



Private Gerald Ford (Regimental Number 1559), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a fisherman earning \$400.00 per annum, Gerald Ford was a recruit of the Fifth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on May 21, 1915. One source has him documented as already having enlisted on the day before while a second has his enlistment on the 25th. His attestation is cited as occurring on either May 20 or May 22.



Private Ford embarked on board His Majesty's Transport *Calgarian* (above – original photograph from the *Provincial Archives*) on June 20 in St. John's Harbour and sailed (*almost**) directly to the United Kingdom. He was one of the two-hundred forty-two men of 'F' Company and eighty-five naval reservists to take passage on that day.

**Apparently the ship took nineteen days to make what was usually the journey of about a week. Not only was Calgarian escorting three submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders apparently even having the time to cross the straits to spend a few hours in North Africa. She reached Liverpool on July 9.*



(Right above: *the Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background.* – from a vintage postcard)

On the day after its arrival in the United Kingdom, 'F' Company marched from the railway station and reported *to duty* at Stobs Camp near the Scottish town of Hawick on the evening of July 10. It was an important moment: the Newfoundland Regiment, as of that day counting fifteen hundred personnel, was now at fighting strength and could be posted on *active service*.

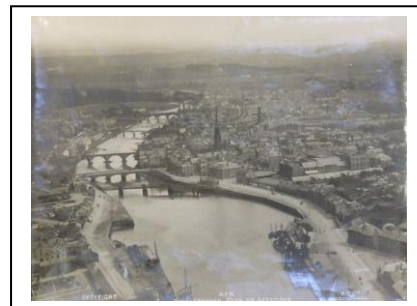


(Right above: *The men of the Regiment await their new Lee-Enfield rifles.* – original photograph from the *Provincial Archives*)

From Stobs, some three weeks after the arrival of 'F' Company, in early August, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D', the senior Companies, having now become 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.

'E' and 'F' Companies – the latter having arrived at Stobs Camp on July 10 - were to be posted to the new Regimental Depot and were to form the nucleus of the newly-formed 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. The Depot was to become home to Private Ford for the following seven months.

The Regimental Depot was being established during that summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland to serve as a base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. It was from there – as of November of 1915 up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were to be sent 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-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*)

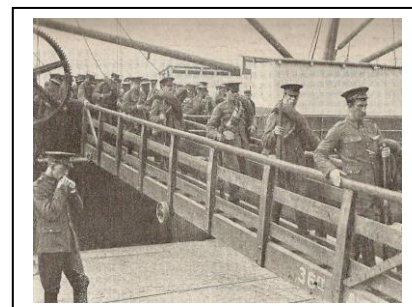
It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that, on February 10, and some six weeks before his eventual departure on *active service*, Private Ford re-enlisted *for the duration of the War**

**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.*



On March 28, Private Ford, as a soldier of the 3rd Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton and boarded His Majesty's Transport *Archangel* (right adjacent) on his way to join 1st Battalion on the Continent.

Disembarking two days later, on the 30th, in Rouen, capital city of Normandy and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot, the contingent made its way to the Depot for several days of final training and organization* before leaving to seek out the parent unit.



(Right: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

(continued)

***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.**

On April 15, a detachment from Rouen of two-hundred eleven *other ranks* – accompanied by two officers – reported to *duty* with 1st Battalion already billeted in the village of Englebelmer some three kilometres behind the lines of the *Western Front*. Private Ford is documented as being among that number, a contingent which included not only personnel from Ayr, but also others from Gallipoli and Egypt whose departure from there had been delayed.

Only two days prior, on April 13, 1st Battalion had *itself* marched into the village of Englebelmer – thus completing a month-long transfer from Egypt – where the Newfoundlanders were billeted, welcomed those re-enforcements from Rouen on the 15th and, on the evening of that same day, were ordered forward – along with the new-comers - to work in the communication trenches not so very far away.

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for the meandering river that flowed – and today still flows - innocuously through the southern part of the region to which it lends its name, *the Somme*.

(Right: *part of the re-constructed trench system to be found in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel – photograph from 2007(?)*)



The son of Thomas G. Ford, fisherman, and Sarah Ford* – to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Middle Amherst Cove, Bonavista Bay, he was reported as *missing in action* at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, during the fighting on the first day of *the Somme*. Some six months later, on December 31, he was officially *presumed dead*.



Gerald Ford had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-one years - the plaque cites twenty-five years of age. (Died at twenty-two according to Newfoundland Vital Statistics despite the twenty-five years cited on the plaque below.)

(Right above: *Beaumont-Hamel - looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences - The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph taken in 2009*)



(Right above: *a grim, grainy image purporting to be Newfoundland dead awaiting burial after Beaumont-Hamel – from ...*)

****If he was the son of Thomas Gaylor Ford and Sarah Ford (née Bartlett), then he was also brother to at least Beatrice-Maud, to Francis-James and to Percy-Leopold-Duncan.***

(Right: A plaque to be found in the church at Amherst Cove honours the sacrifice of Private Ford. – photograph from 2013)

Private Gerald Ford was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

