



Private George Hann (Regimental Number 2605) lies in Brookwood Military Cemetery – Grave reference X. B. 1.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman earning an annual \$200.00, George Hann was a recruit of the Ninth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on April 25, 1916, before enlisting *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on the morrow, April 26. He attested on that same day.

Private Hann 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.

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**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)

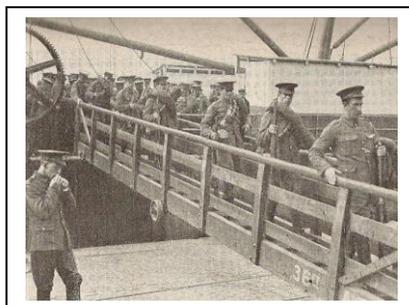
At the outset there had been problems at Ayr to accommodate the new arrivals – plus men from other regiments who were still being billeted in the area – but by the spring of 1916, things had been satisfactorily settled: the officers were in Wellington Square in Ayr itself, and the other ranks had been 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 – Private Hann 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 1st 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, Étaples, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

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Private Hann'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, 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, the wood may well have resembled what is seen here – photograph from 2014*)



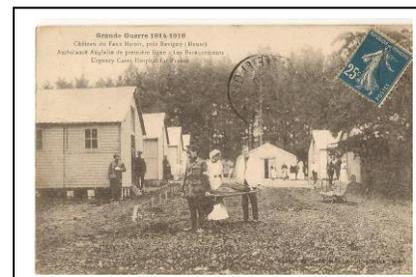
After the episode of October 12 at Gueudecourt, 1st Battalion had remained in the same area of *the Somme* and was regularly into and out of the trenches. There were no infantry engagements, but the incessant artillery action ensured a steady stream of casualties.

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*)



For Private Hann, however, this intermission far from the turmoil of the front lines was blemished – as was his turkey dinner on Christmas day - by his admission on December 23 into the 88th Field Ambulance where he was diagnosed as suffering from enteritis. His case was apparently not too serious as he was discharged back to duty with 1st Battalion on the 30th of the same month, the Newfoundlanders still quartered in the place where he had left them a week before.



(Right above: *a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)

After their welcome six-week Christmas-time respite away from the front lines, the Newfoundlanders of 1st 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 1st 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.



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(Previous page: *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.



It was on March 29 that 1st 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*)

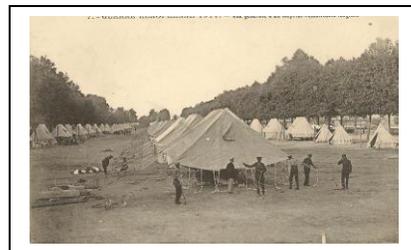
1st Battalion was to play its part in the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at a place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, Monchy-le-Preux was to prove to be the most costly 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, to the east, away from the camera.* – photograph from 2013)

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It was at Monchy-le-Preux, on April 14, while serving with 'A' Company, that Private Hann was wounded, incurring severe injuries from gun-fire to his left arm, a foot, a leg, his left knee and a thigh. He was forthwith evacuated by the next day to the 19th Casualty Clearing Station at Beauval, and from there taken, on the 16th, to the 14th General Hospital at Wimereux.



(Right above: a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when necessary – being established somewhere on the Continent – from a vintage post-card)

On that same day he was embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. Denis* (right below) for the short crossing back to the United Kingdom.

Once back in England, Private Hann was admitted into the 4th London General Hospital at Denmark Hill, south-east London. Pronounced *dangerously ill* on June 17, his wounds nevertheless seem to have healed - all except for his still-septic left knee – by August 1. From then on it was, unfortunately - in those days before anti-biotics - to be a losing battle.



The son of Captain Charles Hann, fisherman, and Permillia (also called *Millie* and *Amelia*) Hann (née *Winsor*, deceased 1902) – to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay and to whom he had willed his all - of Wesleyville, he was also brother to Bessie, Hettie-Jean, Isaac, Bertram-Gordon (see below*), John, Peter, Martha-Ann, Louisa and Pamela.

Private Hann was reported as having *died of wounds* and of septicæmia in the 4th London General Hospital on September 8, 1917.

At home it was the Reverend Charles House of Wesleyville who was requested to bear the news to his family.

Private Hann was buried in Brookwood on September 13 with full military honours with the firing-party and bugle party both provided by the 4th London Rifle Brigade. A Newfoundland flag lay draped over his coffin.

The last Post was sounded and a volley of three rounds blank was fired at 1. 35 p.m.



George Hann had enlisted at the age of nineteen years and six months.

**His brother Bertram, Corporal, Regimental Number 1255, survived the conflict.*

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

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Private George Hann was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

