



Private Wilson Butler (Regimental Number 2938), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman earning four hundred dollars per annum, Wilson Butler was a recruit of the Tenth Draft. He enlisted for the duration of the war at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on July 1 of 1916 - at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – then presented himself for medical examination and also attested on the 3rd, two days later.



It was the 28th of August before Private Butler embarked for passage to the United Kingdom and it was on His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian** (right) that he was to make the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom. This was the third such voyage that the ship was to make in 1916, the Newfoundlanders likely sharing the vessel with Canadian personnel**. He sailed as a soldier of 11th Platoon, Section 11, of 'C' Company of 3rd Battalion***.



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

***Sicilian had been re-fitted in 1906 to carry just under twelve-hundred passengers, thus her journey to St. John's in March of 1916 was likely followed by the short passage to Halifax to embark Canadian military personnel. Likewise, in July, she had sailed from Montreal on July 16 with Canadians to embark the Newfoundlanders awaiting passage overseas.*

****3rd Battalion was based in St. John's, whereas 2nd (Reserve) Battalion – 'E', 'F', 'G' and 'H' Companies - was stationed in the United Kingdom. 1st Battalion was the edge of the sword – 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies – and was posted to the front.*

Upon arrival in the United Kingdom, the ship docked in the south-coast naval port of Devonport from where the Newfoundlanders entrained for the journey north to Scotland and to the Regimental Depot where each newcomer was delegated to one of the four resident companies - and the where the somewhat confusing title of 'C' Company was abandoned.

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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 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.



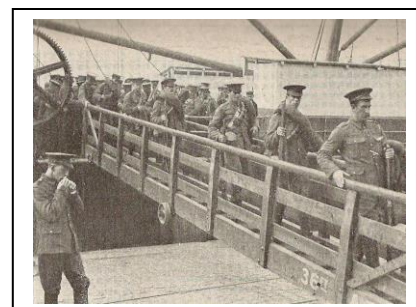
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-upon Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

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 – photo from 2012*)

The 14th Re-enforcement Draft – Private Butler among that contingent - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on November 30 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, December 1, 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.

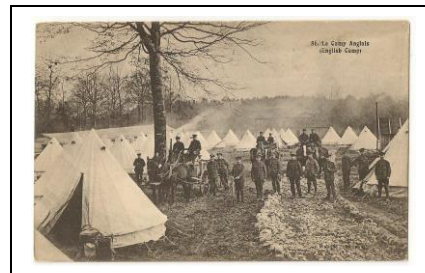


(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen on their way to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

**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.*

When that rendezvous was effected it was late in the day of December 11 – which is most likely why it is recorded elsewhere as happening on the 12th. The parent unit had retired from the front on December 8, but many of the men had been seconded for work at Carnoy and Fricourt.

Those spared had marched on to Méricourt l'Abbé which is where the one-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* from Base Depot – Private Butler among that contingent - reported to *duty*.



The newcomers were just in time for the six-week Christmas period to be spent encamped well behind the lines in *Corps Reserve* and near to the city of Amiens.

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

The Newfoundlanders officially returned to *active service* on January 23 of 1917, although they had already been back in the trenches and had suffered their first casualties – and fatality – of the year. The next five weeks differed little from those of the preceding autumn: in and out of the trenches, the occasional dead, wounded and ill, and the occasional winter's day which did not seem to bother the Newfoundlanders. Anything was better than rain and mud.

The only infantry activity involving 1st Battalion during that entire period from mid-October, 1916 – the costly affair at Gueudecourt - until April of 1917, was to be the sharp engagement at Sailly-Saillisel at the end of February and 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(?))

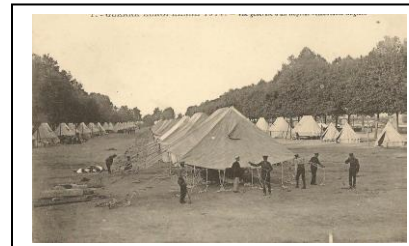
The affair at Sailly-Saillisel also brought *Private Butler's war* to a temporary close. March 3 was a day of enemy bombing (grenade) raids, of heavy bombardments by both sides, and of counter-attacks made by the Newfoundlanders. The casualties amounted to six dead and twenty-six wounded, of whom Private Butler was one.

He was evacuated from the field to the 60th Field Ambulance before being forwarded on the same March 3 to the 55th (2/2 London) Casualty Clearing Station at Grovetown, west of Albert.

