

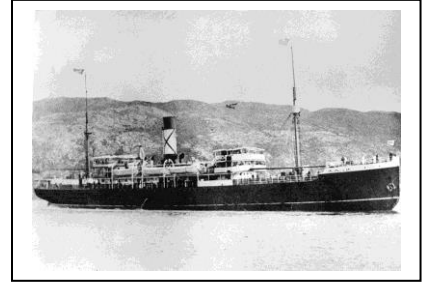


**Private George Allen Butler (Regimental Number 3494) is interred in Sanctuary Wood Cemetery – Grave reference V. M. 12.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a lumberman, George Allen Butler was a recruit of the Thirteenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on February 26 of 1917, he also enlisted – *for the duration of the war* at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on the same day.**

**(continued)**

It was on April 7 of 1917, that Private Butler boarded either the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel* (right) for Halifax, or a train\* in St. John's for the cross-island journey to Port aux Basques from where a ferry and another train would have transported Private Butler and his co-travellers to Halifax – the files are contradictory. Apparently it had been hoped that the fifty personnel of this draft would be joining the *Windsor Draft*\*\* on April 16 or 17 when it was to board one of the three transports awaiting in Halifax harbour and sail to the United Kingdom.



*\*The records of Private Butler and of other personnel cite... 'Embarked St. John's S.S. Train to Halifax 7/4/17' ...while other sources hint that the passage to Nova Scotia may have been by ship: nevertheless, a personal memo of a Private Yetman mentions the Florizel.*

*\*\*This was the name given to the draft of about three-hundred twenty all ranks which had left St. John's on January 31, 1917, en route to Halifax from where they were to sail to the United Kingdom. This contingent would eventually make that voyage, but about thirteen weeks later than envisaged. They were quarantined at Windsor as the result of a measles and mumps epidemic that claimed two of their number – and maybe a later third. In the meantime, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was running low on man-power.*

This plan, however, was not to be, for whatever the reason – perhaps lack of space as the ships were carrying Canadian reinforcements overseas - and it was not until the final day\* of the month that this small contingent – Private Butler still one of its number - finally sailed from Halifax. They may, in fact, have embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* (right) – sister-ship of *Titanic* – which sailed at that time from Halifax with Canadian troops to the United Kingdom.



*\*If it were on Olympic that the contingent embarked – she appears to have been the only ship sailing on or about that time - then the Newfoundlanders sailed from Halifax on April 29 to arrive in Liverpool on May 7.*

Having arrived in England, the contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence to serve as the base for the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for some two years. It was from here – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were being despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1<sup>st</sup> 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)

On September 22, 1917, the 30<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Barry\* – Private Butler among its fifty *other ranks* – was on its way to France through the English south-coast port of Southampton. On the next day the contingent disembarked in the Norman capital, Rouen, where time was spent at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, for final organization and training\*\* before moving onward to its eventual rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

*\*During the summer months of 1917, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of the city of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

*\*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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Private Butler joined 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion *in the field* – not in France but in Belgium - three days after the engagement at the *Broembeek* (see below). Following their exertions, the Newfoundlanders had retired to *Swindon Camp* in the area of the community of Poperinghe, and it was there that the ninety-four *other ranks* of Private Butler's detachment from Rouen reported *to duty* on October 12.

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had by this time been serving in Belgium for better than three months in the campaign which came to be known simply as *Passchendaele*. A small cog in the machinery of the British Army which floundered its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders, notably the unit had fought in two major infantry engagements, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, and at the *Broembeek* on October 9.



(Above right: *an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

A week after that encounter of October 9 at the *Broembeek*, the Newfoundlanders were withdrawn from the *Passchendaele* campaign in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: *Cambrai*. They were ordered back south from Belgium into northern France on October 17 to re-enforce, to organize and to train in the vicinity of Berles-au-Bois, a small rural community a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of Arras – some personnel even having been granted at the time a ten-day furlough back to the United Kingdom.

(continued)

The so-called *Battle of Cambrai* was to officially last for just two weeks and a day, from November 20 until December 4, the Newfoundlanders directly involved at all times during that period.

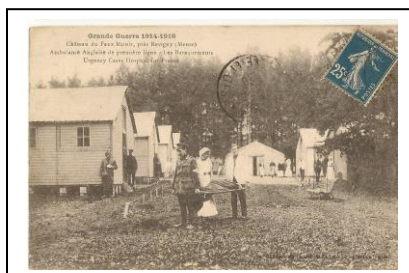
The battle began well for the British who used tanks on a large scale for the first time; but opportunities were squandered and by its close the British had relinquished as much territory as they had gained. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was again dealt with severely, at Marcoing and at Masnières - where a Caribou stands today: of the total of five-hundred fifty-eight officers and men who went into battle, two-hundred forty-eight had become casualties by the end of the second day.



