



**Private Augustus Chesley Toms (Regimental Number 2561) lies in Grove Town British Cemetery, Meaulté – Grave reference II. N. 2.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Augustus Chesley Toms 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 20, 1916, he also enlisted *for the duration of the war* – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on the same April 20, before attesting two days later, on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.**

***\*A second document records him attesting on the day of his enlistment.***

**(continued)**

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

*\*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 Toms 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.

(continued)

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

Private Toms' 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*)

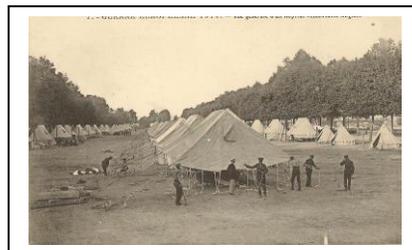
After that welcome six-week Christmas-time respite away from the front lines, the Newfoundlanders of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had incurred their first casualties – and fatality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

On February 1 the Regimental War Diarist notes simply ...*Batt in firing line: ...C Co. in Cow Trench*; it was at some time on this day that Private Toms was wounded while serving with 'C' Company – in fact, only days earlier, 'C' Company had been acting as stretcher-bearers, bringing in wounded during an attack in the same area by the 1<sup>st</sup> Borderers and 1<sup>st</sup> Iniskilling Fusiliers.



(Right above: *Stretcher-bearers often accompanied the fighting troops, were exposed to exactly the same dangers, and oft-times for longer periods. – from Illustration*)

He was evacuated immediately to the 55<sup>th</sup> (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown, for medical attention to injuries to the buttocks inflicted by gun-fire.



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

The son of Esau Toms, fisherman, and Mary Ann Toms (née *Anstey*) - to whom he had allocated a daily fifty cents from his pay - of King's Point, Southwest Arm, Green Bay, he was also brother to Willis and, by adoption, to Harold Shering.



Private Toms was reported as having *died of wounds* on that same February 1, 1917, at the same 55<sup>th</sup> CCS.

Back at home, it was the Reverend Wilfred Woolfrey of King's Point who was requested to bear the news to his family.

Augustus Chesley Toms had enlisted at the age of twenty-three years and four months.

(Right above: *Guillemont Road Cemetery the fields where 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was in the front line on February 1, 1917, and the area where Private Toms was wounded. – photograph from 2010*)

Private Augustus Chesley Toms was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

