



Joseph Leo Phillips

2nd Lieutenant, Royal Flying Corps.

He died on 20th July 1917, following a flying accident near Gawdy Hall Estate, Redenhall, Harleston, Norfolk, aged 21.

He is buried at Norwich Cemetery.

1917		1917	
Cadet. Murphy, Thomas Xavier.	R. F. C.	2 Lt. Pinnock, Carey.	R. F. C.
Capt. Napier, Frank C.	1 st R. Lanc. R.	P. F. O. Pitt, Weston Ward.	R. N. A. S.
Rfa. Naysmith, Archibald.	11 th K. R. R. C.	Sgt. Platt, John.	8 th Lanc. R.
2 Lt. Needs, Charles Richard.	R. F. C.	Spr. Plunkett, James.	R. E.
Lieut. Neily, Frederick Ernest.	R. F. C.	Pte. Pollard, Henry James.	2 nd L. N. Lan. R.
Om. Newton, Reuben.	R. F. C.	S. Lt. Poole, Eric Skerrington.	W. York. R.
Cadet. Neulan, Angelo.	R. F. C.	F. S. Lt. Pothin, James Edward.	R. N. A. S.
Pte. Nylon, Samuel.	13 th Midd. R.	S. A. M. Powers, James Ernest.	R. F. C.
2 Lt. Noble, Harold Taylor.	R. F. C.	2 Lt. Pratt, Arthur Murray.	R. F. A.
2 Lt. Nolan, Howard Stanley.	R. F. C.	L. Col. Prestwich, Thomas.	29 th March. R.
2 Lt. Norris, Miller, Claud.	R. A. S. C.	2 Lt. Primeau, Cecil Willibrod.	R. F. C.
Sgt. Notley, John Leonard.	R. M. A.	Cadet. Pritchard, Stafford Macklin.	R. F. C.
Ch. Sgt. O'Callaghan, John.	1 st Oxf. and Bucks. L. I.	2 Lt. Pritchard, Thomas Bradley.	M. C. R. F. C.
2 Lt. O'Connor, Roderic S.	1 st S. Staff. R.	Lieut. Pym, Claude John.	2 nd I. Gde.
F. S. Lt. O'Her, William Smith.	R. N. A. S.	Pte. Rangley, John Joseph.	16 th Glouce. R.
Lieut. O'Her, Roscoe Henri.	R. F. C.	Om. Rae, Alexander.	R. A. I. F.
Pte. O'Neill, Alexander.	1 st Essex. R.	2 Lt. Rambold, Lawrence John.	R. F. C.
F. S. Lt. Orchard, Wallace Ernest.	R. N. A. S.	2 Lt. Raney, Paul Hartley.	R. F. C.
Pte. Ormond, Martin Duff.	R. N. A. S.	2 Lt. Raymer, Charles Oliver.	R. F. C.
2 Lt. Osborn, Edward Stanley.	R. F. C.	2 Lt. Reddy, Edward Charles.	R. F. C.
2 Lt. Osborne, John.	17 th H. L. I.	Gnr. Reeves, Enoch George.	R. F. A.
2 Lt. Osler, Edward Revere.	R. F. A.	Lt. Col. Reid, Alexander Daniel.	D. S. O.
2 Lt. Oxley, Malcolm Guy Macdonald.	R. F. C.	Lt. Reid, Alexander Daniel.	1 st R. Ir. Rif.
Cadet. Page, Clairmont A.	R. F. C.	F. S. Lt. Reid, Ellis Vair; D. S. C.	R. N. A. S.
F. Lt. Page, John Albert.	R. N. A. S.	2 Lt. Reid, Percy Carquill.	16 th Lond. R.
2 Lt. Palmer, Lewis Arthur.	R. F. C.	Pte. Reith, David.	5 th Gard. B.
Pte. Parent, Joseph.	16 th H. L. I.	Pte. Rhodes, Grant.	5 th H. L. I.
F. S. Lt. Parker, Leslie Hunter.	R. N. A. S.	2 Lt. Rhude, Foster Weston.	R. F. C.
Pte. Paterson, Andrew.	3 rd R. Ir. Fus.	Spr. Richards, Ernest Frank George.	R. E.
Spr. Paterson, Thomas.	R. E.	Dvr. Richards, William Henry.	R. F. A.
Pte. Paton, David.	7 th R. Scots.	Sgt. Richardson, Alfred.	1 st Lond. R.
2 Lt. Paton, Henry Forsyth.	R. F. C.	2 Lt. Richardson, Henry.	R. G. A.
2 Lt. Payne, Cecil M. Keryie.	R. F. C.	F. S. Lt. Richardson, Samuel Spaulding.	R. N. A. S.
Capt. Payne, Frederick Norman.	Gen. List.	Cpl. Riches, Robert John.	R. F. A.
2 Lt. Peacock, Hubert William.	R. F. C.	Capt. Rickards, Arthur Iraberne.	R. F. C.
Pte. Pearce, Milton Oliver.	R. A. S. C.	Pte. Rickells, John Albert.	5 th Wilt. R.
2 Lt. Pearce, Walter Josiah; M. C. R. H. A.	R. F. C.	Pte. Riddell, John.	2 nd Dns.
Cadet. Pearson, Henry James.	R. F. C.	Capt. Riddell, Sydney; M. C.	9 th York. and Lanc. R.
F. Lt. Peberdy, Warner H.	R. N. A. S.	2 Lt. Rider, Clifford Ernest.	R. F. C.
2 Lt. Pell, Harry Saxon.	R. F. C.	2 Lt. Riggs, Roy Robertson.	R. F. C.
Capt. Pemberton, Frederick Despard.	R. F. C. (R. F. A.)	2 Lt. Risteen, Clifford Fraser.	R. F. C.
2 Lt. Penhale, Thomas William.	13 th K. R. R. C.	Capt. Ritson, Claude Wilson.	R. N. A. S.
S. A. M. Pepper, Reuben John.	R. F. C.	F. S. Lt. Roach, Edmund Daniel.	R. N. A. S.
Lieut. Percival, Anthony.	M. C. C.	Pte. Roache, John.	1 st R. Dub. Fus.
Lieut. Perney, Eriand Dauria.	R. F. C.	Capt. Robertson, Charles Eric.	R. F. C.
2 Lt. Perry, Cecil Victor; M. C. R. F. A.	R. F. C.	Lieut. Robertson, Robert Ward Shepherd.	R. F. C.
Pte. Perry, George.	R. A. M. C.	2 Lt. Robertson, William Dickson.	8 th R. Scots. (T. F.)
Ir. Enq. Pestell, Leslie Chifford.	M. M. R.	Pte. Robson, George.	2 nd Durh. L. I.
Sgt. Peters, Albert.	11 th R. Lanc. R.	Cadet. Roebuck, Lee James.	R. F. C.
2 Lt. Peters, Frank Wesley; M. C.	1 st Essex. R.	Pte. Rogers, John William.	16 th R. W. Fus.
2 Lt. Phalen, Ralph Uriel.	R. F. C.	2 Lt. Rook, Frederick William.	R. F. C.
Pte. Phillips, John Charles.	2 nd Yorks. L. I.	Lieut. Roper, Geoffrey Stapleton Rowle.	R. F. C.
2 Lt. Phillips, Joseph Leo.	R. F. C.	2 Lt. Ross, James Graham.	7 th Sea. H.
2 Lt. Phillips, Ralph Aberdeen.	R. F. C.	2 Lt. Roug, Frank.	R. F. C.
2 Lt. Pilling, Walter.	R. F. C.		

