



Private John Joseph Duke (Regimental Number 1964) lies in Ancre British Cemetery – Grave reference II. E. 14.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a policeman in the capital city, John Duke was a recruit of the Seventh Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's On October 29, 1915, he then enlisted – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on November 1, 1915, and attested two days afterwards, on November 3.

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

Private Duke 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* (previous 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 appears that Private Duke was not one of those 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 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.

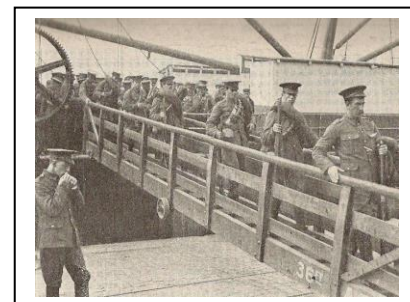


(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that, on May 24, some three weeks before his departure to France on *active service*, Private Duke 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.*

The 6<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Duke among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to the Continent on June 14, 1916. It arrived in the Norman capital of Rouen on the following day, June 15, whereupon the contingent was received into the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, there to continue final training\* and to organize before moving onwards towards the front and to a rendezvous with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

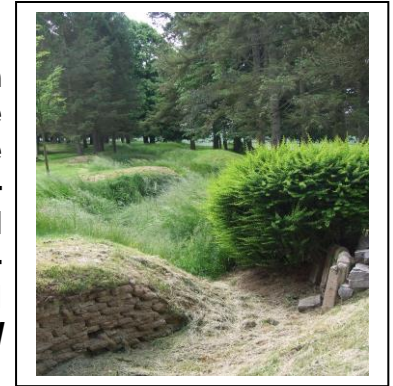


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

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

(continued)

A detachment of sixty-six *other ranks* from Rouen, a draft which included Private Duke, arrived to join the parent unit in the community of Louvencourt on June 30. At 9:15 that evening, the Newfoundlanders – including a goodly number of those newcomers – but with the exception of the fourteen officers and eighty-three *other ranks* assigned to remain behind with the Reinforcement Company, marched from there to their assigned *forming-up place trenches i.e. rear line of trenches in our usual sector* (Regimental War Diary).



(Right above: *Just inside the entrance to the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel, this trench is reputed to be the (re-constituted) one where 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion spent the night before launching its attack from there on July 1. – photograph from 2009*)

The next day, July 1, was the first day of *the Somme*, the British and French offensive of the summer of 1916.

(Right above: *Just inside the entrance to the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel, this trench is reputed to be the one where 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion spent the night before launching its attack from there on July 1. – photograph from 2009*)

The son of Michael Duke (former fisherman) and Mary Duke (née *Whiffen* from Iona – formerly Rams Island - Placentia Bay) (she apparently re-married to a *Mr. Carrigan* after the death of her two sons) – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty-five cents from his pay, and to whom he had willed his all – of Fox Harbour, Placentia Bay, he was also brother to William\* and to Michael.

He was at first reported as *missing in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, serving with 'C' Company during the fighting of the first day of *the Somme*, and later likely *presumed dead*.



However, a subsequent report submitted by the Officer Commanding 5<sup>th</sup> Corps Mobile Graves Registration Unit recorded the identification of Private Duke's remains and their burial on or about 23/4/17 in No-Man's-Land west of Y Ravine. From there his remains were later transferred to where they lie today. His records were thus amended so as to read *killed in action 1/7/1916*.



John Joseph Duke had enlisted at the age of twenty-three years and two months: date of birth, September 4, 1892.

*\*Private William Duke, Regimental Number 1306, had contracted meningitis while serving in Gallipoli and had died in hospital in Alexandria (Egypt) on Boxing Day, 1915, in which city his remains are buried.*

**(Previous page: *Beaumont-Hamel - looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences - The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009*)**

**(Previous page black & white: *a grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from ...*)**

**Private John Joseph Duke was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

