



**Private James Atwill (Regimental Number 1914) is believed to be interred in Ancre British Cemetery – Grave reference Special Memorial 37.**

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

**Private Atwill was one of the one hundred men who comprised the first contingent of 'H' Company, to travel overseas. The draft left St. John's by train for Port aux Basques on December 18, crossing the island and then the Gulf of St. Lawrence en route to Saint John, New Brunswick. The Atlantic voyage was effected from there on His Majesty's Transport *Corinthian* (right) and the draft reached the Regimental Depot at Ayr on January 4 of the New Year, 1916.**



Transferred to 'G' Company, the new arrivals were quartered in the barracks of the Royal Scots Fusiliers who had not yet vacated the premises, due to an epidemic of measles at the time. It was not long before the disease had also taken its toll on the Newfoundlanders.

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 a 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.

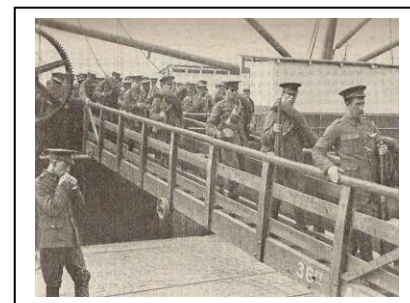


(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that, on May 24, some three weeks 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.*

The 6<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Atwill among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to the Continent on June 14, 1916. It arrived in the Norman capital of Rouen on the following day, June 15, whereupon the contingent was received into the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, there to continue final training\* and to organize before moving onwards towards the front and 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*)

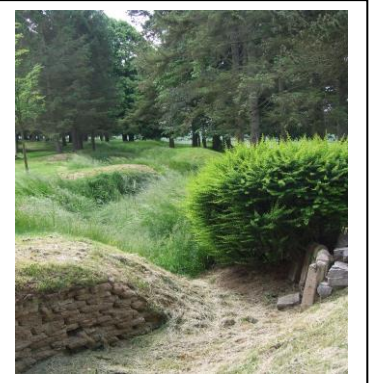
*\*Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

A detachment of sixty-six *other ranks* from Rouen, a draft which included Private Atwill, arrived to join the parent unit in the community of Louvencourt on June 30.

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At 9:15 that evening, the Newfoundlanders – including a goodly number of those new-comers – but with the exception of the fourteen officers and eighty-three *other ranks* assigned to remain behind with the Re-enforcement Company, marched from there to their assigned *forming-up place trenches i.e. rear line of trenches in our usual sector* (Regimental War Diary).

(Right: *Just inside the entrance to the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel, this trench is reputed to be the (re-constituted) one where 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion spent the night before launching its attack from there on July 1.* – photograph from 2009)



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 (nurse in training by 1919) of 120 Cornwall Avenue – his own given address at the time of enlistment - and then later of Mundy Pond Road; and to two brothers, Richard John, and Duncan.

Private Atwill was at first reported as *missing in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'D' Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*. However a subsequent report resulted in his record being amended on March 22, 1917, so as to read *killed in action 1/7/16* (see below).

James Atwill had enlisted at the age of twenty-five years and three months.



His brother, Private Duncan Atwill, Regiment Number 1833, was later to be reported as having been *killed in action* in March of 1918 while fighting in Belgium (see elsewhere in these documents).

(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel - looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences - The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph.* – photograph taken in 2009)

(Right: *a grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel* – from ...)



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**1914, Private J. Atwill**

**Previously reported missing 1/7/16, Now unofficially reported killed.**

**Authority:- Letter to Officer i/c Records from 2/Lt. R. T. Smith, 1/6 Seaforth Highlanders, who stated that he found the body of the above man and buried him in a shell-hole 22/11/16. He was in charge of a burying party at the time. Date of letter 22/11/16**

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

