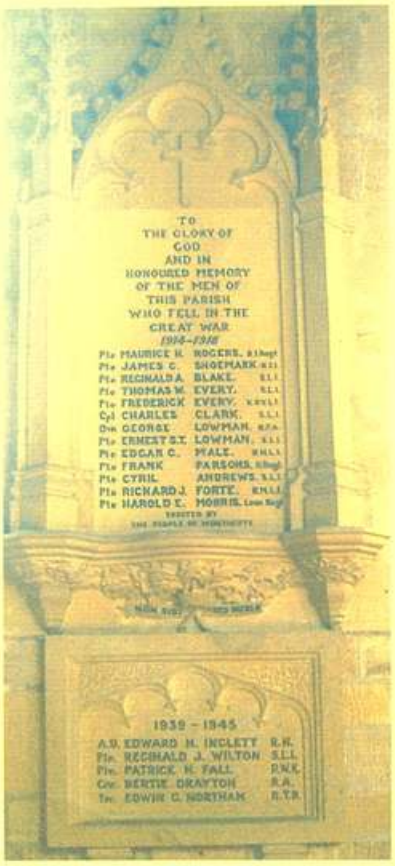
A Tribute to the Men of Montacute who fell in the Two World Wars



1914-1918
1939-1945

Contents

	Page
Introduction	2
Private Henry Rogers	6
Private James Shoemark	12
Private Reginald Blake	21
Private Thomas Every	28
Private Frederick Every	37
Corporal Charles Clark	43
Lance Bombardier George Lowman	49
Private Ernest Lowman	55
Private Edgar Male	57
Private Frank Parsons	60
Private Cyril Andrews	66
Private Richard Forte	76
Private Harold Morris	91
Able Seaman Edward Inglett	101
Private Reginald Wilton	111
Private Patrick Fall	117
Gunner Bertie Drayton	137
Trooper Edwin Northam	144
Epilogue	153

Introduction



This year (2004) sees the 90th Anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War on 4th August 1914, as well as the 60th Anniversary of D Day on June 6th 1944.

It therefore seemed an appropriate occasion to pay tribute those men of Montacute who died in the two World Wars and whose names are inscribed on the Memorial in St. Catherine's Church. This booklet seeks to do this so that we can not only commemorate them but also remember the circumstances under which many of them met their death, to remind ourselves of the horror and also the futility of war – particularly appropriate in these present troubled times.

The information herein has been compiled from the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and from accessing Regimental and other histories of the period. Because it has not been possible to look at the Service Records of the men concerned, which, for the First World War were largely destroyed by enemy bombing and, for the Second, are available to next of kin only, it has in some cases been difficult to ascertain the precise circumstances in which they met their death and an informed guess has had to be made. If anyone has more precise information then I should

be pleased to receive it and incorporate it in this tribute. In a few instances, some of the information on the Memorial in St. Catherine's Church differs from that in the official records and I have indicated this in the individual entry.

The following poem was written by Laurence Binyon in 1914 and verse 4 is recorded on War Memorials and used in Remembrance Day Services all over the country. I have included it in full as it has a lot more to say to us than just that well known verse.

For The Fallen
With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill; Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.

On the memorial there are 13 names from the First World War, all in the Army, except for two in the Royal Marines Light Infantry who fought as land soldiers as part of the Royal Naval Division. They are all infantrymen except for one in the Royal Field Artillery. One is a New Zealander but was born in Montacute. Their deaths occurred as far afield as France, Belgium, Greece, Palestine and Turkey although two of them are buried in this country. Six of them have no known graves and their names appear on the appropriate war memorials.

There are 5 names from the Second World War, four from the army and one from the Royal Navy. The soldiers consisted of two infantrymen, one from the Royal Artillery and one from the Royal Tank Regiment. Two of them are remembered on memorials as having no known graves. The sailor was on board a destroyer torpedoed when escorting a convoy in the Mediterranean Sea. The soldiers are buried in North Africa, what was formerly Burma, Italy and France.

The following individual tributes are in the order in which they appear on the Church Memorial.

Lest we forget

John Powlesland
April 2004

FIRST WORLD WAR

963 Private Henry Maurice ROGERS
5th Battalion Royal Irish Regiment

(Listed as Maurice Henry Rogers in the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission)

Son of Thomas Frederick and Lucy Ellen Rogers
of 5 Stoke Road, Montacute

Died 16th August 1915

Aged 19

Name included on the Helles Memorial, in Turkey as someone with no known grave.

