



Private William Patrick Donnelly (Regimental Number 2162), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer earning a weekly six dollars working for *L. J. Malone*, William Donnelly was a recruit of the Tenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on February 24, 1916, he then enlisted for the *duration of hostilities* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on February 25, before attesting on the same day.

It was the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, another six months hence, before Private Donnelly embarked for passage to the United Kingdom. His documentation suggests that, in fact, he had been due to depart on His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right) from St. John's on July 19, but he must have been absent from the departure parade either because of ongoing misdemeanours or because he was confined to barracks at the time. His conduct sheet shows that he finally *did* sail – and that it was on board *Sicilian* - but not until August 28.



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

Upon arrival in the United Kingdom, the ship docked in the south-coast naval port of Devonport from where the Newfoundlanders entrained for the journey north to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> (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 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*)

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: *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 – photo from 2012*)



The 14<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Donnelly one of its number - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on November 30 of 1916 on its way to the Continent and to the *Western Front*. The contingent disembarked in the Norman capital of Rouen on the next day, December 1, 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, the Newfoundland Regiment.



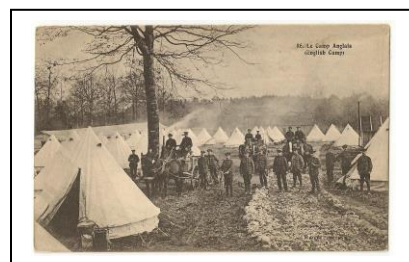
Private Donnelly, during his posting at Rouen, apparently managed to get himself deprived of two days' pay for *loss of kit*.

(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.*

When that rendezvous was effected it was late in the day of December 11 – which is likely why it is recorded in the Regimental War Diary as occurring on the 12<sup>th</sup>. The parent unit had retired from the front on December 8, but many of the men had been seconded for work at Carnoy and Fricourt.

Those spared had marched on to Méricourt l'Abbé which is where the one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Base Depot – Private Donnelly in that number - reported to *duty*. The newcomers were just in time for the six-week Christmas period to be spent well behind the lines in *Corps Reserve*, encamped near the city of Amiens.



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

After that welcome Christmas-time respite away from *the Front*, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had by then also incurred their first casualties – and fatality – of 1917.

The only infantry activity involving 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion during that 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 Sailly-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 Sailly-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(?)*)

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March was a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris (right), the latter on March 17, St. Patrick’s Day.



On March 29 that 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, its march to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right adjacent: *the remnants of the Grande Place in the city of Arras in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

On April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties it was the most expensive operation of the War for the British, its only positive episode being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday. The French offensive was a disaster.



(Right above: *the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

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1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to play its part in the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at a place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After *Beaumont-Hamel*, Monchy-le-Preux was to prove the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 alone.



(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community. The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

The son of William Donnelly, tallyman with *Monroe & Co.*, and Mary Donnelly – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of fifty cents from his pay - of 45, Wickford Street, St. John's, he was also brother to Jeremiah (see below), to Charles - who had *offered\** on December 4, 1914; to Mary; and to Elizabeth.

Private Donnelly was reported as *missing in action* on April 14, 1917, during the fighting at Monchy-le-Preux. Some thirty weeks later, on November 17 of 1917 he was officially *presumed dead*.

William Patrick Donnelly had enlisted at the age of nineteen years and two months.

His brother Jeremiah, Private, Regimental Number 3572, was to die on November 20 of the same year, during the course of the fighting at Masnières.



(Right: *The Caribou at Monchy-le-Preux stands atop the remains of a German strongpoint in the centre of the re-constructed village. – photograph from 2009(?)*)

*\*To 'offer' was to present oneself as available for service but to be refused for one or more of a number of reasons, usually medical. A special badge was created for those who had 'offered'.*

(Right: A family memorial erected by their parents, and which stands in Belvedere Cemetery in St. John's, commemorates the sacrifice of two brothers: Privates William Patrick Donnelly and Jeremiah Donnelly. – photograph from 2015)



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**Private William Patrick Donnelly was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

