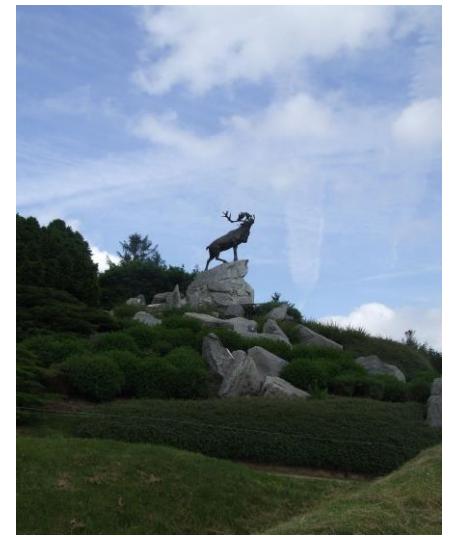


BAKER, E.

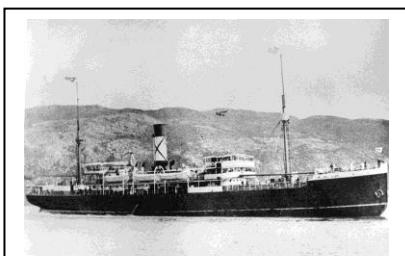
Private Esau* Baker (Regimental Number 3696), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

**He must surely be the Mark Baker recorded in the 1911 Clarenville census.*

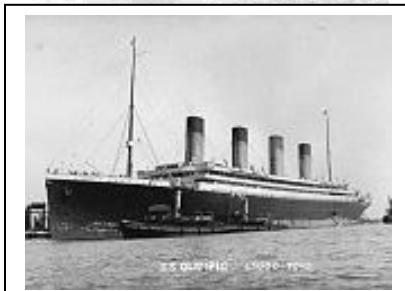
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman earning a monthly \$50.00, Esau Baker was a recruit of the Fourteenth Draft. He enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury on Harvey Road in St. John's on April 27 1917, - engaged for the duration of the war at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and also attested on the same April 27. Apparently he did not present himself for medical examination at Headquarters until the following day, the 28th.



Private Baker was not to depart from Newfoundland until May 19, when the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) left en route to Halifax. His contingent of three officers and one-hundred eighty-two other ranks, and also ninety-nine recruits of the newly-formed Newfoundland Forestry Unit, then left Nova Scotia for the United Kingdom on board an unspecified* vessel, on May 29.



**The ship in question may well have been the White Star liner Olympic (right) – sister ship to Titanic – requisitioned as a troop transport during the war, which sailed on June 2 from Halifax with Canadian military personnel as well – there are no other departures on or about this date. May 29 may have been the date of embarkation by the Newfoundland contingent.*



Arriving in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on June 9 the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr* had already been in existence as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were being despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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)

**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was 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.*

During his stationing in Scotland, Private Baker was admitted into Heathfield Hospital at Ayr where he was diagnosed as suffering from diphtheria. His treatment lasted for over three weeks, from June 21 up until July 13.

It was then not to be until November 6, 1917, that Private Baker took ship again; on this occasion he was on his way to the Continent, passing through the English south-coast port of Southampton as a soldier among the one-hundred eleven *other ranks* of the 32nd Draft from Ayr. The Newfoundlanders disembarked in Rouen on the following day and made their way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot there for a few days of final training and organizing* before making their way to a rendezvous with 1st 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, Étaples, Le Havre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

By that time, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had been withdrawn from the Passchendaele campaign, on October 17, in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: Cambrai. The unit had been ordered back south from Belgium into northern France to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of Berles-au-Bois, a rural community a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of Arras.

It was there that, on November 14, four officers and one-hundred forty-one *other ranks* – one of them Private Baker – reported from Rouen to duty with 1st Battalion.

That new offensive, the so-called *Battle of Cambrai*, was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders directly involved at all times during that period.

The battle began well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered and by its close the British had relinquished as much territory as they had gained.

(continued)

1st Battalion was again dealt with severely, at Marcoing and at Masnières - where a Caribou stands today: of the total of five-hundred fifty-eight officers and men who went into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of the second day.

(Right: *The Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai.* – photograph from 2009)



The son of Caleb Baker, fisherman, and Theresa Baker (she of Southport, Random?) - by the latest, the family was in Clarenville in 1904 – he was also husband of Sarah (later King of Little Harbour, Little Heart's Ease, Trinity Bay) – with whom he had two daughters, Nellie and Pearl and to whom he allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - the couple's own place of residence recorded as Bishop's Falls. He was also brother to George (see below), Marca, Benjie, Rachel, Walter, Isiah, Edmund and Willie.

Private Baker was at first reported as *missing in action* on December 3, 1917, while serving with 'A' Company during the fighting retreat near the French villages of Marcoing and Masnières.

At home it was Adjutant Brown of the Salvation Army in Grand Falls who was requested to bear the news to his wife.

His death was soon afterwards confirmed from two sources*: in a burial report by the Reverend W. Keary attached to the 17th Field Ambulance (no date given but likely to have been shortly thereafter); and from an official German report forwarded to London through the offices of the Geneva Red Cross on March 14, 1918, a file which documented his identification and interment by German forces in Seranvilles Cemetery**.



It was upon the receipt of the first of these confirmations of his death, that Private Baker's personal file was amended – so done, in fact, on December 18, 1917 - so as to read *killed in action (or died of wounds on or shortly after) 3/12/18*.

Esau Baker had enlisted at the age of twenty-nine years and five(?) months.

(Right above: *The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of 1st Battalion on November 20; however, whether this was ever achieved is at best controversial.* – photograph from 2012)

(continued)

**In many cases original graves were disturbed by subsequent fighting and the remains re-buried so the two sources are not necessarily incompatible.*

***This cemetery has yet to be found.*

His brother George – photograph far right above - Private, Regimental Number 1439 - was reported as having been killed in action at the Broembeek, Belgium, on October 9, 1917, during Passchendaele. Private George Baker, in common with his brother, has no known last resting-place.

(With sincere apologies to the person who kindly sent me, and allowed me the use of, the photograph of Esau and George Baker, and whose name I have managed to misplace.)

(Right: The Clarenville War Memorial honours the sacrifice of the Baker brothers. – photograph from 2009(?)

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



(continued on following page)

Hon. A. E. Hickman
Minister of Militia
St. John's

Clarenville
July 23rd 1919

Dear Sir:-

I am the father of Private George Baker Reg. No. 1439 who was killed the 9th of October 1917. I understand there is due me what is termed as death money which I have not received as yet. I am unable to work and require some support in view of the fact that I lost two sons in the Newfoundland Regiment. Esau Baker is the name of my other son who was killed on the 20th of November 1917*. I believe the Country which my two sons died for will see to the parents at home.

Thanking you for your kind attention to the above, I remain, sir,

Respectfully Yours truly,
Caleb Baker

***There seems to be no explanation for the discrepancy in the dates of Private Esau Baker's death, the official one – in separate sources – being December 3, 1917.**