The Helles Memorial stands on the tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula. It takes the form of an obelisk over 30 metres high that can be seen by ships passing through the Dardenelles.



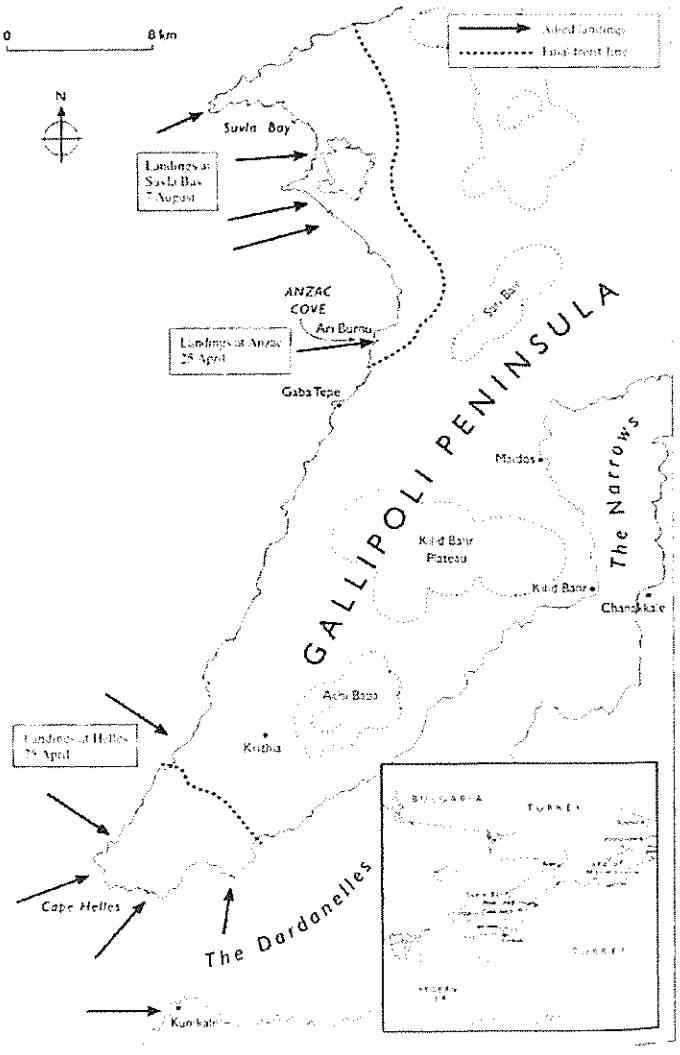
Helles Memorial

IRISH BATTALIONS

The first Irish volunteers into the British Army during the First World War were placed into the service battalions of the Irish Regiments which made up the 10th (Irish) Division. The 5th (Service) Battalion (Pioneers) was formed at Clonmel, August 1914 and attached to 29th Brigade, 10th (Irish) Division. About June 1915, it converted to a Pioneer Battalion of the same Division. It is not known how someone from Montacute came to be in an Irish regiment.

Details of the action in which Private Rogers met his death

The action in which Private Rogers lost his life followed immediately after the events in which Private James Shoemark died just eight days before (qv).



Gallipoli 1915

The Landings at Suvla Bay, 6th August 1915



With three fresh divisions of reinforcements promised to arrive in Gallipoli in August 1915 by Lord Kitchener in London (subsequently increased to five), Commander-in-Chief Sir Ian Hamilton began planning a major Allied offensive on the Gallipoli peninsula to coincide with their arrival.

At this time the combined British (including Australian and New Zealand Corps - the Anzacs) and French force had established two beachheads on the peninsula,: the first on the southern tip at Cape Helles, and the second further north at Ari Burnu (shortly afterwards renamed Anzac Cove).

However repeated attempts to strike out north of Helles had all ended in dismal failure at heavy cost in casualties. No similar attempt to break out of the confined beachhead at Anzac had been considered however for want of reinforcements: only 20,000 Australians and New Zealanders were sited at Anzac Cove.

Hamilton opted to use his pending reinforcements to support an Allied breakout from Anzac Cove. However the cramped beachhead itself at Anzac could not support the additional numbers of reinforcements promised by Kitchener. Thus a fresh landing site was selected further north at Suvla Bay, with the aim of securing the Anafarta Hills.

