

Private Norman Harvey Alderdice (Regimental Number G/6613) of The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment), British Expeditionary Force, has no known last resting-place. His memory is perpetuated in the stone of the Arras Memorial located in the Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery, Arras: Memorial reference, Bay 2.

(Right above: The photograph of the Regimental Badge as depicted on a CWGC Headstone on the Long, Long Trail web-site.)

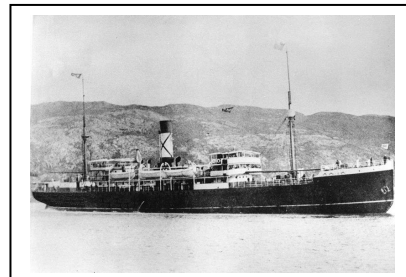
Involved with the *Colonial Cordage Company* of S. John's, Norman Harvey Alderdice joined the first wave of enthusiastic volunteers who formed the First Draft of the Newfoundland Regiment. He did not enlist but rather applied for and received, on September 24 of 1914, an Imperial Commission* as a lieutenant.

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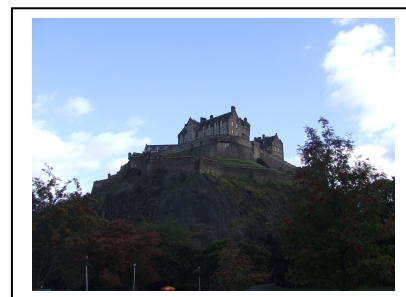
****Officers who were eventually promoted from the ranks may be identified from their Regimental Number. Other officers who were not from the ranks received the King's Commission, or in the case of those in the Newfoundland Regiment, an Imperial Commission, and were thus not considered as enlisted. These officers thus had no Regimental Number allotted to them.***

Lieutenant Alderdice embarked on October 3, 1914, onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel*. The ship sailed for the United Kingdom on the following day, joining the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas.

(Right: The photograph of *Florizel* is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum, Mount Pearl.)



Having arrived in England, Lieutenant Alderdice trained with the Battalion: at first on the Salisbury Plain in southern England; then at Fort George in Scotland, on the Firth of Moray and near to the town of Inverness. The Newfoundlanders subsequently moved in February to the Scottish capital, Edinburgh, there to garrison the city's historic Castle. They were to be the first contingent of troops from outside the British Isles to do so.



Lieutenant Alderdice's posting at the venerable Castle, however, was to be of a short duration.

(Right above: *The venerable bastion of Edinburgh Castle on its hill in the centre of the city – photograph from 2011*)

In late Mid-March – likely on board *Missanabie* and also likely via Halifax – Lieutenant Alderdice returned to Newfoundland and reported *to duty* on the 23rd of that month. He had been recalled to help in training the draftees who were to comprise 'E' Company, a unit which departed St. John's on the *Stephano*, sister-ship of *Florizel*. Leaving Newfoundland on April 22, 1915, this contingent *also* travelled via Halifax where it took ship, also on board His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie*, on April 24.



Missanabie sailed from Nova Scotia just before mid-night on the same April 24, the two-hundred fifty men of 'E' Company, with Commanding Officer Captain Eric Ayre and Lieutenant Alderdice taking passage on the vessel in the company of two units of Canadian troops: the Railway Supply Depot personnel of the Canadian Army Service Corps and the Field Bakery, also of the CASC.

(Right above: *The photograph of the SS Missanabie is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

'E' Company disembarked in the English port-city of Liverpool on May 2 and immediately thereupon took a train northwards to Edinburgh. They were to spend only days there before being ordered to transfer on May 11 to *Stobs Camp*, a large training establishment – for the most part under canvas – to the south-west of the Scottish capital and close to the town of Hawick.

(Right below: *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 Camp*, some thirteen weeks later again, in early August, the senior 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies, having by that time become the 1st Battalion* of 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.



**It was only on July 10 of 1915 that the Newfoundland Contingent, with the arrival at 'Stobs Camp' from Newfoundland of 'F' Company, comprised the sufficient number of personnel, some fifteen-hundred, to be of establishment battalion strength.*

Lieutenant Alderdice, however, was not to serve in the Middle East. At the end of the month of July and the beginning of August, for a period of twelve days, he was to receive treatment for a venereal problem in the First Northern General Hospital. But not only that, by this time he had incurred other problems, suggested as having been of a financial nature – although this is far from confirmed - and serious to the point where he had received the following letter from none other than the Prime Minister of Newfoundland:

Lieutenant N.H. Alderdice.

23rd July,

1915

1st Newfoundland Regiment

Stobs Camp. Hawick. N.B.

Dear Mr. Alderdice

I have been making enquiries re our conversation and I should think the only thing for you to do is to enlist as a Private in one of the Regiments going to the Front. I am sorry it is impossible to do anything else for you. I return the Colonel's certificate.

I should think there is every chance of earning promotion in the field.

Wishing you good luck,

Yours faithfully,

(signed) E.P. Morris

On October 8 of 1915, the *London Gazette* reported that Lieutenant Alderdice had relinquished his Imperial Commission in the Newfoundland Regiment. He had then transferred to the 6th Battalion – a second source has the 9th – of The Queen's (*the Royal West Surrey Regiment*), and had, as suggested to him by the Prime Minister, reverted to the rank of a private soldier*: service number G6613.

