



Captain* Eric Stanley Ayre lies in Ancre British Cemetery – Grave reference II. E. 12.

****Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were not considered as enlisted. These officers thus had no Regimental Number allotted to them.***

And since officers did not enlist, they were not then required to re-enlist 'for the duration', even though, at the beginning, as a private, they had volunteered their services for only a limited time – twelve months.

Eric Stanley Ayre was a director of *Ayre & Sons Ltd.*, St. John's merchants. Having been appointed Musketry Training Officer for the months of October and November of 1914, he received a temporary Imperial Commission to the rank of Lieutenant during that same period. His appointment in rank was confirmed on or about December 2, thus... *you are eligible to apply to join the next draft for the front, if circumstances permit.*

Lieutenant Ayre received further promotion to the rank of captain on January 26, 1915. Subsequently, as commanding officer of 'E' Company, he embarked in St. John's for overseas service on April 22, 1915, on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* (above right – from *Provincial Archives*).

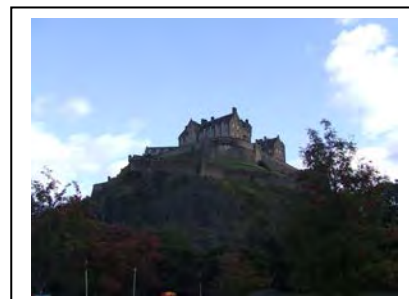


The ship then sailed for Halifax, Nova Scotia, where the Company almost immediately re-embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right) en route for the United Kingdom. The ship docked in Liverpool on May 2.

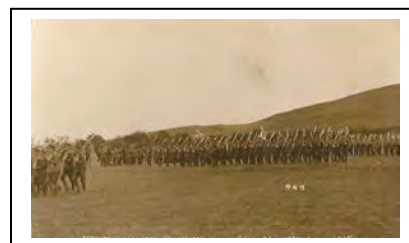


'E' Company entrained for the journey north to Scotland, to the capital city of Edinburgh where 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies had already been posted at the venerable Castle as temporary garrison, the first troops from outside the British Isles to be assigned that duty.

(Right: *the venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle on its hill in the centre of the city* – photograph from 2011)



Exactly one week after the arrival of 'E' Company in the Scottish capital city, the Newfoundland contingent, on May 11, was posted to Stobs Camp some dozen kilometres away – Captain Ayre took a taxi - from the Scottish town of Hawick – he also writes that it was *a rotten day with snow on the hills*. There the Battalion remained for some three months, until the four senior companies moved south to England, to Aldershot, for a final two weeks of training – and a royal inspection - at the beginning of August, on the 3rd.



(Right above: *The Newfoundland Regiment parades at Stobs Camp to be presented with its colours on June 10, 1915* – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

While 'A', 'B', 'C', and 'D' Companies were being posted to Aldershot, thence to depart for service in the campaign in Gallipoli, most of the personnel of 'E' Company was sent to the new Regimental Depot. Captain Ayre went with them.

In a more personal vein, it had been during the period while he was serving at Stobs Camp, that Captain Ayre had married his fiancé from Newfoundland, Janet Morrison Miller. She was to spend the year following living with her mother-in-law in Glasgow.

The Depot, at the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland had, by the time of Captain Ayre's arrival, only just been established; in fact, 'E' Company was the first contingent to be posted there. Ayr was to serve as the overseas base for the new 2nd (Reserve) Battalion from where – as of November of that 1915 until January of 1918 - re-enforcement drafts would be sent to bolster 1st Battalion's numbers, at first to the Middle East and then later to the Western Front.



(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*)

Nine months later Captain Ayre travelled from Scotland to join 1st Battalion in France. Having made and signed his will in Scotland on May 13, he had arrived on the Continent, likely at Rouen, by May 19, on the day after the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had relieved the Border Regiment in the trenches - in the firing-line by day, as support by night. Upon reporting to duty with 1st Battalion, Captain Ayre was immediately posted to 'D' Company.



The Newfoundlanders were also preparing for the upcoming British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the meandering river flowing through the region, *the Somme*.

(Right above: *part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)

The son of Frederick Wayne Robert Chesley Ayre, managing director of *Ayre & Sons Ltd.*, and Lydia Gertrude Ayre of *Northview*, Circular Road, St. John's, he was also husband of Janet Ayre (née *Miller*) of St. John's. Captain Ayre's own addresses are recorded as *Brookdale*, Circular Road, St. John's as well as *Rodney House*, Endford Square, in West-Central London (apparently with other properties in the United Kingdom and Ireland). He was reported as having been *killed in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, by machine-gun fire in No-Man's Land, while serving with 'D' Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*.

Captain Ayre was killed at twenty-seven years of age.

His brother, Captain Bernard Ayre, serving with the Norfolk Regiment, was killed on the same day – although not at Beaumont-Hamel. Two cousins, 2nd Lieutenants Gerald W. Ayre and Wilfrid D. Ayre also died on that July 1 with the others of 1st Battalion.



(continued)

(Page preceding: *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*)



(The photograph of Lieutenant Ayre is from the Provincial Archives.)

At some time in January or early February of 1920, the remains of Captain Ayre were removed from the place of their original burial - at a Point, South, South, West of Beaumont Hamel, Somme, France, Sheet 57d Q. 10d 85.20 - and transferred to where they repose today.



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

Captain Eric Stanley Ayre was entitled to the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



“Brookdale”
Circular Road, St. John’s,
Nov. 26th.1914

Sir Walter Davidson, K.C.M.G.,
Colonel of First Newfoundland Regiment

Sir,

Whilst assisting to train in musketry the First Nfld. Regiment in musketry during the time of their camping in Pleasantville, I received the commission of Lieutenant, but do not know whether this commission would hold good for the second Contingent, now about to be recruited.

It is my wish to go forward with this Contingent, and I should like to be informed if it be necessary for me to make a fresh application, or whether the former appointment would be official for the present occasion also.

I have the honour to be
Your obedient servant,

(continued)

Eric S. Ayre

(Right: *Beaumont-Hamel* is a commune, not a village (see below). – photographs from 2010 & 2015)

**In fact, Beaumont-Hamel was a commune – it still exists today – at the time comprising two communities: Beaumont, a village on the German side of the lines, and Hamel which was behind those of the British. No-Man’s-Land, on which the Newfoundland Memorial Park lies partially today, was on land that separated Beaumont from Hamel.*



The author would like to acknowledge the contribution of Rosemary Ayre and of Mrs. Kathleen Knowling in correcting some of the errors which were to be found in the original biographies.