



Private Benjamin Bursey (Regimental Number 1956) is interred in Heilly Station Cemetery, Méricourt l'Abbé – Grave reference III. E. 33.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Benjamin Bursey was a recruit of the Seventh Draft. He enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on October 25, 1915, before presenting himself for medical examination on the following day, the 26th, and attesting on the 28th.

****A second source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.***

Private Bursey 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* (preceding page) 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 – although it would appear that Private Burseley was not among those so afflicted.

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 2nd (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 1st Battalion.

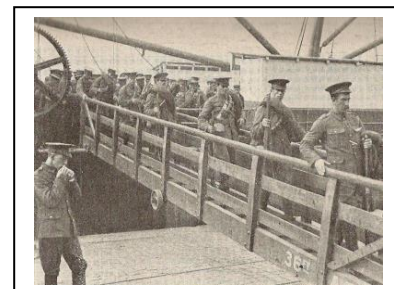


(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that, on May 24, some thirty-two days before his departure to France on *active service*, Private Burseley 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.*

On June 25, the 7th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, Private Burseley among its ranks, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent. On the morrow, the 26th, the detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot which had been established there. There the draft spent time in final training and organization* before proceeding on to its rendezvous with 1st 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, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

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This meeting was effected on July 11 (recorded elsewhere as the 12th) while the parent unit was just behind the line, being quartered in huts in the remnants of the village of Mailly-Maillet. It was here that Private Bursey and a further one-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen reported *to duty*.

Even with this additional man-power, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1st Battalion still numbered only *11 officers and 260 rifles* after the disaster of Beaumont-Hamel, a quarter of regulation battalion strength.

(Right: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John's East. – photograph from 2009*)

On July 27-28 of 1916, 1st Battalion - still under battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after re-enforcement – moved north and entered into Belgium for the first time.

It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel. *The Salient* was relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there, yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number of them fatalities.

On October 8, after ten weeks in Belgium, 1st Battalion moved south back to France and back to the area of – and the battle of – the Somme.

(Right above: *the entrance to 'A' Company's quarters in the ramparts of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *the city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – and eight months before the Newfoundlanders were posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)

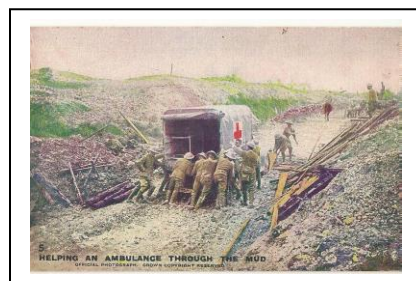
Only four days after its return to France on October 8, 1st Battalion had been ordered to pass to the offensive, on this occasion on the outskirts of the ruined village of Gueudecourt perhaps a dozen kilometres or so to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel. Here, on October 12 – and during a heavy enemy bombardment of the previous evening – the Newfoundlanders again lost heavily – two-hundred thirty-nine casualties in all during those two days - with little reward for the sacrifice.

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(Preceding page: *This is the ground over which 1st Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)

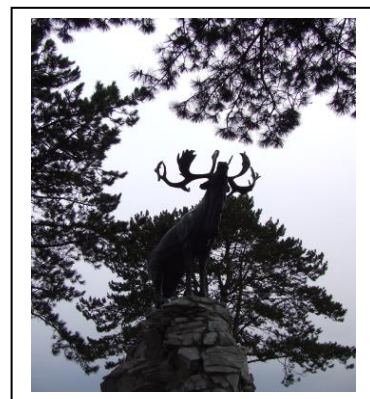
It was during the attack of October 12 at Gueudecourt that Private Bursey was wounded by gun-fire while serving with 'C' Company. Suffering from injuries to the chest and having also incurred a fractured arm, he was evacuated on that same day to the 15th Corps Main Dressing Station and from there forwarded to the 36th Casualty Clearing Station at Heilly.



(Right above: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)

The son of Andrew Bursey, fisherman, and Isabella Bursey (née Fancey) – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Victoria Cove, Gander Bay, he was also brother to George*, Sarah Ann (died as a child), Walter (died as an infant), Claude, Ethel and Emily (died as an infant).

Private Bursey was reported as having *died of wounds* in the 36th CCS on October 14 (a second source has the date as the 15th), 1916. At home, it was the Reverend J. Prescott of Change Islands who was requested to bear the news to his family.



Benjamin Bursey had enlisted at nineteen years of age.

**Lance Corporal George Bursey, Regimental Number 2677, was reported as having been killed in action on October 2, 1918, in Belgium.*

(Above right: *the Caribou at Gueudecourt stands at the furthest point of 1st Battalion's advance of October 12, 1916 – photograph from 2012*)

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

