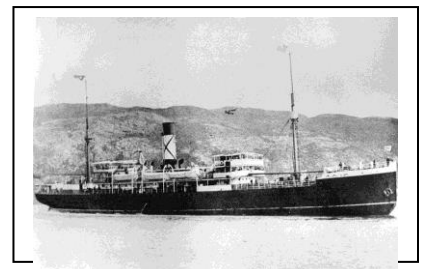




Private William Stephenson (Regimental Number 3737) is interred in Nine Elms British Cemetery – Grave reference XIV. B. 1.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, William Stephenson was a recruit of the Fifteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on May 7, 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 Stephenson 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 he... embarked St. John's train for Halifax N.S. 4/8/17: Both of these sources are in Private Stephenson's personal documents.***

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 Stephenson 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.

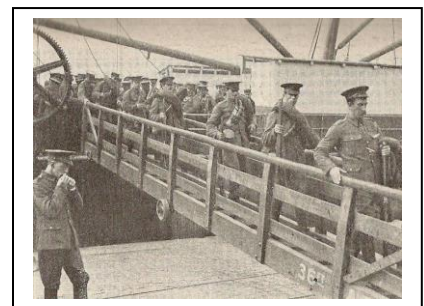


It was there that he would have been at the beginning of February when he was ordered to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.

****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.***

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

On February 4, the 36th Re-enforcement Draft of two hundred *other ranks* from Hazely Down – Private Stephenson among its ranks - passed through the English port of Southampton on its way to the Continent. On the 6th the Newfoundlanders landed in the French port of Rouen for the inevitable final training and organization* at the Base Depot before finding their way to the front.



(Right: 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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.***

A detachment of one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Rouen – Private Stephenson among that number - reported to *duty* with 1st Battalion at Steenvoorde, just on the French side of the frontier, on the 15th of that February, the day before an inspection by Major-General Beauvoir de Lisle, Officer Commanding 29th Division, a parade complete with presentation of decorations and the announcement that the Newfoundland Regiment was to be designated as *Royal*.

Meanwhile, at the close of the *Battle of Cambrai* at the beginning of December of 1917, 1st Battalion – once again badly under-strength due to the heavy casualties incurred – had been withdrawn from the area of the front lines to re-enforce and to re-organize. The following weeks had been spent at first to the south-west of the city of Arras, at Humbercourt and then at some distance to the north-west, at Fressin.

The weather obliged and even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow, a bit too much at times apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, and after that snowy Christmas period spent to the west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had been ordered into Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time.

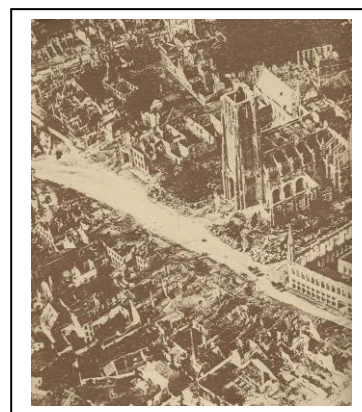
There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences. It was during a period while 1st Battalion was out of the lines that Private Stephenson reported to *active service*.

(Previous page: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

Meanwhile, while the Allies built their defences, by the beginning of 1918 the Germans were preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them.

It was expected that the Germans would launch a spring offensive. While they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders continued to dig.

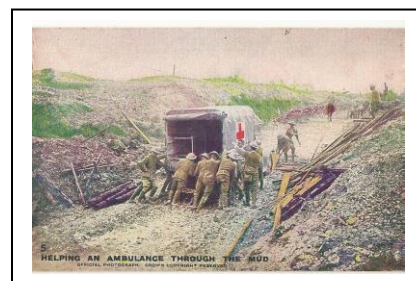
(Right above: *countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)



On March 27, the Newfoundlanders were manning the front-line and support trenches just beyond Zonnebeke and Passchendaele, to the north-east of Ypres, having been posted there in the evening of the day prior, March 26.

The *Regimental War Diary* of that period makes no particular note of events on any one of those days, only making a note on March 31 of *Total casualties to-date:- Killed in Action = 5 Other Ranks. Missing b. Killed 2 do. Wounded = 1 Officer, 11 Other Ranks*

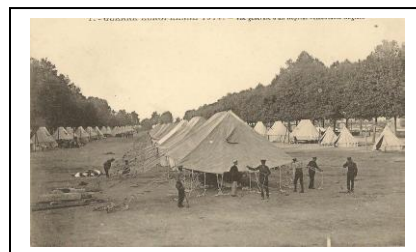
It was on March 27, while serving with 'B' Company in the front lines, that Private Stephenson was wounded and was subsequently evacuated from the field to the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearing Station at the Rémy Siding, Poperinghe. He had incurred injuries to the head inflicted by shrapnel.



(Right: *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*)

(Right below: *a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card*)

The son of John Stephenson and Mary Stephenson (née *Bryant?*) – to whom he had allocated a daily sixty cents from his pay – originally of Venison Island, Labrador - at a time when Labrador was not as yet a part of the Dominion of Newfoundland – then by the time of enlistment, Shoal Bay (later *Cavendish*), Trinity Bay.



Private Stephenson was reported as having *died of wounds* at a quarter to five in the afternoon of March 27, 1918, in the same 3rd Australian CCS.

William Stephenson had enlisted at the age of twenty-one years and eleven months.

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

