



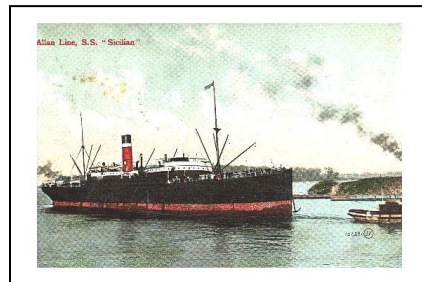
Corporal Michael Conran (Regimental Number 2209) lies in Grove Town British Cemetery, Meaulté – Grave reference III. C. 21.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of, firstly, a telegraph operator having worked for two years with the *Reid Newfoundland Company*, then a paper-maker for four years, employed for a daily wage of \$2.00 by the *Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company* in Grand Falls, Michael Conran was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on February 21, 1916, he then enlisted nine days later – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on March 1, before attesting two days later again, on March 3.

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

Before his departure from Newfoundland for overseas service, Private Conran was promoted on two occasion: on May 9 he was advanced to the rank of lance corporal and, one month later, on June 9, to that of (acting) corporal.

Corporal Conran sailed from St. John's on July 19 on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian** (right). The ship - refitted some ten years previously to carry well over one thousand passengers - had left the Canadian port of Montreal on July 16, carrying Canadian military personnel.



It is likely that the troops disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool; however, it is *certain* that upon disembarkation the contingent journeyed north by train to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot.

**Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport during another conflict, carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War.*

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 the 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.



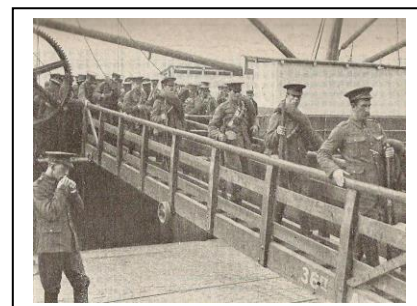
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-upon Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been billeted at Newton Park School and either in the grandstand or in a tented camp at the racecourse in the suburb of Newton-upon-Ayr.



(Right above: *the new race-course at Newton-upon-Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photograph from 2012*)

The 12th Re-enforcement Draft – Corporal Conran one of its number - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on October 11 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the Western Front. It disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, October 12, and spent time at the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, in final training and organization*, before making its way to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



(Page preceding: *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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Corporal Conran's contingent comprised a single officer and two-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* by the time it reported for duty at the Bernafay Wood Camp on October 22. Still in the area of Gueudecourt, 1st Battalion had been relieved in the front line three days before, on the 19th.



(Right: *Bernafay Wood a century later – not being close to the front lines, it may have resembled what is seen here – photograph from 2014*)

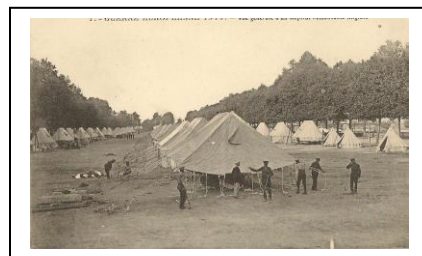
Five days after his joining 1st Battalion, on October 27, Corporal Conran was admitted into the 87th Field Ambulance for medical attention to ICT (*Inflammation of the Connective Tissue*) of the left hand, being transferred to V Corps Rest Station on the same day. When he re-joined his unit seems not to be recorded.

After the episode of October 12 at Gueudecourt, 1st Battalion had then remained in the same area of *the Somme* and from there on was to be regularly into and out of the trenches. There were no infantry engagements, but the incessant artillery action ensured a steady stream of casualties. The Newfoundlanders were withdrawn from *active service* on or about December 12 and spent the following six weeks or so encamped well behind the lines and close to the city of Amiens.



(Right above: *a typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card*)

Corporal Conran was not, however, to enjoy all of that Christmas period with his unit. On January 13 of the New Year 1917, he was admitted into the 21st Casualty Clearing Station at nearby Corbie, suffering from diarrhoea. Two days later he was transferred into the 11th Stationary Hospital in Rouen. Two weeks again after that, on the 28th, he was discharged to duty at Base Depot.



(Right above: *a British Casualty Clearing Station – the one shown here under canvas for if or when the necessity for mobility might arise – somewhere in France at the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)

Corporal Conran re-joined 1st Battalion *in the field* on February 27. If the Regimental War Diary is to be believed, he arrived just in time to enjoy bathing in the regimental bath and to submit to trench-foot treatment. On the next day the Newfoundlanders marched back to the front lines and, late in the evening, took up positions in and about the village of Saily-Saillisel.

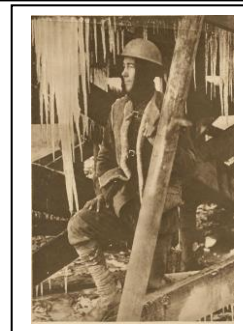
Some five weeks previously, after that welcome Christmas-time respite away from the front lines, the Newfoundlanders had *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

The only infantry activity involving 1st Battalion during the entire period – from the action in mid-October of 1916 at Gueudecourt, until Monchy-le-Preux in April of 1917 – was to be the sharp engagement at Saily-Saillisel at the end of February and the beginning of March, an action which brought this episode in the Newfoundlanders' War – in the area of *the Somme* - to a close.

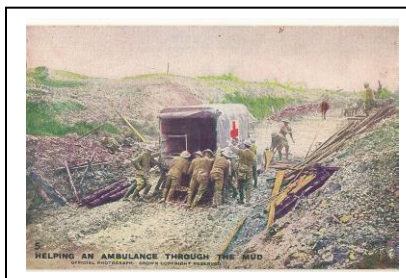


(Right above: *The fighting during the time of the Battalion's posting to Saily-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time.* - photograph from 2009(?))

(Right: *A soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers stands in the cold of the trenches at Saily-Saillisel apparently enjoying a cigarette, during the late winter of 1916-1917, just prior to the arrival there of the Newfoundlanders who relieved them.* – from *Illustration*)



On March 3 there was a great deal of activity in the Newfoundlanders' area of the front: heavy bombardments preceded infantry attacks and counter-attacks. The Regimental War Diary entry cites casualties for the day as being six dead and twenty-seven wounded. One of the latter was Corporal Conran of 'B' Company who was evacuated on that same day from the field to the 55th (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown for treatment to injuries of the neck, elbow and arm.



His condition at the time was deemed to be *dangerous*.

(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 James Conran – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of fifty-five cents from his pay – and Elizabeth Conran* of Woodford's Station in the District of Harbour Main, he was also brother to James**, Joseph, Patrick (who apparently had attempted, unsuccessfully, to enlist twice) and to Gertrude; another sister, Mary, had died at fifteen years of age.

Corporal Conran was reported as having *died of wounds* on March 3, 1917, in the 2/2 London CCS. At home it was the Reverend R. M. Shear of Harbour Main who was requested to bear the news to his family.

**His mother passed away on August 9, 1916, just two weeks after Corporal Conran had left Newfoundland on the Sicilian.*

Michael Conran, born November 8, 1896, had enlisted at the age of twenty-one years and three months.

(Right: *The sacrifice of Corporal Conran is commemorated on this family memorial in the Cemetery of St. Peter and St. Paul, Chapel Cove, Harbour Main. – photograph from 2012*)



(Right: *The sacrifice of Corporal Conran is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Grand Falls-Windsor. – photograph from 2010*)



***There seems to have been an older brother Nicholas in the picture as well, unless this is also one of James Jr.'s names.*

Corporal Michael Conran was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

