

Private Thomas Druken (Regimental Number 1363) is interred in Étapes Military Cemetery – Grave reference XII. B. 5.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer earning a daily \$1.60, Thomas Druken enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 - on March 26, 1915, and presented himself for medical examination on the following day, March 27. He attested six days later again, on April 1*.

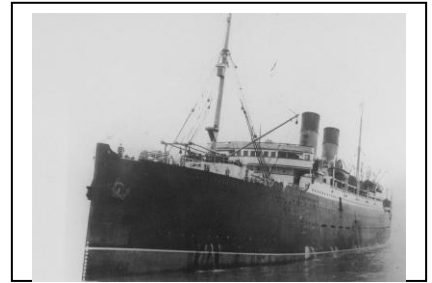


****A second source has his attesting on the day of his enlistment.***

Private Druken of 'E' Company embarked in St. John's on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* (right above – from the *Provincial Archives*) just three weeks later again, on April 22, 1915.

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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 they travelled by train to Edinburgh where the Newfoundlanders 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 training from Edinburgh to a tented Stobs Camp near the Scottish town of Hawick.



(Right: *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 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 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.



The Depot was about to become home to Private Druken for the next seven months, as he was not leave there until the following March.

(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)

The Depot was about to become home to Private Druken for the next seven months. He did not leave there until the following March. On the 27th of that month, the day before his departure, he re-enlisted, on this occasion *for the duration of the war**.

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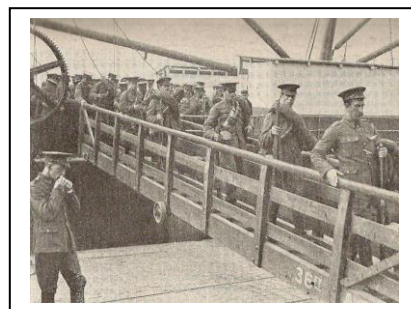
**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

On March 28, Private Druken, as a *ranker* of the 3rd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton and boarded His Majesty's Transport *Archangel* (right above) on his way to join 1st Battalion on the Continent. Disembarking two days later, on the 30th, in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, the contingent made its way to the Depot for several days of final training and organization* before leaving to seek out the parent unit.



(Right: *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.*



On April 15, a detachment from Rouen of two-hundred eleven other ranks – accompanied by two officers – reported *to duty* with 1st Battalion already billeted in the village of Englebelmer some three kilometres behind the lines of the *Western Front*. Private Druken is documented as being among that number, a contingent which included not only personnel from Ayr, but also others from Gallipoli and Egypt whose departure from there had been delayed.

Only two days prior, on April 13, 1st Battalion had *itself* marched into the village of Englebelmer – thus completing a month-long transfer from Egypt – where it was billeted, welcomed those re-enforcements from Rouen on the 15th and, on the evening of that same day, was ordered forward – along with the new-comers, to work in the communication trenches not so very far away.



The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the languid, 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(?)*)

Private Druken was not one of those who figured in the fighting of the morning of July 1 with 1st Battalion at Beaumont-Hamel, but his name was included on the unit's nominal roll; it is therefore possible that he had been seconded to another unit or, more likely, that he was one of the ten per cent reserve of fourteen officers and eighty-three *other ranks* held at Louvencourt and not called forward until late in the afternoon of that day when the fighting had subsided.



**The well-known roll-call of July 2 of those who survived the battle unscathed was not officially recorded until two days later. The roll call of those who had been in the ten per cent reserve of fourteen officers and eighty-three men held back for most of the day at Louvencourt was apparently also recorded officially only later. Thus the inscription 'With Battalion 4/7/16' on certain records.*

(Right above: *another part of the reconstituted battlefield, here showing the British front lines, in the Newfoundland Park at Beaumont-Hamel: today the wire serves only to keep the tourists out of the trenches. – photograph from 2010(?)*)

On July 27-28 of 1916, 1st Battalion moved north and entered 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. *The Salient* was relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there, yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number of them fatal. 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 above: *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*)

Four days after its return to France, on October 12, 1st Battalion went again to the offensive at a place called Gueudecourt, the remains of yet another small village, a dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel. It was to be another costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.



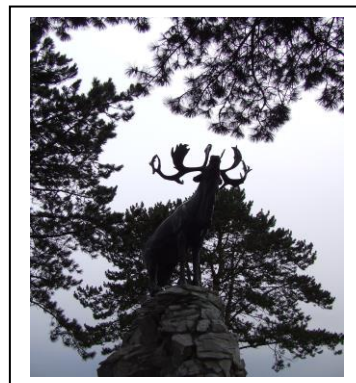
(Previous page: *This is the ground over which 1st Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)

On that October 12, Private Druken was wounded by shrapnel from enemy artillery fire while serving with 'B' Company. By the 14th he was at the 38th Casualty Clearing Station at Heilly and then, by October 16, he was being treated in the 1st Canadian General Hospital in the coastal town of Étapes, for multiple wounds to the left leg.



(Right: *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 John J. Druken and Alice Druken – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay - of Horse Cove Line, Topsail, he was reported as having *died of wounds* on November 1, 1916, in hospital at Étapes. Private Druken was interred on the same day, his burial being reported by the Reverend A. Johnson, Chaplain of Forces attached to the 16th Division.



Thomas Druken had enlisted at nineteen years of age.

(Above right: *The Caribou at Gueudecourt stands on the site of the furthest point of advance of the Battalion on October 12, 1916. – photograph from 2012*)

(Right: *The sacrifice of Private Druken is honoured on the Topsail - today Conception Bay South - War Memorial, shown here on its previous site, in Topsail. – photograph from 2010*)



(The photograph of Private Druken is from the *Provincial Archives.*)

Private Thomas Druken was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