Suvla Bay was large and ideal for the landing of a sizeable number of additional troops. Directly in front of the bay was the shallow Salt Lake, dry in August (but ill-suited for an infantry advance), and beyond that the flat Suvla plain that would serve for subsequent troop deployment.

Along with the landings at Suvla Hamilton set in train two additional attacks. He instructed the Allied force at Helles to strike out with a holding attack. Meanwhile the Anzacs were to break out north from Anzac Cove to seize Sari Bair Ridge, aided by 25,000 fresh reinforcements smuggled into the area (see Private Shoemark).

In planning both additional attacks Hamilton was concerned to tie up as many Turkish troops as possible to guarantee the success of the fresh landings at Suvla Bay.

On 22nd July the Turks received news warning that an Allied offensive was to be expected on the peninsula in early August. The Turks divided their 14 divisions to meet the most likely attack points: Helles, Anzac and the Bulair area. They did not send reinforcements to guard against an attack launched from Suvla Bay, where the sector remained protected by three battalions comprising around 1,500 men.

In charge of the landings was Sir Frederick Stopford, a somewhat elderly general close to retirement age whose earlier wartime service had consisted of a ceremonial posting as Lieutenant of the Tower of London. He possessed no battle experience of any description, a fact which proved crucial during the operation.

Nevertheless he was to guide 10th (Private Rogers' Division), 11th and 53rd Divisions - comprising IX Corps - during the landings. Stopford was instructed that a key priority was the linking of Allied forces south once Tekke Tepe had been captured, with the Anzac forces striking north from Anzac Cove to Sari Bair. Further, Stopford was to assist the Anzacs in the capture of Sari Bair if it became necessary.

The landings were begun at 10p.m. on the evening of 6th August with 20,000 troops set down at Suvla Bay with virtually no Turkish opposition other than from sniper fire. The remainder of the British troops, including 10th

Division, were successfully landed the following morning, albeit at disparate sites along the bay owing to reconnaissance failures.

With his troops landed Stopford opted to wait until evening before pressing forward with attacks upon the hills immediately around the bay in the course of which some 1,700 casualties were incurred. Stopford's staff officers argued that attacking the Tekke Tepe ridge before consolidating their force (including all-important artillery) would leave them open to violent attack by defending Turk forces. They remained unaware of the actual weakness of Turkish military preparedness in the sector.

Stopford, having secured the local hills, remained content that he had achieved his set aims (meanwhile directing activity from an off-shore battleship). It wasn't until Hamilton's personal arrival on the afternoon of 8th August that the position was made clear to Stopford. Meanwhile the freshly-arrived (and inexperienced) British troops were rested on the beach.

Hamilton promptly issued orders that the Tekke Tepe ridge to the east be rapidly secured. However by the morning of 9th August the Turks had secured the heights of the ridge and of the Anafarta Spur to the south.

By nightfall on 9th August almost nothing had been achieved and most of the IX Corps was in serious disarray. Since 6th August the 10th and 11th Divisions had suffered severe casualties and had become hopelessly inter-mingled.

Hamilton nevertheless continued to order fresh British attacks against the ridge over the course of the following three days, all of which ended in failure: while the Turks poured in reinforcements to surround the Allied beachhead at Suvla.

On 15th August, Stopford let Irish troops attack along the Kiretch Tepe Ridge, a move that caused great anxiety to the Turks as it was exactly in that region that they kept their principal ammunition reserves. Moreover, an Allied success there would have threatened to roll up the entire Turkish flank. They made some progress but any gains were lost to strong Turkish counter-attacks next day – **this is presumably when Private Rogers lost his life**

Stopford himself did not know what exactly he was trying to achieve and his troops were poorly supplied with fresh ammunition. Stopford's apparent incompetence, but also his doubtful complaints that his new-army troops were worthless and his never-ending pleas for even more artillery, caused Kitchener to dismiss him.

Losses were predictably heavy. The Allies suffered approximately 18,000 casualties at Suvla Bay and at Anzac Cove, plus a further 3,500 at Helles. Once again a state of trench warfare set in from Suvla.

10th Irish Division



Members of the 10th (Irish) Division

The following is an eye-witness description of the landing of the 10th Irish Division at Suvla Bay:

'In late April, the Division reached their assembly point at Basingstoke in England, prior to their departure for the Dardanelles.....

