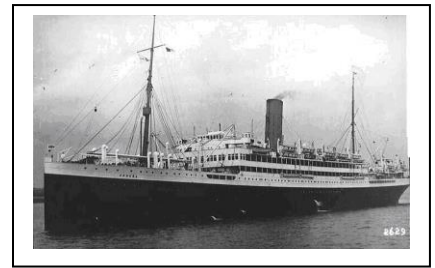


Second Lieutenant Gerald Walter Ayre (Regimental Number 869\*), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

*\*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.*

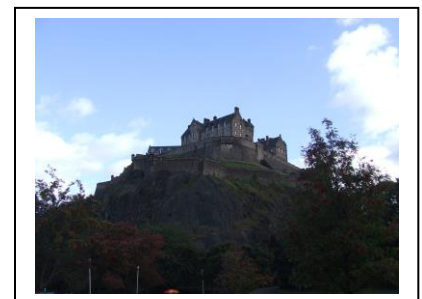
His occupation prior to his enlistment recorded as that of salesman with *Ayre & Sons Co. Ltd.*, Gerald Walter Ayre enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on January 2, 1915 – engaged at the private soldier's daily rate of \$1.10.



He was soon to be promoted directly to the rank of corporal, on February 24.

As an NCO of 'D' Company Private Ayre sailed for overseas service on the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* (above centre – from *Provincial Archives*) from St. John's to Halifax on March 20, thence to the United Kingdom on March 22 on board His Majesty's Transport *Orduna* (above right) to the English port-city of Liverpool, arriving there eight days later.

'D' Company immediately entrained for the Scottish capital of Edinburgh where it was re-united with 'A', 'B' and 'C' Companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion which had recently arrived from Fort George, further to the north of Scotland near Inverness, where the Newfoundlanders had been previously posted. The four companies remained as garrison at Edinburgh Castle – the first troops from outside the British Isles to perform that duty - until May 11.



(Previous page: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle dominates the city from the summit of Castle Hill.* – photograph from 2011)

Corporal Ayre was promoted to the rank of sergeant on June 14, 1915, while the Newfoundland Regiment was in quarters at Stobs Camp, some dozen kilometres or so from the town of Hawick. It was also here that he received his Commission, on July 29, and the accompanying appointment to the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant.

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

In early August the four senior Companies, 'A', 'B', 'C', and 'D' – which in future were to comprise 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion – were sent south to Aldershot, in England, for less than three weeks of final preparation before travelling to the Middle East and to the Gallipoli Peninsula. Companies 'E' and 'F', the later arrivals, were sent to the new Regimental Depot.

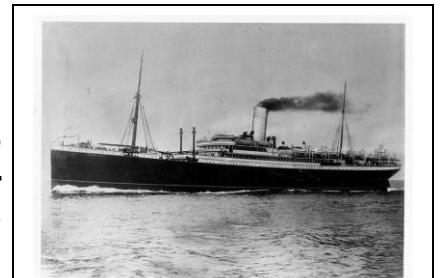
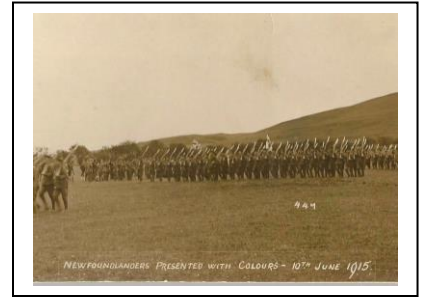
At the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, the Regimental Depot was then in the throes of being established as a Base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion which, from that time on, was to send re-enforcements to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, at first to the Middle East and later to the Western Front in France and Belgium.

(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)

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Ayre did not, however, travel to the Middle East; nor is it likely that he went to Ayr. On August 6 he took ship in Liverpool for the trans-Atlantic passage back to Newfoundland – certainly via an unspecified Canadian port – where he arrived on the 20<sup>th</sup>. The reason for his travel seems not to be recorded\*.

*\*It is likely that the vessel in question was HMT Corsican (right above) which sailed from Liverpool on August 7 and which docked at Québec on the 17<sup>th</sup>. From there it was usually by a combination of train and ferry that travellers reached St. John's.*

In an undated letter that he wrote to the *Pay & Record Office* in London, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Ayre states that from about October 28 until about February 28 of the following year, 1916, he was Acting Adjutant at Headquarters in St. John's, temporarily replacing Captain Montgomerie. He apparently left Newfoundland for overseas service again in the company of the remainder – the first hundred personnel having already departed some three months prior, on December 15 - of 'H' Company on March 23, 1916, travelling to Halifax on *Florizel*, before embarking onto an unidentified transport for the ocean crossing.



Upon arrival – the evidence is another undated letter – he travelled to Ayr, to be posted *to duty* there for some four weeks.

(Right: *the High Street in Ayr as shown on a postcard of the time* – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo)



The records indicate that 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Ayre embarked from England for the short crossing to France to join the British Expeditionary Force\* in France on May 5 - the same day that another 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Ayre, his cousin Wilfred Douglas, joined the Battalion in the trenches with a draft of thirty-two *other ranks*. The date on which Lieutenant *Gerald Ayre* re-joined 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion seems not to be recorded.



*\*Upon arrival in France, officers and men alike were ordinarily subjected to days – the norm at the time was ten – of final training and organization in Depots notoriously known to troops and officers as the Bull Rings.*

(Right above: *part of the reconstructed trench system in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel* – photograph from 2007)

The son of Frederick William Ayre, a Managing Director of Ayre & Sons, and Mary Julia Ayre (née *Pitts*, deceased August 22, 1903) of Circular Road in St. John's, he was brother to Dora-*Gertrude*, to Arthur-William, Harold Cecil, Charles-Robert, Ruby-Edith, James-Stewart and Marjorie-Pitts\*.



2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Ayre was reported as *missing in action* on July 1, 1916, at Beaumont-Hamel during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*. Some six months later, on December 31, he was officially *presumed dead*.

*\*Frederick William Ayre married again and had two further children with his second wife.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Ayre died at the age of twenty-five years\*.

*\*Gerald Ayre was one of four family members to die on that day, the others all his cousins: Wilfred and Eric of the Newfoundland Regiment, and Bernard (brother of Eric) of the Norfolk Regiment.*

(Right above: *looking down the old battlefield from the British positions to Y Ravine Cemetery which stands on part of the German front line of 1916: The Danger Tree is on the right.* – photograph taken in 2009)



(continued)

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

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

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Gerald Walter Ayre was entitled to the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).**

