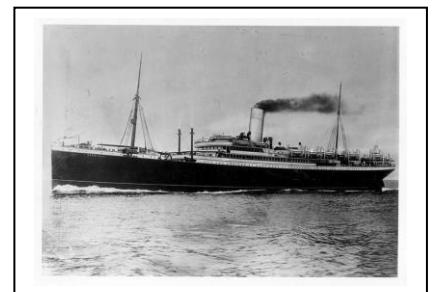




Private Duncan Atwill (Regimental Number 1833) is interred in Oxford Road Cemetery – Grave reference V. H. 29.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, Duncan Atwill was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on September 13, 1915, and also enlisted – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – and attested, all on the same day.

Private Atwill and the other personnel of 'G' Company – apparently in the company of several naval reservists and also some German prisoners (these latter presumably to remain in Canada) - left St. John's by train on October 27, to cross the island to Port aux Basques. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry, and proceeded by train from North Sydney to Quebec City.



(continued)

At Québec the Newfoundlanders boarded His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* (page preceding) for the trans-Atlantic passage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9.

By the morning of the 10th the new arrivals had travelled by train and had gone north to Scotland. There they had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gailles, not far removed from the new Regimental Depot where accommodation for the contingent was as yet not available.

That new Regimental Depot had been established during the summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland to serve as a base for the 2nd (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 sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.

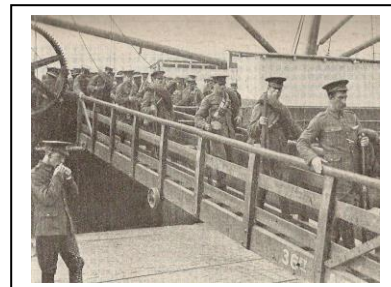


(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that on June 20, a mere five days before his departure to France on *active service*, Private Atwill was prevailed upon to re-enlist *for the duration of the War**.

**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

On June 25, the 7th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, Private Atwill among its ranks, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent. On the morrow, the 26th, the detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot which had been established there. There the draft spent time in final training organization before proceeding on to its rendezvous with 1st 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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

(continued)

This meeting was effected on July 11 (recorded elsewhere as the 12th) while the parent unit was just behind the line, being quartered in huts in the remnants of the village of Mailly-Maillet. It was here that Private Atwill and a further one-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen reported *to duty*.

Even with this additional man-power, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1st Battalion still numbered only *11 officers and 260 rifles* after the disaster of Beaumont-Hamel, a quarter of regulation battalion strength.

(Right: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John's East. – photograph from 2009*)

On July 27-28 of 1916, 1st Battalion - still under battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after re-enforcement - moved north and entered into Belgium for the first time.

It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel of July 1. *The Salient* was relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there, yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number of them fatal. On October 8, after ten weeks in Belgium, 1st Battalion moved south back to France and back to the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

(Right above: *the entrance to 'A' Company's quarters in the ramparts of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *the city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – and eight months before the Newfoundlanders were posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)

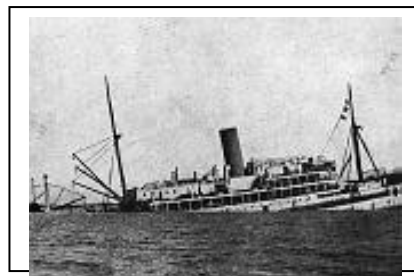
Private Atwill, however, was to leave Belgium well before his comrades-in-arms. On August 30 he was admitted into the 88th Field Ambulance before being forwarded to the 10th Casualty Clearing Station at the Rémy Siding, Poperinghe, his complaint diagnosed as a *hæmorrhaged lung* and as *debility*. On September 6 he was sent on to the 3rd Canadian General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers and, from there, to the Marlboro Rest Camp in Boulogne, on the 24th.

(Right above: *the railway station at Dannes-Camiers through which many thousands of sick, wounded and convalescent military personnel passed during the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



His medical adventure was far from complete, for Private Atwill was back receiving treatment three or four days later in the 25th General Hospital at Hardelet, on this occasion suffering from scabies. Discharged from there on October 12 to Base Details at Boulogne it was only two days later that he was transferred to the Base Depot and then three more again – October 17 – before he was back receiving further medical treatment, in the 12th General Hospital, Rouen, for NYD (*Not Yet Diagnosed*), which was finally discovered to be an abscess on his groin.

November 15 saw Private Atwill being embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Gloucester Castle* (right – later torpedoed, in 1917) from where he was admitted into the Victoria Hospital, Cork – today in the Irish Republic – on the 17th. He was once more afflicted with *debility*. Discharged from there to Cork Civil Hospital only two days later on November 19, he was finally released on December 12.