Again through terrible logistics and poor planning, there followed utter carnage at these landings. They arrived in Gallipoli without any maps and any orders as to what to do when they got there. Prior to their departure for Gallipoli, the 10th (Irish) Division's artillery pieces went to France instead of Gallipoli. Water was in such a short supply that men nearly killed each other for a simple drink. When the fight against the Turks did begin, they even ran out of ammunition and resorted to throwing stones at the Turks. One pathetic account was of a Private Wilkins from the Pals Company. He was in a trench into which the Turks were lobbing grenades. Private Wilkins was catching them and throwing them back at the Turks. He caught five, the sixth one blew him to pieces.'

10/1982 Private James Charles SHOEMARK
Wellington Regiment
New Zealand Expeditionary Force

Son of Mrs. George Shoemark of New Plymouth, husband of the late Margarette (Margaret on Service Record) Shoemark

Died: 8th August 1915

Aged: 33

Name included on the Chunuk Bair (New Zealand) Memorial, in Turkey as someone with no known grave.



Turkish, left, and New Zealand memorials stand side-by-side at Chunuk Bair

James Charles SHOEMARK

Private Shoemark was born in December 1882 in Montacute. His address at the time of his death was Palford Street, New Plymouth, New Zealand. He enlisted on the 11th January 1915 for the duration of the war, at which time he was a bricklayer. He joined the 11th Taranaki Company of the Wellington Infantry Battalion. The prefix 10 to his Service Number indicates he was part of this Battalion.



Badge of the 11th Taranaki Company

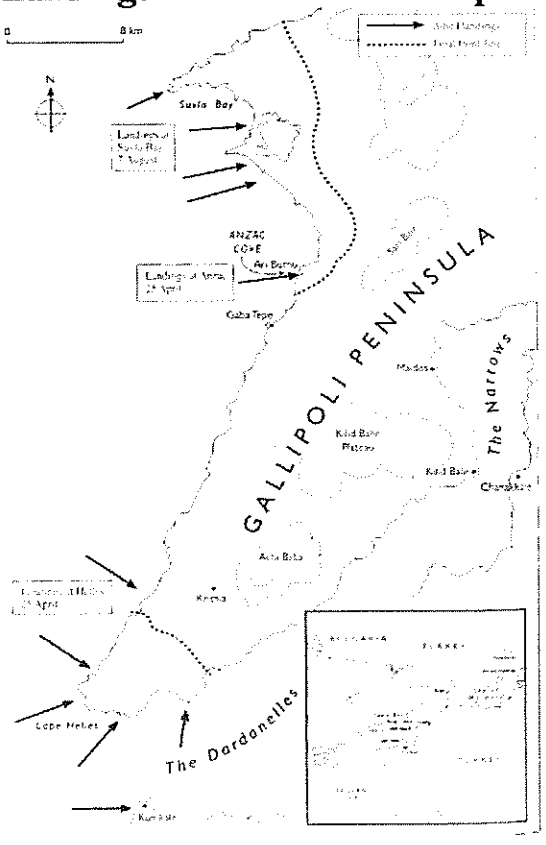


Landings at ANZAC Cove

The Wellington Regiment left New Zealand on 17th April 1915 and landed at ANZAC Cove at about 9.00 a.m. on 25th April, when the New Zealand Infantry Brigade was part of the ANZAC Force that went ashore that day (now celebrated as ANZAC Day).



The Landings at ANZAC Cove - April 1915



Details of the action in which Private Shoemark met his death

The action in which Private Shoemark lost his life was a week prior to the events in which Private Henry Rogers died. The background to the action is the same as that for the action involving Private Rogers (qv).



Chunuk Bair and locality – August 1915

The battle for Chunuk Bair began after dark on 6th August 1915. In the late afternoon, the 1st Australian Division mounted an attack on the Turkish line at Lone Pine. So strong was this attack that initially the Turkish commanders were of the opinion that a major break-out from Anzac towards the south-east was being attempted. At 9.30 pm, the 4th Australian Brigade made their way north along a newly made road.

On their right flank they heard the noise of the attack by the New Zealand Mounted Rifles on Turkish positions in the foothills of the range. The Mounted's task that night was to clear the way for the New Zealand Infantry Brigade who were to take Chunuk Bair by first light on 7th August. That struggle in the dark in the foothills was a brilliant success for the New Zealanders.

