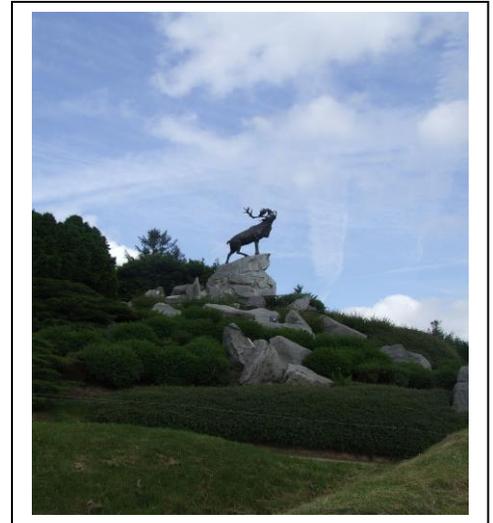




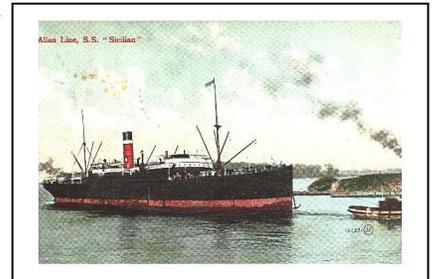
Private Alexander Williams (Regimental Number 2051), having no known last resting-place, is commemorated beneath the Caribou in Beaumont-Hamel Memorial Park.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a sailor, Alex Williams was a recruit of the Eighth Draft. He presented himself for medical examination and also enlisted at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's – engaged at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10 – on the same day, December 28, 1915. He then attested, three days following, on December 31.



*\*Another source has him attesting on the day of his enlistment.*

It was to be almost a further three months before Private Williams was to embark for overseas service to the United Kingdom. It was as a soldier of the second contingent of 'H' Company that he took ship for overseas service on board His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian*\* (right) 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<sup>\*\*</sup>: Private Williams 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.



(Preceding page: *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.

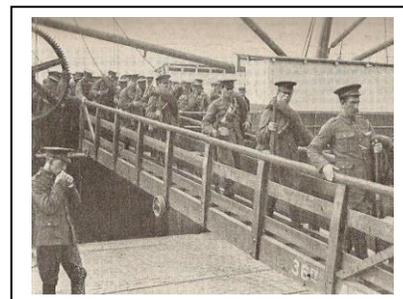


(Right above: *the new race-course at Ayr - opened in 1907 – where the men of the Regiment were sometimes billeted and where they replaced some of the turf with a vegetable garden; part of the present grandstand is original – photo from 2012*)

It was at *the Racecourse* at Newton-on-Ayr that Private Williams 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 Williams 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, Étaples, 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.

(continued)

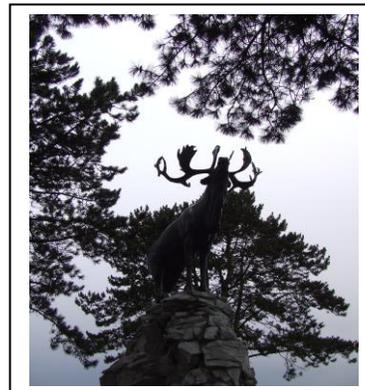


Only four days after its return to France on October 8, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was ordered to pass to the offensive, on this occasion on the outskirts of the ruined village of Gueudecourt perhaps a dozen kilometres or so to the south-east of Beaumont-Hamel. Here, on October 12 – and during a heavy enemy bombardment of the previous evening – the Newfoundlanders lost heavily – two-hundred thirty-nine casualties over the two days - and achieved little for their sacrifice.



(Right above: *This is the ground over which 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced and then mostly conceded at Gueudecourt on October 12. Some few 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 son of Martin Williams (former fisherman, deceased October, 1910) and Lucinda (*Lucy*) Margaret Williams (née *Goodyear*, she later *Mrs. Charles Wimbleton*) – to whom he had allocated a daily allowance of sixty cents from his pay - of Springdale, Hall's Bay, in the District of Twillingate, he was also brother to at least Hugh, to Janet and to Finley.



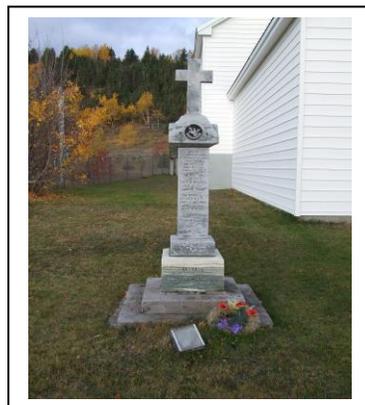
Private Williams was at first recorded as *wounded and missing in action* on that October 12, 1916, in the fighting at Gueudecourt. However, for a reason unspecified in the records, his file was amended as of March 10, 1917, so as to *read killed in action 12/10/116*.

Alex Williams had enlisted at the age of twenty-one years and eight months: date of birth, April 29, 1894.

His brother, Private Hugh Williams, Regimental Number 3581, was to die fourteen months later, in December of 1917, at Marcoing-Masnières.

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

(Right: *The War Memorial in the community of Springdale honours the sacrifice of Privates Alexander and Hugh Williams. – photograph from 2014*)



(continued)

**Private Alexander Williams was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