On that same day Private Atwill was granted the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom, a period of leave which he spent in Scotland, his address recorded as at the house of *Mrs McHugh, No. 6, John Street, Paisley*. He reported *to duty* at the Regimental Depot in nearby Ayr on December 21.



(Right above: *the High Street in Ayre, dominated then as it still is today by the imposing Wallace Tower, as shown on a postcard of the time sent home by a Newfoundland soldier – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo*)

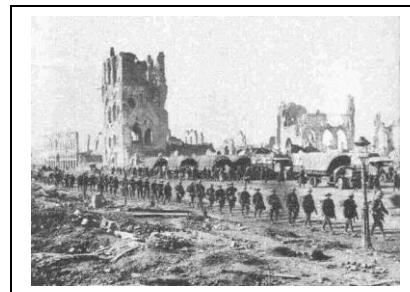
During the period spent at Ayr, Private Atwill was seven weeks in the 3rd Scottish General Hospital, Glasgow, from March 6 until April 24 of 1917, for treatment to venereal disease. Up until that period he had been allocating a fifty-cent per diem allowance to the sister, Nellie, who resided on Cornwall Avenue in St. John's; now the sum was transferred to a Miss Lizzie McHugh of Paisley. He had apparently found ways of spending his time in Scotland other than soldiering.

On August 5, 1917, the 28th Re-enforcement Draft from Paisley traversed the English Channel on its way to the Continent, once again embarking in the port of Southampton to arrive in Rouen two days later, on the 7th. After the inevitable days to be spent at the Base Depot there, the new-comers, Private Atwill among them, reported *to duty* at Penton Camp near the town of Poperinghe, Belgium, on August 28.

1st Battalion had just withdrawn from the line and it – and much of the rest of the British Army – was about to spend some four weeks in re-enforcing and re-organizing. On September 20, the Newfoundlanders were on the move forward again.

(continued)

Some two months before Private Atwill arriving at Penton Camp, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had once again moved north into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again to the area of Ypres. This had been selected by the High Command as the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, borrowing that name from a small village on a ridge that was one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right above: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

1st Battalion remained in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army which floundered its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders. Notably it fought in two major engagements, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9. Private Atwill, of course, was not present at the former, but he surely was there to serve at the latter.



(Right above: *an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

A week after the encounter of October 9 at the *Broembeek*, the Newfoundlanders were withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: *Cambrai*. They were ordered back south from Belgium into northern France on October 17 to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of Berles-au-Bois, a small rural community a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of Arras.

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. 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.

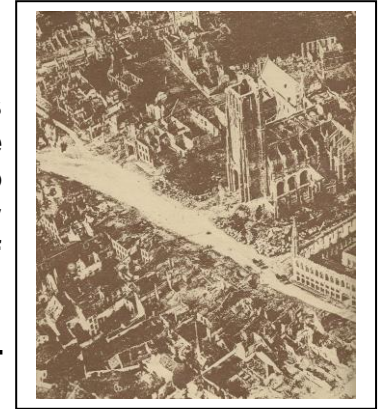


(Above right: *the Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

(continued)

At the beginning of January of 1918, after a snowy Christmas period spent to the south-west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had returned to 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.

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



In the meantime, the Germans had been 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 they would launch a spring offensive. While they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders dug.

On March 7 the Newfoundlanders began another tour in the trenches. By this time the front line was further removed from Ypres than had been the case before, and 1st Battalion was in positions not far distant from the ruins of Passchendaele. On March 11 the Regimental War Diary records *that 'C' Company bombarded heavily on our right, casualties slight. Unfortunately, not slight enough!*

The son of Samuel Atwill and Charlotte Ellen Atwill (née *Bartlett*) of Mundy's (sic) Pond Road, St. John's, he was also brother to sisters Florence Arnott of Mundy Pond Road, Katie Arnott of Mundy Pond Road, Helen Halleran of Military Road, and Nellie Atwill of Cornwall Avenue and then Mundy Pond Road; and to brothers, Richard John and James*.

Private Atwill was reported as having been *killed in action* while serving with 'C' Company, almost undoubtedly the victim of that heavy enemy bombardment of the day, on March 11, 1918.

Private Atwill had enlisted at the age of nineteen years and eleven months died at twenty-two years of age.

*Private James Atwill, Regimental Number 1914, had died, *killed in action*, July 1, 1916, during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*.



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

(continued)

Private Duncan Atwill was eligible for the British War Medal (on left) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



3-4-18

6 John Street
Paisley

Dear Sir

I beg to take the liberty to write to you on behalf of No. 1833 Pte Duncan Atwill, 1st Newfoundland Reg.

I have not had any letters from him for the past six weeks, and he was expecting leave at the end of March all arrangements for our Marriage has been made.

I am now very anxious as to his whereabouts, if you could give me any information I would be much obliged.

I am

Yours truly
Lizzie McHugh