



Private Leo Michael Burke (Regimental Number 1170) is believed *to be buried* in Ancre British Cemetery – Grave reference Special Memorial 30.

His occupation previous to his military service recorded as that of a labourer earning a weekly \$5.00, Leo Michael Burke enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem - on February 20, 1915, before attesting nine days following, on March 1.



(continued)

Private Burke of 'E' Company embarked in St. John's on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* (preceding page – from the *Provincial Archives*) some two months later again, on April 22, 1915.



The ship sailed to Halifax where his contingent took ship on His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right) – likely with Canadian troops - for the crossing to Liverpool – the ship departed Halifax on April 25. From Liverpool the Newfoundlanders travelled by train to Edinburgh where they arrived on May 2. 'E' Company was to have but a few days to savor the charms of the Scottish capital.



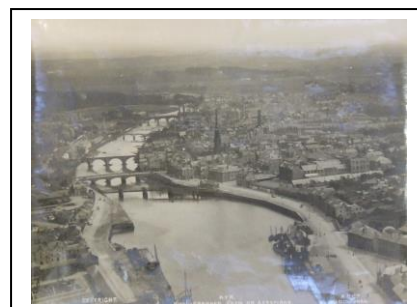
Only nine days later, on May 11, the entire Battalion was posted for three months training, from Edinburgh to a tented Stobs Camp near the Scottish town of Hawick.

(Right above: *the Regiment on parade at Stobs Camp on June 10, the day it received its Colours* – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

From Stobs, some thirteen weeks later again, in early August, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the senior Companies now become 1st Battalion, the Newfoundland Regiment, were transferred to Aldershot in southern England. There they were to undergo final preparations – and a royal inspection – before departing on active service to the Middle East and to the fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

'E' and 'F' Companies – the latter having arrived at Stobs Camp on July 10 - were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were to form the nucleus of the newly-formed 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. The Depot was to be Private Burke's home for the next eight months.

The Regimental Depot was being established during that 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 up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were to be sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.



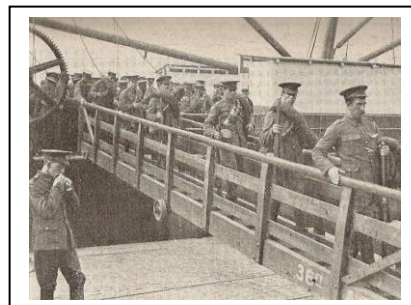
(Right: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right.* – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr)

It was during this period spent at Ayr that Private Burke re-enlisted, on April 8 of 1916, on this second instance being engaged *for the duration of the war**.

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**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.*

Private Burke was a ranker of the 5th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr which passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on April 13 of 1916, en route to the *Western Front*. On the following day, the 14th, the contingent landed in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot. The Newfoundlanders proceeded to the Base Depot for several days of final training and organization*.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route 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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

2nd Lieutenant Wilfred Ayre and the thirty-two *other ranks* in his charge reported to *duty* in the forward village of Mailly-Maillet on May 4, according to Private Burke's papers – the 5th in the Regimental War Diary. Just behind the front at the time, the village was where the Newfoundlanders were being billeted after a posting in the nearby trenches.



(Right above: *the re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – twinned with Torbay, St. John's East – and the monument to its own war dead – photograph from 2007(?)*)

Only three weeks prior, on April 13, 1st Battalion had *itself* marched into the village of Englebelmer some three kilometres away – thus completing a month-long transfer from Egypt to the *Western Front* – where it was billeted, welcomed re-enforcements, and had almost immediately been put to work in the communication trenches not so very far away. There followed a short respite and then, from April 22 until the day of arrival of Private Burke's draft, the Newfoundland unit had been ordered into the front-line trenches.



The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the 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 Martin Burke and Annie Burke, he was brother to Annie, Mrs. Charles Davis – to whom he allotted a daily allowance of fifty cents from his pay – of 8, Barron Street in St. John's, and also to Mrs. Joseph Cook of 116, Casey Street.

Private Burke was at first reported as *missing in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'B' Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*.

However, subsequently, a letter submitted on September 29 of that year by the Commanding Officer of 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards, cited the identification of his remains and their burial on or about September 22. The record of Private Burke was thus amended to read *killed in action*.

Leo Burke had enlisted at nineteen years of age.

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

Private Leo Michael Burke was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