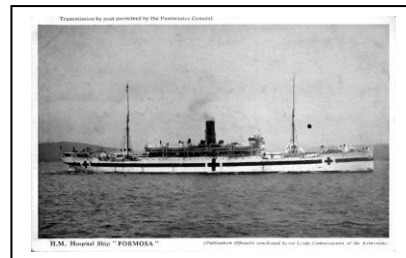
(Right: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and manpower* – from a vintage post-card)



(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)



On an uncertain date not long afterwards, he was sent from there to the 9th General Hospital in Rouen whereupon it was decided to invalid him back to the United Kingdom. On March 6, Private Butler was embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Formosa* (right) for the cross-Channel journey.



Upon arrival in England he was transported to the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth where he was admitted on the 7th for further treatment to the gun-shot wound to his left knee.

(Right: *The main building of what became 3rd London General Hospital during the Great War was opened, on July 1st, 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 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

Private Butler remained for some four weeks at Wandsworth before being discharged on or about April 1 and granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded service personnel released from hospital in the United Kingdom.

On April 10, according to his files, Private Butler reported to duty with 'E' Company of the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion still stationed at Ayr. He was to remain there – and then at Barry* - until that summer when he was ordered back to the Continent.



(Right: *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*)

On August 5, the 28th Re-enforcement Draft, from Barry*, passed through either Folkestone or Southampton en route to Rouen. Again the formalities of final preparation were observed during several days at the Base Depot there before Private Butler and company moved north to meet with 1st Battalion.

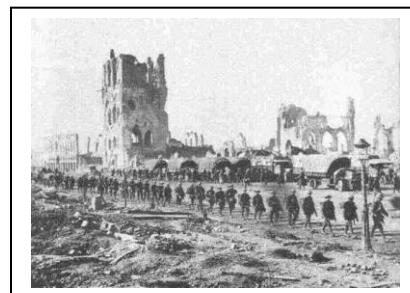
**During the summer months of 1917, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion had been transferred from Ayr to not-so-distant Barry in the region of the city of Dundee. Initially intended to be a permanent move, the protest from several quarters was so great that the Newfoundlanders were back in Ayr by the third week of September.*

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A contingent of twenty-six *other ranks* from Rouen – Private Butler among that number - reported for duty on September 3 to Penton Camp, not far distant from the Belgian community of Poperinghe, one of the major centres for the British Army serving in the Ypres Salient. 1st Battalion had been withdrawn from the line only days before to reorganize and re-enforce – as had many other units - for three weeks before resuming hostilities.

Towards the end of the month the Newfoundlanders were again back in the line.

Just less than three months previously, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had moved north for a second time into Belgium – at the end of June - and once again to the area of *the Ypres Salient*. This had been selected by the High Command to be the theatre of the British summer offensive of 1917. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, borrowing that name from a small village on a ridge that was one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right above: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

1st Battalion remained in Belgium until October 17, a small cog in the machinery of the British Army which floundered its way across the sodden countryside of Flanders. Notably it fought in two major engagements, at the *Steenbeek* on August 16, which occurred before Private Butler's arrival - and at the *Broembeek* on October 9 where he would play his role to the fullest.



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

The son of Samuel Butler, fisherman – to whom he had allotted a daily fifty cents from his pay - and of Jane Butler of Flat Islands, Placentia Bay, he was also likely brother to at least Elias and Thomas*.

Private Butler was reported as having been *killed in action* in heavy enemy shelling on October 9, 1917, while serving with 'C' Company during fighting at the *Broembeek*. At home, it was the Reverend F. H. Philipson of Flat Islands who was requested to bear the news to his family.

Wilson Butler had enlisted at the age of twenty years and ten months.

(Right: *An innocuous-looking stream in the fall of 2010, the Broembeek was otherwise in 1917 when its waters turned the surrounding fields into a quagmire. – photograph from 2010*)



**This could use some confirmation.*

The photograph of Private Wilson Butler is from the Royal Canadian Legion publication *Lest We Forget*.



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



April 9, 1917 – during his ten-day furlough – a card was sent from the *Ayreshire and Galloway Hotel, Ayr* to the *Pay & Record Office, London...*

Dear Sir

Can you spare me two pounds I
am broke till I get Back to the
Depot if you please

Pte W. Butler Reg No
2938 E Coy

Race Course Ayr