



**Private Frederick Roy Durnford (Regimental Number 2631) lies in Marcoing British Cemetery – Grave reference II. G. 7.**

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a book-keeper, Fred Durnford was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on April 27, 1916, he also enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on that same day, before attesting on the next, the 28<sup>th</sup>.

Private Durnford sailed from St. John's on July 19 on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right below). 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.

(continued)

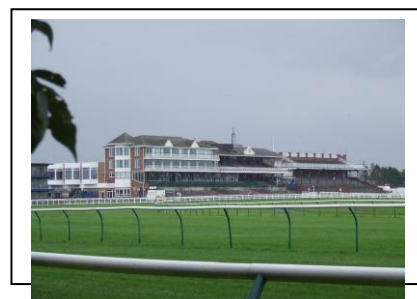
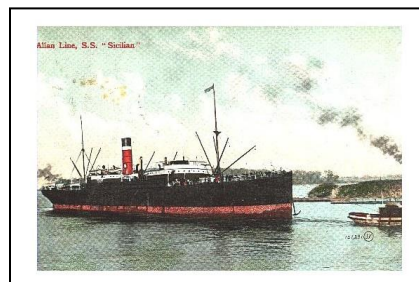
*\*Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when she was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport during another conflict, carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War.*

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 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-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.

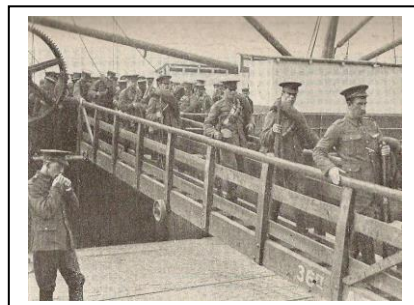
(Right above: *the new race-course at Newton-upon-Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photograph from 2012*)



The 12<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Durnford among its ranks - 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.

The contingent 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

(Right: *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.

(continued)

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

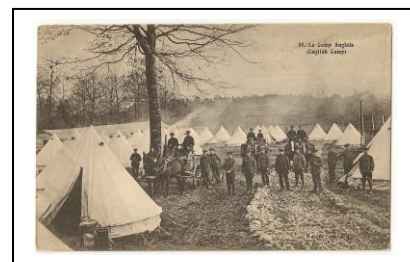
(Right: *Bernafay Wood a century later – not being close to the front lines, the wood may well have resembled what is seen here – photograph from 2014*)



After the episode of October 12 at Gueudecourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had remained in the same area of *the Somme* and was 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 would be withdrawn from active service on or about December 12 and were to spend the following six weeks or so encamped well behind the lines and close to the city of Amiens.

(Right: *a British encampment somewhere on the Continent, apparently during the winter season – from a vintage post-card*)



After that welcome six-week Christmas-time respite away from the front lines, 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 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.

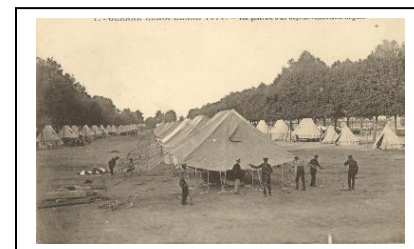
(Right above: *The fighting during the time of the Battalion's posting to Sailly-Saillisel took place on the far side of the village which was no more than a heap of rubble at the time. - photograph from 2009(?)*)

After the efforts at Sailly-Saillisel, the month of March was to be a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they 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.



By the time of the Prime Minister's arrival, however, Private Durnford was no longer with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. On March 9 he had been admitted into the 34<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown suffering from influenza.

(Right: *a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card*)



From Grovetown on March 12, Private Durnford was transferred to the 10<sup>th</sup> General Hospital – there to be diagnosed as having also contracted trench fever - at Rouen before being embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. David* (right) for the crossing back to the United Kingdom.



The ship traversed the English Channel the night of March 21.

Arriving in England on March 22, Private Durnford was transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth, his complaints now further including bronchitis and laryngitis.

(Right: *The main building of what became 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital during the Great War was opened, on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1859, as a home for the orphaned daughters of British soldiers, sailors and marines. - photograph from 2010*)



(Above far right: *Newfoundland patients, unfortunately unidentified, convalescing at 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

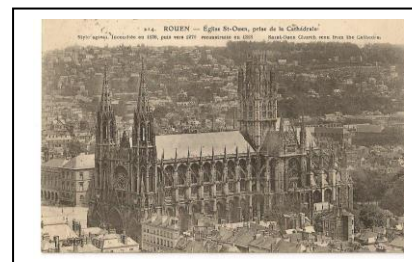
Private Durnford remained at Wandsworth until April 12 when he was discharged and granted the customary ten-day furlough allowed military personnel upon discharge from hospital in the United Kingdom. After this short period of leave he was posted to 'E' Company back at the Regimental Depot in Scotland.