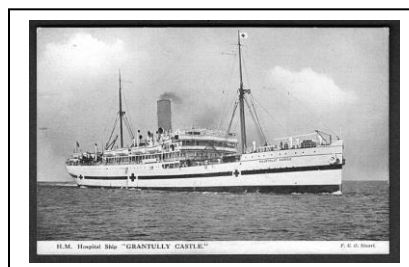
(Right above: *the Canal St-Quentin at Masnières, the crossing of which and the establishment of a bridgehead being the first objectives for the Newfoundlanders on November 20, the first day of the Battle of Cambrai – photograph from 2009*)

It was on the first day of the fighting at Masnières that Private Butler was wounded. He was evacuated from the field to the 89<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance for treatment to a gun-shot injury to his right thigh.

(Right above: *a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)



He was transferred after this preliminary care to the 48<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Achiet-le-Grand and from there, on November 28, he boarded His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Grantully Castle* (right) for the cross-Channel journey back to the United Kingdom.



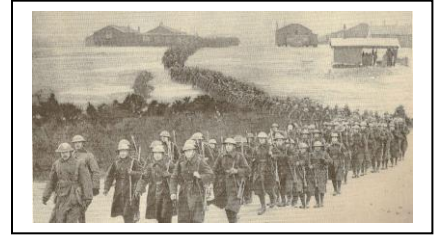
Upon arrival in England he was transferred to and admitted into the Military Hospital, Endell Street, London West Central, on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Some three weeks later Private Butler was sent – on or about December 22 – to Byculla Auxiliary Hospital, Broadlands Road, Highgate, for convalescence.

He was discharged from there on December 28 at which time he was accorded the customary ten-day furlough accorded to service personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom – his address during this period of leave being 24A, Hawk Hill, Dundee. He was posted immediately afterwards to 'H' Company at the Regimental Depot, and reported to duty at Ayr on January 7 of the New Year, 1918.



(Right above: *the High Street in Ayr, dominated then as it still is today by the imposing Wallace Tower, as shown on a postcard of the time sent home by a Newfoundland soldier – by courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs Lillian Tibbo*)

At that time 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion was about to move quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was there that Private Butler would have been when he was received orders to re-join the British Expeditionary Force.



(Right above: *a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from The War Illustrated*)

This he did in May as a private of the 44<sup>th</sup> or 45<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft which departed from England on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month to disembark on the Continent three days later, on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Four days later again, having spent little time if any at the Base Depot in Rouen, he was with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. Apparently the weather was hot and fine to greet the draft of thirty-five *other ranks* which reported at Écuire on May 17.

Meanwhile, some three weeks previously, only days after the crisis of the German spring offensive had passed, on April 24, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had said farewell to their comrades-in-arms of 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 29<sup>th</sup> Division. On the following day there had been a recessional parade. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 it was to move a world away from Flanders where it had just fought, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four other ranks - took train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étaples, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening. They still had a two-hour march ahead of them to their new quarters.

The summer of 1918 was to pass peaceably enough for the personnel of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. For the months of May, June and until early July, the unit was posted to Écuire, to the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



It was there, at Écuire, that Private Butler's contingent from Rouen reported to duty with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on May 17.

(Right above: *Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ – from Illustration*)

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the recently-proclaimed *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* was no longer capable of serving in the field.

*\*Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

The posting to Écuire completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders were encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équièhen – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.



(Right above: a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équièhen at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

The Newfoundlanders returned to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade of 9<sup>th</sup> Scottish Division. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it was to finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (today *Ingooghem*).



(Right: *British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days* – from *Illustration*)

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2<sup>nd</sup> British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive*\*. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge. After almost four years of stalemate, it was once again a conflict of movement.

*\*This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3<sup>rd</sup> Somme.*

The husband of Fanny Elizabeth Butler\* - to whom he had allocated a daily seventy cents from his pay – of Shoal Bay (later re-named *Wellington* then *Dover*), Bonavista Bay, he was also the son of Azariah Butler and Mary Jane Butler, also of Shoal Bay, and brother to James, Harriet, Katie and Grace.

Private Butler died on October 5, 1918, reported as having been *killed in action* while serving with 'B' Company in western Belgium near the village of Ledeghem.

George Allen Butler had enlisted at the age on twenty-two years and five months.

*\*They had married on December 5, 1914, in the community of Wellington. Née King, she later re-married – by 1921 - to become Mrs. Brown. No children are mentioned in the records.*



(continued)

**(Preceding page: *the re-constructed village of Ledeghem, Belgium almost a century later – photograph from 2009*)**

**(Right: *This family monument stands in the Salvation Army Central Cemetery in Dover to commemorate the sacrifice of Private Butler. – photograph from 2013*)**



**Private George Allen Butler was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

