

Private Frederick Fifield (Regimental Number 3473) is interred in Oxford Road Cemetery – Grave reference V. F. 23.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Frederick Fifield was a recruit of the Eleventh Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads brigade Armoury in St. John's on February 12, 1917, he also enlisted – *for the duration of the war* and at the private soldier's rate of \$1.10 per diem – and attested on that same day.

Private Fifield was one of the contingent of one-hundred four *other ranks* to leave St. John's on March 17, St. Patrick's Day of 1917, for the journey to Halifax. The means of their departure, however, is not clear: in one source, *The Fighting Newfoundlander*, the claim is that it was on board the Bowring Brothers vessel *Florizel*; the files of the soldiers themselves record that it was... *Embarked S.S. Train to Halifax 17/3/17...* presumably via Port-aux Basques and thence by ferry and train again to Halifax. Other sources have not proved helpful.

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It was from Halifax that the detachment made its trans-Atlantic crossing in the company of Canadian troops on board His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right), sailing from Nova Scotia on March 28. Thus this draft was to reach the United Kingdom two weeks or so before the ill-fated *Windsor Draft** which had left Newfoundland at the end of January, some ten weeks earlier.



**This was the name given to the draft of about three-hundred twenty all ranks which had left St. John's on January 31, 1917, en route to Halifax from where they were to sail to the United Kingdom. This contingent would eventually make that voyage, but about thirteen weeks later than envisaged. They were quarantined at Windsor as the result of a measles and mumps epidemic that claimed two of their number – and maybe a later third. In the meantime, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion at Ayr was running low on man-power.*

Missanabie having docked in Liverpool on April 6, the Newfoundland contingent entrained for the west coast of Scotland. By this time, the Regimental Depot at Ayr had already been in existence to serve as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for two years.

It was from Ayr – since November of 1915 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from Newfoundland were to be despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and later to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.

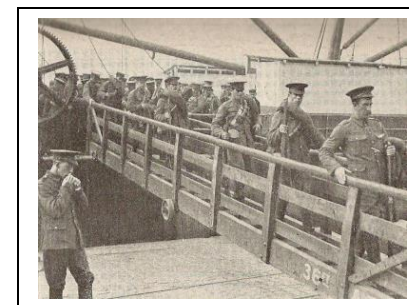


By the time that the *Windsor Draft* arrived at the Regimental Depot, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion was becoming critically short of personnel.

(Right above: 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)

Private Fifield had not been at Ayr for many days when he was admitted into the Heathfield Hospital there for treatment for diphtheria. He remained there for a month, from April 19 until May 18.

On June 11, the 25th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr – Private Fifield among its ranks - passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton on its way to the Continent. The detachment disembarked in Rouen on the following day, the 12th, and made its way to the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot there for a few days of final training and organization* before proceeding on its way to a rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



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(Previous page: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route 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.*

While others from his draft were ordered to duty with the parent unit by then preparing for the upcoming British summer offensive, Private Fifield, was to stay in Rouen. There he was admitted into the 11th Stationary Hospital on July 6. Two weeks afterwards, on July 20, he was placed on board His Majesty's Australian Hospital Ship *Western Australia* (right) for the cross-Channel passage back to the United Kingdom.



Having arrived in England, Private Fifield was transported to the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. Admitted there on July 22, he was diagnosed as suffering from neuritis, a disease of the peripheral nerves, most likely as a consequence of his diphtheria. Apparently it was a lengthy treatment and convalescence as he was not discharged from care until the latter part of October, on the 22nd, when he was granted the customary ten-day furlough accorded military personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom.

(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*)

Following his furlough, Private Fifield was posted to the Northern Command Depot near the eastern England town of Ripon where he reported for duty on November 1 – a second source cites November 7. Some two months later again, on January 6 of the New Year, 1918, he reported to the Regimental Depot at Ayr, in time to assist in 2nd (Reserve) Battalion's departure from Scotland.

