Lance Corporal Arthur Wilfred Gillam (Regimental Number 454), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

Employed prior to his military service by the Reid Newfoundland Company as a section foreman on the railway, and earning a monthly $40.00, Arthur Wilfred Gillam enlisted – engaged at the private soldier’s rate of $1.10 per diem - on September 8, 1914, a recruit of the First Draft.

Having then attested some three weeks later, on October 1, Private Gillam embarked for the United Kingdom two days later again, on October 3, onto the Bowring Brothers’ vessel Florizel (right – courtesy of Admiralty House Museum). The ship set sail on the following day, the 4th, in order to join the convoy carrying the 1st Canadian Division overseas. The Newfoundlanders arrived in the south-coast English port of Devonport on October 14 and then sat on board ship until the 20th.

Having disembarked in the United Kingdom, Private Gillam trained with the Battalion: firstly in southern England on the Salisbury Plain; then in Scotland at Fort George (right); at Edinburgh Castle; and for three months at Stobs Camp near the Scottish town of Hawick.

(Far right above: The Newfoundland Regiment parades at Stobs Camp and is presented with its Colours on June 10, 1915. – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo)

At the beginning of August, Private Gillam was transferred with the four senior Companies, ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’, to southern England, to Aldershot, for some two weeks of final training and a royal inspection in preparation for active service at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea at Gallipoli.

‘E’ and ‘F’ Companies, the last arrivals, were instead sent to the new Regimental Depot. There they were to form the nucleus of the newly-formed 2nd (Reserve) Battalion.

(continued)
It was while at Aldershot that, on August 13, Private Gillam was prevailed upon to re-enlist, on this occasion 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 August 20, 1915, Private Gillam took ship on board the requisitioned passenger liner Megantic (right above) for passage to the Middle East and to the fighting in Gallipoli where, a month later – of which two weeks had been spent billeted at the British barracks at Abbassia, near the Egyptian capital, Cairo - on September 20, 1st Battalion landed on the beach at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

(Right above: Newfoundland troops on board a troop-ship anchored at Mudros, either Megantic on August 29, Ausonia on September 18, or Prince Abbas on September 19 – Whichever the case, they were yet to land on Gallipoli. – from Provincial Archives)

(Right above: ‘Kangaroo Beach’, where the men of 1st Battalion landed on the night of September 19-20, 1915, is in the distance at the far end of Suvla Bay. The remains of a landing-craft are still clearly visible in the foreground on ‘A’ Beach. – photograph from 2011)

(Right: a century later, the area, little changed from those far-off days, of the Newfoundland positions at Suvla, and where Private Gillam served during the fall of 1915 – photograph from 2011)

On the night of December 19-20, the British abandoned Suvla Bay, the Newfoundlanders, the only non-British unit to serve there, forming a part of the rear-guard for the occasion. Two days later, 1st Battalion was transferred to Cape Helles on the western tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula. Less than three weeks later again – on the night of January 8-9 – the British were to abandon Cape Helles as well, and the entire Gallipoli adventure.

(Right above: Cape Helles as seen from the Turkish positions on the misnamed Achi Baba, positions which were never breached. The Newfoundland positions were to the right-hand side of the picture. – photograph from 2011)
When the British evacuated the entire Gallipoli Peninsula in January of 1916, 1st Battalion was sent to Alexandria, arriving there on the 15th of that month. From there the Newfoundlanders were transferred, almost immediately, south to Suez where they were to await further orders. To that point it seems that the theatre of the future posting of 29th Division was still uncertain. It was during this period spent at Suez that Private Gillam was promoted, to the rank of lance corporal, on February 2.

On March 14, the officers and men of 1st Battalion embarked through Port Tewfiq at the southern end of the Suez Canal onto His Majesty’s Transport Alaunia (right above) for the voyage to the French Mediterranean port of Marseilles, en route to the Western Front.

Some three days after the unit’s disembarkation on March 22, the Battalion’s train arrived at the small provincial town of Pont-Rémy.

It had been a cold, miserable journey, the blankets provided for them travelling unused in a separate wagon. De-training at the station at two in the morning the Newfoundlanders still had a long march ahead of them before they would reach their billets at Buigny l’Abbé.

(continued)
It is doubtful that any of those tired soldiers paid much attention to the slow-moving stream flowing under the bridge that they passed on their way from the station. Some three months later the Somme would be a part of their history.

On April 13, 1st Battalion entered into the village of Englebelmer – perhaps some fifty kilometres in all distant from Pont-Rémy – where the Newfoundlanders were billeted, welcomed reinforcements on the 15th and, on the evening of that same day, were introduced into the British lines of the Western Front, there to be immediately set to work to improve the communication trenches.

The Newfoundlanders were also soon to be preparing for the British campaign of that summer, to be fought on the ground named for that same meandering river, the Somme.

The son of Stephen Charles Gillam, fisherman and sportsman’s guide - to whom he had allotted a daily seventy cents from his pay - and Lucy L. Gillam of Robinson’s Head in the District of St. George, he was the oldest brother of John Samuel who enrolled into the Naval Reserve, No. 2230x*, in 1916; of Margaret; John Samuel; Robert Deaker; Rebecca Gertrude; Elizabeth (Lizzie) A.; and of Charles (Karl) C.

Lance Corporal Gillam was reported as missing in action on July 1, 1916, at Beaumont-Hamel, while serving with ‘B’ Company during the fighting of the first day of the Somme. Some six months later, on December 31, he was officially presumed dead.

Arthur Wilfred Gillam had enlisted at the age of twenty years: date of birth, July 15, 1896.

*A cousin, Kenneth Gillam, also served in the Navy, No. 613x.
Department of Militia in regards to the star of 1914-1914 i must say the i received it i would have notified you before but i Did Not have three cents to poast it altho i suppose you people think i was Made rich of My son who i let go to the War. i am not quite As rich As those who stayed home and got their three to five Dollars a Day and We seventy cent...

(excerpt of a letter from Charles Gillam to the Department of Militia)

Lance Corporal Arthur Wilfred Gillam was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).