FLYING TRAGEDY IN SOUTH NORFOLK.

On Friday a young officer of the Royal Flying Corps fell with his machine in a Norfolk village and received such injuries that he died the same day in the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. An inquest was held there on Monday by the Deputy Coroner (Mr. W. N. Ladell). The victim was identified as Lieut. Joseph Leo Phillips, a Canadian, aged 21.—Sec.-Lieut. E. H. Russell said the deceased, who was his pupil, had been flying since the beginning of the month, and previously had had a course. He had done 3 hours 20 minutes' dual control, and on the morning of the 20th he had made a perfect solo flight and landing. At about twenty minutes to five the same morning he started out for a solo flight, and apparently lost sight of the aerodrome, which he ought not to have gone away from. As he did not return witness went out in search of him at 6 a.m., again at 7 a.m., and finally at 9.30 a.m. At 11 a.m. a telephone message was received that Lieut. Phillips had landed near a neighbouring town, and was badly injured. Witness flew to the place indicated, and examined the wreckage, the pilot having already been removed to the Hospital. The machine appeared to have turned completely over twice. From the position of the throttle and switch it was clear that the landing had been made with nearly full engine, an error aggravated by the fact of the landing being made amid standing corn, which was always dangerous unless you could come down absolutely flat on it. Witness had himself flown the machine ten times before this fatal flight was started, and found the engine and controls working normally.—John Smith, labourer, said that at about 5.30 a.m., hearing aircraft about, he went outside his cottage, and saw an aeroplane passing over. It turned towards a wheat field two or three hundred yards away; and then, when he had lost sight of it because of some trees, he heard a crash. He at once went to the spot, and found the airman lying straight on his back. He was unconscious, and kept moaning. A neighbour went for the police, while witness remained with the airman and did what he could. After Superintendent Bentham and Dr. Maidment had arrived Phillips was taken away on an ambulance.—Dr. Crabtree said the injured airman arrived at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital suffering from the effects of severe concussion. He died the same day without having regained consciousness.—A verdict of "Death caused accidentally by fall from an aeroplane" was returned.