**His Medal Index Card has him as a sergeant – Sjt – but the CWGC (Commonwealth War Graves Commission) refers to him as Private Alderdice.*

During the autumn, winter and spring of 1915 and then into 1916, the 6th Battalion of The was stationed in the sector just to the north-west of the German-occupied city and mining centre of Lens. It was during this period – and earlier rather than later – that Private Alderdice apparently joined his new unit: by late October of 1915 – and thus immediately subsequent to the resignation of his Commission. At the time he was documented as being with the *Sniping Company* of the 37th Infantry Brigade of which the Queen's was a unit*.



**However, his medal card suggests that Private Alderdice did not serve in a theatre of war until, at the earliest, 1916.*

(Right above: two scenes of the city of Lens: one taken before and the other after the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

On July 1st, the first day of *the First Battle of the Somme* and the day on which the Newfoundland Regiment attacked to such disastrous effect at Beaumont-Hamel, the 6th Battalion was still marching from the Lens Sector into a position some two kilometres to the north-east of the provincial town of Albert – perhaps eight kilometres to the south-west of the Commune of Beaumont-Hamel.



Private Alderdice's unit attacked in front of the remnants of the village of Orvillers before dawn on the following morning, July 2 – re-enforcing the failure of the previous day – and incurred three-hundred four casualties, of whom almost fifty per cent were eventually recorded as *dead*, and gained little or nothing.

(Right above: *Orvillers is situated next to la Boisselle where the largest of a number of mines had been exploded on July 1 – leaving this, the Lochnagar Crater to bear witness - just before the first attack of the day. – photograph from 2011*)

Then at the end of the first week of that October, and still in the area of *the Somme*, the by-then re-enforced and re-organized 6th Battalion attacked at a place called Gueudecourt. The attack had been abandoned by the following day with



heavy losses.

Five days later, it was to be the turn of the newly-returned Newfoundland Regiment – the unit having just spent ten weeks in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium – to attack; the results were comparable to those incurred by Private Alderdice’s unit.

(Preceding page: *The area at Gueudecourt where the 6th Battalion of the Queen’s attacked in early October, 1916: the Newfoundlanders followed suit – just to the left of here - on October 12. The Gueudecourt Caribou today stands at the furthest point of advance among the central copse of trees on the sky-line. – photograph from 2014*)

(Right below: *The remnants of the Grande Place – Grand’Place - in the city of Arras in early 1916 – from Illustration*)

Following its efforts at *the Somme*, in January of 1916 the 6th Battalion, The Queen’s, was transferred some forty kilometres north, to the area of the medieval city of Arras. There the personnel were off-times quartered, during the months to follow, in caves cut out of the sub-soil to shelter some of the thousands of troops in the area.



(Right below: *One of the several entrances into the Ronville Cave system, almost a century after its use by Commonwealth and British troops. It was employed at different times by personnel of thirty-six different Army Divisions. – photograph from 2012(?)*)

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 to be the most expensive operation of the Great War for the British, one of the few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive was a disaster.

(Right: *the Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

At one stage during the Battle of Arras, on April 12 of 1917, Private Alderdice was posted to a sector just to the right of the village of Monchy-le-Preux on the *Arras Front*. On that date and on the following, his unit was relieved by the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment; one might well wonder whether he was even aware of this*.



(Right: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community. The*



Queen's was apparently in trenches in and just to the right of the village. – photograph from 2013)

**Two days later, on April 14, the 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, incurred more than four-hundred fifty killed in action, wounded in action, missing in action or taken prisoner. After July 1 of 1916, it was to be the costliest day of the Newfoundland Regiment's war.*

Even towards the conclusion of the short-lived *Battle of Arras* – short it was, but expensive in terms of life: in five weeks the British and Commonwealth forces had incurred some one-hundred sixty thousand casualties – the British High Command had been obliged to continue the pressure in certain sectors to draw German troops away from the beleaguered French theatre of operations.

Thus, at the beginning of May, the 6th Battalion of The Queen's found itself in the line to the east of Arras and once more in the vicinity of Monchy-le-Preux.

Excerpt from the War Diary entry of the 6th Battalion, The Queen's (*the Royal West Surrey Regiment*) for May 12, 1917: *At 6 P.M. the battalion attacked that position of Devil's Trench from BIT Lane to Harness Lane both inclusive... the attack failed – 'D' Company were then ordered to send up 2 Platoon to reinforce the the Front line... CASUALTIES 1 Officer Killed and 17 Other Ranks Killed 2 Officers 46 O.R's wounded.*

Born in Belfast, Ireland, in or about the year 1879, the son of William Alderdice and of Rachel Kathleen Alderdice (née *Monroe*) (from the 1901 Census for Ireland) he was also husband to Dorothy (née *Rendell*) to whom a War Gratuity of eight pounds and ten shillings was forwarded after his death. The couple had been married in St. John's on July 6 of 1910 and subsequently had two daughters, Norma-Monroe and Pamela-MacKay.

He was also brother to William-Lamond, to Edith-Maude and to Frederick-Charles who was to become Prime Minister of Newfoundland and also then to be associated with the later Commission of Government, the final governing body of the independent Dominion of Newfoundland.

Private Alderdice was at first reported as *missing in action* on May 12, 1917, to be then officially registered as *presumed dead* some six months later.



He died at the age of forty years: date of birth in Belfast, Ireland, November 23, 1877.

The photograph of Lieutenant Alderdice is from that of an officer group held in *the Provincial Archives*.

Private (elsewhere *Sergeant*) Norman Harvey Alderdice was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to



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