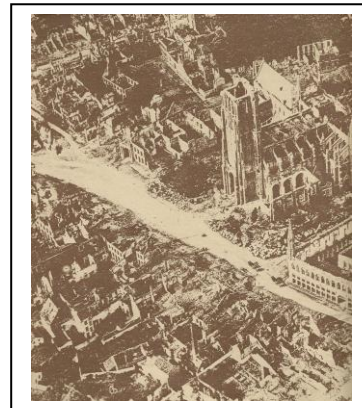
2nd (Reserve) Battalion was about to move quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the historic cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was there that Private Fifield would have been at the beginning of February when he received orders to re-join the British Expeditionary Force.



(Preceding page: *a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from The War Illustrated*)

On February 9, the 37th Re-enforcement Draft, from Hazely Down, took ship to cross the English Channel on its way to the Continent. After disembarking on the 11th, and after the usual final days of training and organizing at the Base Depot in Rouen, the new-comers were sent to rendezvous with 1st Battalion. On February 20, Private Fifield was one of a contingent of forty-nine *other ranks* to report *to duty* at Poperinghe, Belgium.

At the close of the *Battle of Cambrai* at the beginning of December of 1917, 1st Battalion – once again badly under-strength due to the heavy casualties incurred – had been withdrawn from the area of the front lines to re-enforce and to re-organize. The following weeks had been spent at first to the south-west of the city of Arras, at Humbercourt and then at some distance to the north-west, at Fressin.



The weather obliged and even allowed the Newfoundlanders some snow, a bit too much at times apparently.

At the beginning of January of 1918, and after that snowy Christmas period spent to the west of Arras and withdrawn from the front, the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion had been ordered into Belgium, to the *Ypres Salient*, for a third time.

There, like the other British and Empire troops in the area, they were to spend much of their time building and strengthening defences. It was during a period while 1st Battalion was out of the lines that Private Fifield returned to *active service*.

(Right above: *an aerial view of Ypres, taken towards the end of 1916 – from Illustration*)

Meanwhile, while the Allies built their defences, by the beginning of 1918 the Germans were preparing for a final effort to win the War: the Allies were exhausted and lacking man-power after their exertions of 1917 - the British had fought three campaigns and some units of the French Army had mutinied - and the Germans had available the extra divisions that their victory over the Russians in the East now allowed them.



It was expected that the Germans would launch a spring offensive. While they were waiting, the Newfoundlanders continued to dig.

(Above right: *countryside in-between Zonnebeke and Passchendaele (today Passendale) in the vicinity of where the Newfoundlanders were stationed in March and early April of 1918 – photograph from 2011*)

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From March 7 to 14, 1st Battalion had been in the front line. Then, after a twelve-day respite, the Newfoundlanders were sent forward again, on March 26, for another week-long posting in the trenches. As usual, infantry action was limited, but the shelling was ever-present. For the period of March 27 to 31, the Regimental War Diary merely records: *Total Casualties to-date:- Killed in Action = 5 Other Ranks. Missing b. Killed = 2 do. Wounded = 1 Officer, 11 Other Ranks.*



Private Fifield, while serving with 'B' Company, was among that number.

(Right above: *Oxford Road Cemetery – wherein Private Fifield lies - is adjacent to the community of Wieltje, where 1st Battalion de-trained en route to the front lines towards the end of March, 1918. The spires of Ypres may be perceived on the western horizon. – photograph from 2013*)

The son of Charles Fifield, fisherman, and Johanna Fifield (née *Whiffen*) – to whom he had allotted a daily seventy cents from his pay - of Church Road, Bonavista, he was also brother to at least William-Thomas, to Charles and to Priscilla.

Private Fifield was reported as having been *killed in action* whilst serving with 'B' Company in the front line just to the north-east of the Belgian city of Ypres.



Frederick Fifield had enlisted at the age of eighteen years.

(Right above: *The sacrifice of Private Fifield is honoured on the town War Memorial in Bonavista. – photograph from 2012*)

(Above left: *Private Frederick Fifield is also commemorated on a family monument in the Anglican Churchyard Cemetery in Bonavista. – photograph from 2012*)

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

