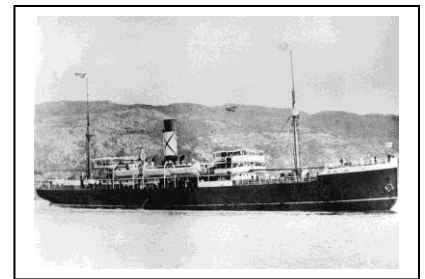




**Private Frederick Wells (Regimental Number 4031) is interred in Dadizeele New British Cemetery – Grave reference V. E. 26.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Fred Wells 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 29, 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 Wells did not embark for overseas service until some six 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 Wells 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 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 Wells 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 Wells 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 46<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft of one-hundred twenty *other ranks*, from Hazely Down – Private Wells one of that number - passed through the English Channel port of Folkestone and, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Wells is recorded as having reported *to duty* to 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Wells' arrival at Écuire - the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion officially had said farewell to their comrades-in-arms of 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 29<sup>th</sup> Division and on the morrow had participated in a recessional parade attended by the officer commanding 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Brigadier Freyberg.

They would later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 1<sup>st</sup> 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 – 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Étaples, 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Wells' reporting *to duty in the field* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.



(Previous 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 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade of 9<sup>th</sup> Scottish Division. 1<sup>st</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> Somme.*

On October 14, 1<sup>st</sup> 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 (today *Kortrijk*) which they were to bypass. The advance of the 14<sup>th</sup> 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 – 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had advanced towards the camera along the far bank. The Harlebeke Caribou stands about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

The son of Herbert Wells and Emma Wells – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Springdale, Notre Dame Bay – he was the first of seven siblings : Joseph, Mary, Lucy, George, Doyle and Kate the others.

Private Wells was at first reported as *missing in action* on October 14, 1918, while serving during fighting in the Ledeghem-Drie Masten area of Belgium.



(continued)

However, due to a subsequent burial report submitted days later by the Reverend G. A. Mills attached to the 9<sup>th</sup> Seaforth Highlanders, Private Wells' file was amended so as to read *killed in action or died of wounds on or shortly after 14/10*.

Fred Wells had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and seven months (born March 1899).

(Previous page: *The Caribou at Harlebeke commemorates the eventual crossing of the Lys Canal on October 19-20, 1918, and the sacrifices of the Hundred Days Offensive.* – photograph from 2012)



(Right above: *The sacrifice of Private Wells is honoured on the War memorial in the town of Springdale.* – photograph from 2014)

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



Springdale Jan 25<sup>th</sup>, 1919

No. 4031, Pte. Fred Wells

Dear Sir:- Beg to acknowledge with thanks receipt of your letter of sympathy re our dear boy, Pte. Fred Wells who is supposed to have been killed in action in Oct. 1918: also message of sympathy from their Majesties King & Queen. It is a trying ordeal we have to undergo like many others but he bravely did his duty. In all his letters he never murmured "Don't worry father," he wrote "if you see my name in the casualties all will be well." Not knowing how he went makes it doubly hard.

(continued)

If you would kindly take some steps, Sir, if you think you could find out any little item of information on: such as, what particular place that Battalion was fighting in at that time and the name of the Commander. The last letter had from our boy did not state about going to the firing line. The letter was dated 1<sup>st</sup> Sept. I suppose it was their orders not to do so; but it leaves us all in the dark.

Perhaps these questions worry you; but it's from parents' hearts you will understand.

Your humble servant  
(Sd.) Herbert Wells

Excerpt from reply:

- **It is to be regretted that nothing can be ascertained with regard to Pte. F. Wells. He was with Coy. from the 28/9/18 till 10/10/18\*, on which date he was reported missing. The Batt'n. was then near Ledeghem, a small town E. of Ypres, when no doubt Pte. Wells was killed and buried. A list of Graves in France and Belgium is being prepared by the DGGR & E\*\*.**

**Chief Paymaster & O. i/c Records**

\*1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was resting out of the line on this date so it is likely that the date in his personal files of 14/10/1918 is the correct one.

\*\*Department of the Director for Graves Registration and Effects