



Second Lieutenant Wilfred Douglas Ayre (Regimental Number 164*) lies in Knightsbridge Cemetery – Grave reference B. 10.

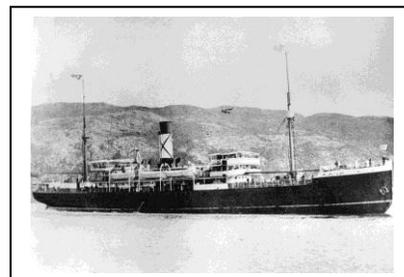
****Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were not considered as enlisted. These 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 previous to his enlistment recorded as being that of an employee of the family firm of Ayre & Sons Ltd., Wilfred Douglas Ayre was a recruit of the First Draft.

Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on August 31, 1914, he then enlisted more than two weeks later, on September 16 – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10. There seems to be no record of when he was appointed to the rank of corporal of 'B' Company, but it may soon afterwards, perhaps on September 21, as there were several such promotions made on that date.

Likely attesting on one of the first three days of October – another source says September 16, the day of his enlistment – Corporal Ayre was further promoted to the rank of sergeant on October 3, the day that he embarked for overseas service onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right, courtesy of Admiralty House Museum). The ship sailed for the United Kingdom on the following day, joining the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division.



In the United Kingdom Sergeant Ayre trained with the Battalion: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland at Fort George (right); and at Edinburgh Castle where he was hospitalized twice for treatment for venereal disease.



On May 11 the Newfoundlanders were transferred to Stobs Camp, near the Scottish town of Hawick, where they underwent further training and exercises for some three months. There he was appointed to Company Quarter Master Sergeant Ayre on July 12.

At this juncture it was decided that he be posted to the new Regimental Depot at Ayr. The four senior Companies – 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' – travelled south to England, to Aldershot, for two final weeks of training - and a royal inspection - before departing in mid-August for the Middle East and for the fighting at Gallipoli. CQMS Ayre and 'E' and 'F' Companies, the later arrivals, remained in Scotland.

(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)

The Regimental Depot had just been established at the Royal Borough of Ayr, on the west coast of Scotland, to serve as a base for the new 2nd (Reserve) Battalion and it was from there – as of November of 1915 up until January of 1918 - that reinforcements were now to be sent to 1st Battalion, at first to the Middle East and, later on, to the Western Front. It was also during this period at Ayr that CQMS received an Imperial Commission, appointed to the rank of 2nd lieutenant, on October 16.



2nd Lieutenant Ayre was to remain in Scotland until March of the following year when he departed on *active service*.

(Preceding page: *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*)

The 2nd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr embarked in Devonport – where Second Lieutenant Ayre had landed some seventeen months previously - and sailed on March 13 for the Middle East. It seems to have been still unclear at the time what the 29th Division's – and thus 1st Battalion's – future theatre of war was to be.

It may have been that their ship lacked radio, or possibly that *some* of the other troops on board *were* finally required in the Middle East, for it was Egypt where Lieutenant Ayre and the other Newfoundlanders briefly found themselves before boarding His Majesty's Transport *Kingstonian* for the return Mediterranean journey to the French port of Marseilles.

(Right: *British troops march through the port area of the French city of Marseilles. – from a vintage post-card*)



The officers and men of the 2nd Re-enforcement Draft disembarked in France on April 4 and most of them entrained immediately for the journey north to rendezvous with the parent unit. This they did on March 8 while 1st Battalion – itself only recently arrived from Egypt – was at Louvencourt and still on the march towards its final stationing near the front.

Second Lieutenant Ayre, however, had at the time been posted elsewhere, almost certainly to the British Expeditionary Force Base Depot in the vicinity of the city of Rouen. It was not until May 5 that he reported *to duty* with 1st Battalion when he did so as officer commanding a draft of thirty-two *other ranks*. It was at a time when 1st Battalion was enjoying a tour in the trenches near to the village of Mailly-Maillet, a village where the Newfoundlanders were occasionally billeted during the short periods when they were relieved from duty in the lines.



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

It was also, of course, at this time that preparations – *inadequate* preparations as it transpired – were being made for the upcoming British summer offensive. Thus when they were not in the trenches, the officers and men of 1st Battalion were involved in supplementary training and logistical work – the building of a light railway, for example.

The son of Charles P. Ayre, managing director of *Ayre & Sons Ltd.*, and Diana Ayre of *Burn Brae*, Waterford Bridge Road in St. John's, he was at first reported as *missing in action* on July 1, 1916, while serving with 14 Platoon, 'D' Company, during the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel on the first day of *the Somme*.

(continued)



(Previous page: *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*)

Lieutenant Ayre was later confirmed as having been *killed in action* by Sergeant Phelan (see below) and his personal record was thus amended to read as such. By that time he had already been buried, on that July 1, by the Reverend H. S. Reid attached to 87th Brigade.



Wilfred Douglas Ayre had enlisted at twenty years of age.

Three of his cousins also died on July 1: Lieutenant Gerald W. Ayre, Newfoundland Regiment, No. 869; Captain Eric S. Ayre, Newfoundland Regiment; and Captain Bernard Pitts Ayre (brother of Eric), Norfolk Regiment.



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

(Lieutenant Ayre's photograph is from the Provincial Archives.)

2nd Lieutenant Wilfred Douglas Ayre was entitled to the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



I saw 2nd Lieut. Wilfred Ayre fall in front of me. I should say it was about one hundred yards from our line. I thought he must have been killed, because he never spoke another word to me. I then took charge of the Platoon, No. 14, D. Co.

Statement made by: 1513 Sgt. W. F. Phelan

**Record Office
28th Aug. 1916**