

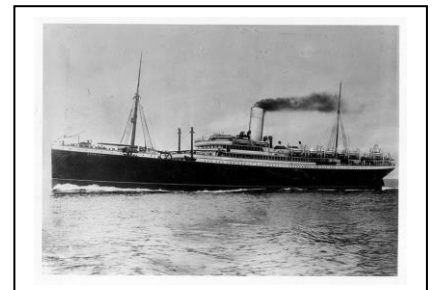


Private Philip Gillett (Regimental Number 1697) is interred in Earlsfield (Wandsworth) Cemetery – Grave reference Nfld. 767.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, Phillip Gillett was a recruit of the Sixth Draft. Having enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on July 14, 1915, he then presented himself for medical examination two days later, on the 16th. Three days later again he attested, on July 19.

****A second source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.***

Private Gillett and the other personnel of 'G' Company – apparently in the company of several naval reservists and also some German prisoners (these latter presumably to remain in Canada) - left St. John's by train on October 27, to cross the island to Port aux Basques. The contingent then traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence by ferry, and proceeded by train from North Sydney to Quebec City.



At Québec the Newfoundlanders boarded His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* (above) for the trans-Atlantic passage to the English south-coast naval establishment of Devonport where they arrived on November 9.

By the morning of the 10th the new arrivals had travelled by train and had gone north to Scotland. There they had been billeted in huts in a military camp at Gailles, not far removed from the new Regimental Depot where accommodation for the contingent was as yet not available.

That new Regimental Depot had been established during the 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 and up until January of 1918 – that the new-comers arriving from home were sent in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then subsequently to the Western Front, to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.

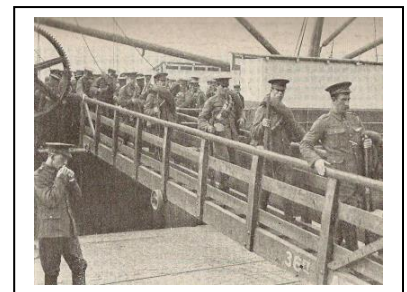


(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

It was during this posting to the Regimental Depot that on May 24, a month before his departure to France on *active service*, Private Gillett was prevailed upon to re-enlist *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 June 25, the 7th Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr, Private Gillett among its ranks, passed through the English south-coast port of Southampton en route to the Continent. On the morrow, the 26th, the detachment disembarked in Rouen, capital city of Normandy, and site of the large British Expeditionary Force Base Depot which had been established there. There the draft spent time in final training organization before proceeding on to its rendezvous with 1st Battalion.



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

**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.*

This meeting was effected on July 11 (recorded elsewhere as the 12th) while the parent unit was just behind the line, being quartered in huts in the remnants of the village of Mailly-Maillet.



It was here that Private Gillett and another one-hundred twenty-six *other ranks* of a re-enforcement contingent from Rouen reported *to duty*. Even with this additional manpower, the Regimental War Diary records that on the 14th of July, 1st Battalion still numbered only *11 officers and 260 rifles* after the disaster of Beaumont-Hamel, just over a quarter of regulation battalion strength.

(Previous page: *The re-constructed village of Mailly-Maillet – the French Monument aux Morts in the foreground - is twinned with the community of Torbay, St. John’s East. – photograph from 2009*)

On July 27-28 of 1916, 1st 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. The Salient was relatively quiet during the time of the Newfoundlanders’ posting there, yet they nonetheless incurred casualties, a number of them fatal.



On October 8, after ten weeks in Belgium, 1st Battalion moved south back to France and back to the area - and 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*)



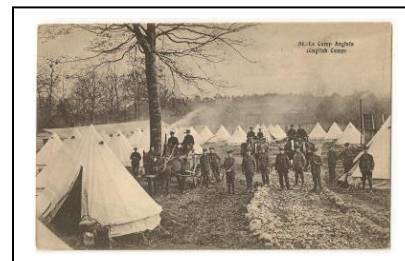
(Right: *the city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – and eight months before the Newfoundlanders were posted there for the first time – from a vintage post-card*)

Four days after its return to France, on October 12, 1st Battalion went again to the offensive at a place called Gueudecourt, some dozen or so kilometres to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel. It proved to be another costly affair – two hundred and thirty-nine casualties all told - for little gain.