(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*)

He reported to Ayr for duty on April 21 and on May 14 received promotion to the rank of lance corporal - as his picture (see below) testifies. Unfortunately he was deprived of this stripe only some ten weeks later, apparently for having been... *Absent from Tatoon until arrested in town about 11.30 a.m. 21/7/17.*

On August 5, the 28<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft from Barry\* embarked in Folkestone for the journey to the Continent. Having disembarked in Rouen on the 7<sup>th</sup>, Private Durnford was admitted almost immediately into the 11<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Rouen, on the 8<sup>th</sup>, to be treated for scabies. He was released from there and sent to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convalescent Camp, also in Rouen, on the following day, August 9.



*\*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 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.*

Discharged back to duty to the Base Depot in Rouen eight days later, it was not until October 14 that Private Durnford was posted to Base Details before eventually re-joining 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on October 25.

(Right above: *Rouen Cathedral and the centre of the city with its gothic cathedral on a vintage post-card at or about the time that Private Durnford was there – from a vintage post-card*)

At the time that Private Durnford returned to duty, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had just been withdrawn from Belgium – on October 17 – where it had been a small cog in the machinery of the British Army which had floundered its way – and was still doing so - across the sodden countryside



of Flanders. This was officially the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Ypres: it was to become notoriously known to history as *Passchendaele*.

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

A week after the infantry action of October 9 at the *Broembek*, the Newfoundlanders were ordered from the *Passchendaele* campaign in order to prepare for yet another upcoming offensive: *Cambrai*. They were transferred 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.

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.

(continued)

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.



(Above right: *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*)

The son of John R. S. Durnford and Mary Durnford – to whom he had allocated a daily seventy cents from his pay - of Rencontre West, Hermitage Bay, he was also brother to at least John-Matthew.

Private Durnford was reported as having been *killed in action* on November 20, 1917, while serving with 'A' Company on the first day of the fighting near the French villages of Marcoing and Masnières.

He was buried in Marcoing Copse Cemetery by the Reverend Thomas Nangle, *Chaplain of the Forces* attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, his remains later being exhumed and transferred to where they repose today.

At home it was the Reverend George Hall of Pussthrough who was requested to bear the news to his family.



Fred Durnford had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and five months.

*(The colour photograph of Private Durnford is by courtesy of the Grand Banks Genealogy web-site.)*

*(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)*

*(Right: The Caribou at Masnières stands on the high ground to the north of the community. The seizure of this terrain was the final objective of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on November 20; however, whether this was ever achieved is at best controversial. – photograph from 2012)*



(continued)

Private Frederick Roy Durnford was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



**Postscript:** It was only later that Private Durnford was considered for a decoration for his conduct during one of the several actions at Saily-Saillisel at the end of February and beginning of March, 1917. An excerpt from a letter to this effect addressed to Government House is hereby included as well as part of the official response:

*"...whether any, and if so what, military recognition should be given to the memory of #3631 Frederick Roy Durnford, late of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, who fell in action at Cambrai on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1917 at the age of nineteen years, in respect of his brave conduct near Combles on the day when Lt. Herbert Outerbridge fell wounded by shell-fire near a trench held at*

the time by a detachment of the Royal Fusiliers. Lt. Outerbridge with a platoon of Newfoundlanders was occupying a small trench from which he advanced alone with a view to better locating the enemy's guns playing on a wide space in which both trenches lay...

...Lt. Outerbridge had ventured out of his trench for the purpose above mentioned, telling his men that he would not be long absent. After waiting a considerable time, the platoon concluded that he must be either wounded or killed, as the enemy fire was very hot and the surface much torn by shell-fire.

Durnford had been Lt. Outerbridge's 'runner' so he went 'over the top' alone to search for his lieutenant: found him after considerable search, badly wounded in the head: returned to the Newfoundlanders' trench and came back with stretcher-bearers to where the lieutenant lay. Ball was one of those bearers.

**(continued)**

Despite his serious wound from which the lieutenant still suffers much, he remembers that it was Durnford who found him and who went back for the bearers...

Mr Justice Johnson

**...His Excellency does not see how anything can be done in the matter now as Durnford was killed some eighteen months ago and it would seem somewhat late in the day for any special recommendation to be made...**