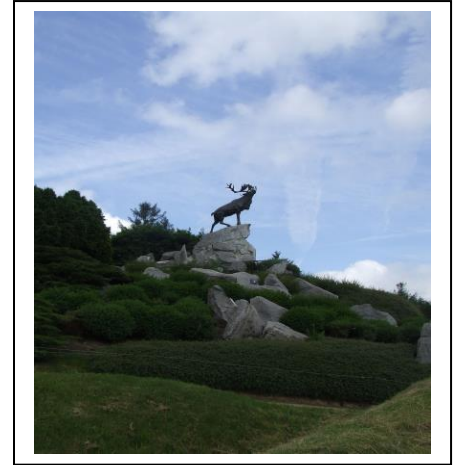




Private John Field (on his papers spelled *Feild*\*) (Regimental Number 2003), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

*\*as in the name of Bishop Feild – the incorrect spelling on the bronze being a common mistake: Feild will be used in this document.*



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a tinsmith working with his uncle *J. T. Philips*, John Feild was a recruit of the Eighth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on November 24, 1915, before then enlisting – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – and also attesting on the following day, November 25.

Private Feild did not sail to the United Kingdom for some eight months. It was as a soldier of the second contingent of 'H' Company that he embarked for overseas service onto His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right above) in St. John's Harbour on March 23-24. The ship did not sail from Newfoundland until the 25<sup>th</sup> and likely crossed the Atlantic in convoy.



This would explain what was apparently a slow voyage\*\*: Private Feild did not disembark in the United Kingdom until April 9, at which time the contingent was transported to the Regimental Depot in Scotland.

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

*\*\*Convoys often altered course and obviously had to travel at the speed of the slowest ship. Sicilian would also have had to sail to a rendezvous point to meet the accompanying vessels – a convoy left Halifax on March 31-April 1 to arrive in Liverpool on April 9.*

*It could also be that she embarked some Canadian troops before crossing the Atlantic as she could carry well over one-thousand passengers with ease.*

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



During the winter of 1915-1916 the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion had been lodged in several venues, at a nearby military camp at Gales, but also as far afield as Paisley Barracks, some sixty-five kilometres distant. However, by the spring of 1916 the difficulty had been overcome by housing the men in a requisitioned school, in a tented community and in the Ayr Racecourse Grandstand, all in the district of Newton-upon-Ayr.



(Right: the new race-course at 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)

It was at the Racecourse at Newton-on-Ayr that Private Feild re-enlisted on June 30, 1916, only nine days before his departure for the Continent.

*\*At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

July 9 saw the 8<sup>th</sup> Re-enforcement Draft – Private Feild among its ranks - pass through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to France. On the day following, the 10<sup>th</sup>, it disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and made its way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, there to undergo final training and organization\* before moving to a rendezvous with the parent unit.



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

There must have been a sense of urgency at the time: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had suffered terribly at a place called Beaumont-Hamel on the morning of July 1, and on July 6 its depleted strength, as reported by the Regimental War Diarist, still numbered no more than one-hundred sixty-eight *other ranks*, less than twenty per cent of the regulation strength of a British battalion.

Private Feild was one of the contingent of one-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* from Rouen to report to *duty* with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on July 21 in the small community of Acheux. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had marched to there from the trenches in front of Mailly-Maillet four days prior, and would continue this march as far as Beauval on the 23<sup>rd</sup> where they were to be billeted for only forty-eight hours before covering – still on foot – a further twenty kilometres to Candas on the 26<sup>th</sup> to board a train.

On July 27-28 of 1916, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion - still under battalion strength at only five-hundred fifty-four strong, even after re-enforcement - moved north and entered into Belgium for the first time. It had been ordered to the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most dangerous pieces of real estate on the entire *Western Front*, there to continue to re-enforce and to re-organize after the ordeal of Beaumont-Hamel.



*The Salient* was relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders' posting there, yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number of them fatalities. On October 8, after ten weeks in Belgium, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved south back to France and back to the area of – and the battle of – *the Somme*.

(Right above: *the entrance to 'A' Company's quarters in the ramparts of Ypres when it was posted there in 1916 – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *the city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – and eight months before the Newfoundlanders were posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)



Only four days after its return to France, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was ordered to pass to the offensive, on this occasion on the outskirts of the ruined village of Gueudecourt perhaps a dozen kilometres or so to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel. Here, on October 12 – and during a heavy enemy bombardment of the previous evening – the Newfoundlanders lost heavily and achieved little for their sacrifice.



(Right: *This is the ground over which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some managed to reach the area where today stand the copse of trees and the Gueudecourt Caribou, on the far right horizon. – photograph from 2007*)

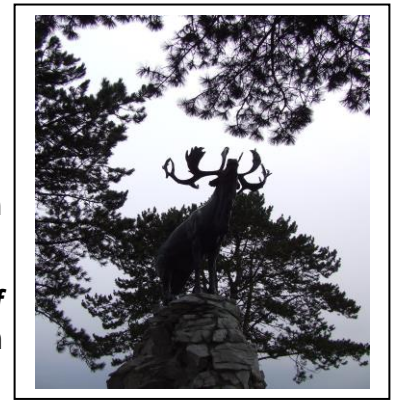
The nephew of James Thomas Philips, tinsmith – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay – and of his wife Fanny, of 76, LeMarchant Road, he was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 12, 1916, while serving with 'C' Company during the fighting at Gueudecourt.

(continued)

John Feild had enlisted at the age of nineteen years and ten months.

(Right: *the Caribou at Gueudecourt stands at the furthest point of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's advance on October 12, 1916 – photograph from 2012*)

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



St. John's Newfoundland  
14 November, 1916

Your Excellency,

Permit me to thank Lady Davidson and yourself for your kind letter of sympathy on the death of my nephew, Private John Feild. The loss is hard to bear, but we have the consolation of knowing that he died doing his duty.

I am

Your Excellency's obedient servant  
James T. Philips

His Excellency Sir WE Davidson, K.C.M.G.  
Government House