(Right: *This is the ground over which 1st 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*)

After Gueudecourt, 1st Battalion continued its watch in and out of the trenches of *the Somme* – not without casualties – during the late fall and early winter, a period broken only by the several weeks spent in *Corps Reserve* during the Christmas period, encamped well behind the lines and close to the city of Amiens.



(Previous page: a typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card)

After that welcome six-week Christmas respite spent in *Corps Reserve*, the Newfoundlanders had *officially* returned to *active service* on January 23, 1917, although they had been back in the trenches already by that date and had incurred their first casualties of 1917.

The only infantry activity directly involving 1st Battalion during the entire period from the action at Gueudecourt in mid-October of 1916, until Monchy-le-Preux in 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(?))

After Sailly-Saillisel the month of March was a quiet time for the Newfoundlanders; having departed from the trenches, they now spent their time near the communities of Meaulté and Camps-en-Amienois re-enforcing, re-organizing, and training for upcoming events. They even had the pleasure of a visit from the Regimental Band, and also one from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Edward Morris (right), the latter on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.



On March 29, 1st Battalion began to make its way – on foot – from Camps-en-Amienois to the north-east, towards the venerable medieval city of Arras and eventually beyond, their march to finish amid the rubble of a village called Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right: *the remnants of the Grande Place of the city of Arras in early 1916* – from *Illustration*)

On April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties it was the most expensive operation of the War for the British, its only positive episode being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday. The French offensive was a disaster.



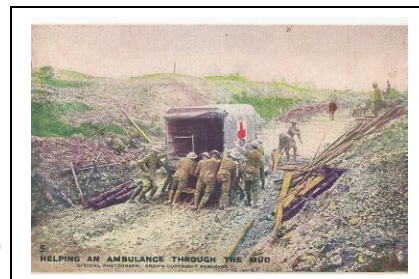
(Right above: *the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge* – photograph from 2010)

1st Battalion was to play its part in the *Battle of Arras*, a role that would begin at a place called Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 and which would finish ten days later, on April 23, perhaps a kilometre distant, at *Les Fosses Farm*. After Beaumont-Hamel, Monchy-le-Preux was to prove the most costly day of the Newfoundlanders' war, four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 alone.



(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the western – in 1917, the British – side of the community. The Newfoundlanders advanced, out of the ruins of the place, to the east, away from the camera. – photograph from 2013*)

It was at Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 that Private Gillett was wounded during the fighting of the day while serving with 'A' Company. Taken to the 8th Casualty Clearing Station at Agnez-les-Duisans, he was suffering from injuries inflicted by gunfire to the left thigh and to the head, shards having penetrated behind his left ear.



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

On the 17th he was transferred to the 6th British Red Cross Hospital at Étapes before being conveyed on a hospital ship across the English Channel and back to the United Kingdom on April 19, two days later. On that same day Private Gillett was admitted into the 3rd London General Hospital in the Borough of Wandsworth. On June 4, the medical staff there reported him as *seriously ill*.

The son of William Thomas Gillett, school teacher, and Helen Melina Gillett* (née *Alcock*) of Leading Tickle – both almost certainly deceased by the time of their son's death - Private Gillett was native to Leading Tickle, Notre Dame Bay. He was also brother to Walter Albert, a railway worker - to whom he had allotted a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay – and to Herbert, William Thomas, Emma, George Thomas, and Louis*. Private Gillett was nephew to an Uncle Philip Gillett, a fisherman of Exploits, to whom he had willed his all, possibly having lived with him and his wife Maria Elizabeth (née *Oxford*) – and their four daughters – after the passing of his parent(s).

Private Gillett was reported as having *died of wounds* – penetrated behind the left ear and also suffering from a fractured skull and a *cerebellar abscess* - in the 3rd London General Hospital in Wandsworth on June 20, 1917. At home it was the Reverend J.H. Bull of Exploits who was requested to bear the news to his family.



Philip Gillett had enlisted at the age of twenty years and nine months (birth-date November 13, 1895).

(Previous page: *The principal building of what became the 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(?)*)

****Apart from Private Gillett and his brother Walter Gillett, all the siblings died at a very young age. Their father died in 1899 and their mother, having re-married in 1901, died in 1908: the marriages, births and deaths all took place in Leading Tickle.***

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

