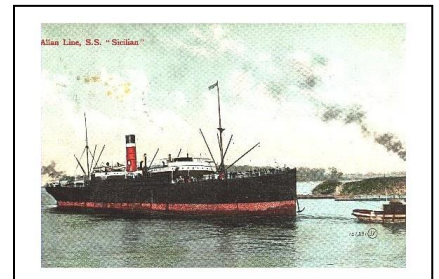


**Private Arthur John Abbott (Regimental Number 2201) lies buried in Earlsfield (Wandsworth) Cemetery – Grave reference Nfld. 769.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Arthur John Abbott was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's and also enlisted – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on February 29, 1916 – 1916 was a leap year - attesting three days later, on March 3.**

***\*A second source has him attesting the day of his enlistment.***

**Private Abbott sailed from St. John's on July 19 on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right). The ship - refitted some ten years previously to carry well over one thousand passengers - had left the Canadian port of Montreal on July 16, carrying Canadian military personnel.**



**It is likely that the troops disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool; however, it is *certain* that upon disembarkation the contingent journeyed north by train to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot.**

*\*Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport during another conflict, carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War.*

The Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as the base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



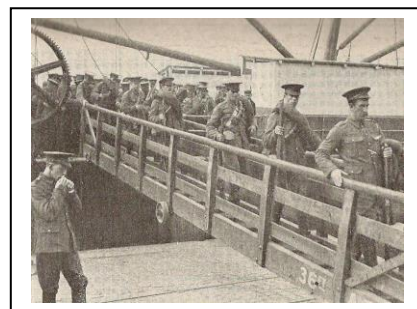
*(Right above: an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-upon-Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)*

At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been billeted at Newton Park School and either in the grandstand or in a tented camp at the racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr.



*(Right above: the new race-course at Newton-upon-Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photograph from 2012)*

The 11<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Abbott one of its number - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 3 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front. It disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, October 4, and spent time at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, in final training and organization\*, before making its way to a rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



*(Right above: British troops disembark at Rouen on their way 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.*

(continued)

Although his records appear not to show it, it is likely that the contingent with which Private Abbott reported *for duty in the field* was a large detachment of two-hundred sixty-six *other ranks* which reported from Rouen to the Battalion transport lines on October 12. This was also the day on which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion made its attack on the enemy positions at Gueudecourt, again sustaining heavy casualties – two-hundred thirty-nine all told - and gaining little.

Thus it was that the new-comers remained behind the lines until the 14<sup>th</sup>, two days later, when they were moved up to *Switch Trench* and parcelled out to the Battalion's four depleted fighting companies. Consequently, the date of their arrival is often recorded not as October 12 but as October 14.

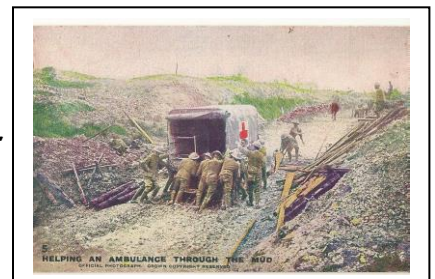
(Right: *This is the ground over which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. This is also the area of the positions into which the re-enforcements of October 12-14 were posted.* – photograph from 2007)



After the episode at Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion remained in the same area of the Somme and was regularly into and out of the trenches. The Newfoundlanders were to be withdrawn from active service on or about December 12 and were to spend the following six weeks or so well behind the lines.

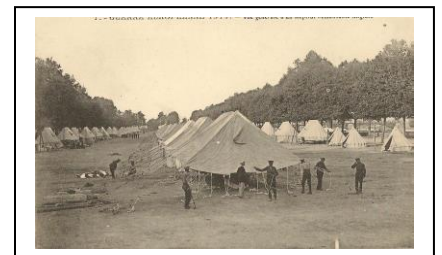
In the meantime, however, Private Abbott had been wounded.

On November 27 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion returned to the trenches near LesBoeufs, 'A' Company taking over the firing-line in *Summer Trench*. No infantry action is recorded in the Regimental War Diary so Private Abbot was undoubtedly to be the victim of enemy artillery fire.



(Right above: *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)

He had been taken to the 14<sup>th</sup> Main Dressing Station by the following day and almost immediately from there to the 55<sup>th</sup> (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown for treatment for gun-shot wounds to the head.



(Right above: *a British Casualty Clearing Station – the one shown here under canvas for if or when the necessity for mobility might arise – somewhere in France at the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

(continued)

On December 4 Private Abbott was transferred to the 6<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in Rouen where he remained for nine days. Discharged to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convalescent Depot on December 12/13, he re-joined 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion *in the field* at Camps-en-Amienois, one of a detachment of twelve *other ranks* from Rouen to do so, on Christmas Eve. The expression *in the field* is a little misleading here as the Newfoundlanders had been retired from the front for the Christmas period and had been assigned to *Corps Reserve*.



(Right above: a typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card)

After that welcome six-week Christmas-time respite away from *the Front*, the Newfoundlanders *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

The only infantry activity involving 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion during that entire period – from the action in mid-October of 1916 at Gueudecourt, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action which brought this episode in the Newfoundlanders’ War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.



(Right above: *The fighting during the time of the Battalion’s posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time.* - photograph from 2009(?))

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March was a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris (right), the latter on March 17, St. Patrick’s Day.



On March 29 that 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, its march to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right adjacent: *the remnants of the Grande Place in the city of Arras in early 1916* – from *Illustration*)

(continued)

On April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties it was the most expensive operation of the War for the British, its only positive episode being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday. The French offensive was a disaster.



(Right above: *the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part in the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at a place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, Monchy-le-Preux was to prove the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 alone.



(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community. The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

It was on that April 14, while serving with 'A' Company at Monchy-le-Preux, that Private Abbott was wounded for a second occasion. He was evacuated into the 8<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Agnez-les-Duisans for treatment to gunshot wounds to the hip and buttock. From there on the 16<sup>th</sup> he was transported to – probably - the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Stationary Hospital in Boulogne. On the 18<sup>th</sup> he was placed on board the Hospital Ship *Princess Elizabeth* (right) for the crossing back to the United Kingdom.



Having arrived in England, Private Abbott was admitted into the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. There he was operated on – a colostomy – but he contracted both gangrene and septicæmia.

The son of William Abbott, fisherman – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay and to whom he had willed his all - and Mary Hannah Abbott of Charlottetown, Bonavista Bay, he was reported as having *died of wounds* in Wandsworth, on May 1, 1917. He was buried at three o'clock in the afternoon of May 5, with full military honours which included a firing and bugle party, by the Reverend J. Lewis, attached to Wandsworth Hospital.



(continued)

At home it was the Reverend H. Martin of Port Blandford who was requested to bear the news to his family.

Arthur John Abbott had enlisted at the age of twenty years and six months.

(Page preceding: *The principal building of what became the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital during the Great War was opened on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. – photograph from 2010*)

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