Joseph Leo Phillips was born on April 17, 1896, in Hamilton, Ontario - the only son of Joseph and Helen Phillips. He worked as a rodman for the Welland Canal Company when he enlisted. He was placed with the Royal Flying Corps rather than the Naval Air Service for which he had applied, because it had stopped recruiting.

At about 4.50 am on July 20th 1917 2nd Lt Phillips took off from Snarehill Aerodrome near Thetford in an obsolescent Maurice Farman Shorthorn biplane on his second solo flight, buzzing with excitement and full of confidence, he climbed away from the airfield and flew due east. It seems that shortly after take-off 2nd Lt Phillips lost sight of the airfield and disappeared from view. His instructor, 2nd Lt Russell went out to look for him at 6 am, 7 am and 9.30 am without success. At 11 am he received a telephone message that 2nd Lt Phillips had landed near Harleston and was badly injured. By the time Russell arrived at the scene at Redenhall, Phillips had already been taken to hospital. The plane had come

down in a field of standing corn and appeared to have turned over completely twice. The position of

the controls indicated that the plane was on almost full power when it hit the ground. Fortunately, given the ignition was still on and sparking, the plane did not catch fire.

John Smith, a labourer, was the only witness to the crash. At about 5.30 am he heard an aircraft overhead and went outside in time to see it head towards a wheat field a few hundred yards away. He lost sight of it behind some trees and then heard a crash. When he got to the aircraft, he found 2nd Lt Phillips had been thrown from the cockpit and was unconscious on the ground, moaning. After Dr Maidment had arrived, Phillips was taken to the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital where he died later that day without regaining consciousness. He was 21 years old.

At his inquest on 23rd July, the Deputy Coroner Mr W N Ladell recorded a verdict of "Death caused accidentally by a fall from an aeroplane".

During 1917 the demand for trained pilots became critical following the Battle of Arras, known in the RFC as Bloody April, when new pilots' life expectancy was measured in weeks or even days. During April the RFC lost 245 aircraft, 211 pilots and observers killed or missing and 108 prisoners of war. Just as in the Battle of Britain, 23 years later, aircraft were easier to replace than pilots. 2nd Lt Phillips was one of those trainee pilots attached to 25 Training Squadron based at Snarehill Aerodrome near Thetford in Norfolk.

A sad story of a young man with no shortage of enthusiasm and confidence but a great lack of flying experience. In the aftermath of Bloody April in a desperate attempt to replace lost pilots and observers, the Royal Flying Corps repeatedly reduced the length of training for new recruits and Phillips was a victim of that reduction. He had been flying for less than three weeks and had logged less than three and a half hours dual control flying time. He had made his first 20-minute solo flight only that morning. Lacking training and ill-prepared, he found himself either lost or with a failing aircraft. It is heart breaking to imagine his last minutes; alone and frightened, desperately trying to find somewhere to land. Possibly misjudging the height of the standing wheat, he seems to have lost control of the aircraft and flown into the ground on full throttle.

The original wooden memorial to 2nd Lt Phillips is thought to have been erected by Mrs Sancroft Holmes of Gawdy Hall very near the site where his plane crashed, and over the years it had been repaired and renewed by the people of Harleston. The latest simple memorial, on Church Lane, the wooden cross a replica of the original which is in Harleston Museum, was dedicated on July 20th 2011 in the presence of members of the Royal Canadian Air Force and the Royal Air Force. 2nd Lt Phillips is buried in Earlham Cemetery in Norwich. His plot, 24/147, is marked by a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. He is also remembered in the Canadian First World War Book of Remembrance on page 580 and on the St Catharine's War Memorial in Ontario. Joseph is commemorated on the Harleston War Memorial.

By a bizarre twist of fate, another young Canadian pilot of the same name died in a not dissimilar accident barely three weeks after 2nd Lt Phillips, the rate of attrition was shocking but this was of course still an experimental form of technology and certainly the first time used in war-fare. Brave men, pushing the frontiers not just of their own skill but also the abilities of their machines.

The District Coroner was yesterday informed of the death of Second-Lieut. R. Phillips, Royal Flying Corps, a Canadian, whose machine came to the ground at Welby, near Grantham.

Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail

16 Aug 1917