Hot on the heels of the Mounteds, the New Zealand Infantry Brigade – Otago, Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury Battalions – began the long climb through the valleys and over the scrub-covered ridges towards Chunuk Bair.

The New Zealanders, accompanied by the British 40th Brigade and the 29th Indian Brigade, became lost and dawn on 7th August found them well short of their intended position from where they were to have attacked and seized Hill 971. The men were exhausted and the debilitating summer months in the trenches of Gallipoli had left them unfit. The 4th Brigade was allowed to stop and dig in. The Indian battalions had also taken the wrong route and were in no position to attack. The 6th Gurkha Battalion pressed on up the slopes towards what turned out to be Chunuk Bair. Only the New Zealanders ended that night march somewhere near their objective. As they came out on the top slopes of what was called Rhododendron Ridge, they could see Chunuk Bair about a kilometre ahead.

The Wellington Battalion was holding a line on Rhododendron Ridge, just below the crest of Chunuk Bair, where it was waiting for reinforcement by the Auckland Mounted Rifles, also engaged in heavy fighting. While this reinforcement had been making its slow and difficult advance, the Wellington Battalion had for hours been engaged in one of the most desperate struggles ever fought by Anzac troops. The solitary machine-gun had been served until all its crew were dead or wounded. There were no bombs, and for rifle ammunition the troops had to rely on what each man had carried and what they could get from the dead. ...for all practical purposes the Wellingtons had been cut off. The troops were weary almost to exhaustion ...shortly after the arrival of the Auckland Mounted Rifles there began a very violent bombardment of the slope by Turkish batteries firing from the south. ...It appears to have been followed by a succession of attacks - hand grenades coming over fifty at a time, the enemy getting out of their trenches and advancing with officers at their head, the New Zealanders shooting them as they rose. This effort of the enemy, like its predecessors, was beaten back.

The original plan had envisaged the New Zealanders attaining Chunuk Bair and then coming down the range behind the Turkish positions towards the Nek. This did not happen. Just before dawn on the 7th the lead New Zealand battalion – the Otagos – were still short of Chunuk Bair. There now ensued what has been called 'the climax on Anzac'. This was the battle, fought from early morning on 7th August to early morning on 10th August by Australian, New Zealand, British, Indian and Gurkha soldiers, to take and hold the peaks of Chunuk Bair and Hill 971



New Zealand troops in trench during attack on Chunuk Bair

At 11.00 am, the Auckland Battalion advancing towards Chunuk Bair ran into intense Turkish fire. They advanced only 100 metres and took 300 casualties. For the rest of the day the New Zealand battalions dug in under constant Turkish artillery and rifle fire. They could see far below at Suvla Bay the new British landing force establishing itself. However, the British at Suvla made little effort to advance (see Private Rogers) and throughout the battle Turkish guns, situated near the village of Anafarta, not far from the British lines, were able to fire unimpeded on the New Zealanders and other British units on Chunuk Bair.

At dawn on 8th August men of the Wellington Battalion took Chunuk Bair from the small number of Turks defending the summit. From there they gazed down on the objective of the whole campaign – the straits of the Dardanelles at the Narrows. Sergeant Daniel Curham of the Wellingtons was aware of the significance of this peak on Gallipoli:

Some chaps had a glimpse of the sea and all the country in between and we knew perfectly well that this hill was the key to victory or defeat on the Peninsula.

For two days – 8th and 9th August 1915 – the New Zealanders fought off numerous Turkish counter-attacks. On 8th August it was the Wellington Infantry Battalion that held the two trenches at the summit – one on the reverse and one on the forward slope. British units – the 7th Battalion, the Gloucestershire Regiment and the 8th Battalion of the Welsh Pioneers – dug in behind and on either side of the New Zealanders. Private Reginald Davis of the Wellingtons, who was taken prisoner that morning, remembered the intensity of the fighting:

Private Surgenor was hit in the head somewhere, but kept on firing with his face streaming with blood, until he got another hit in the head, which dazed him for a while, and knocked him back in the trench. This time I thought he was killed, but he partly came to after, and loaded rifles for me to fire. At that time I was using three rifles and each was burning hot ... On the right of my position I was able to see about thirty yards of trench in which all our men were wounded or dead.

As the day wore on, many of the New Zealand and British wounded from the trenches at the summit found their way back to a gully in the rear. Lance Corporal Charles Clark of the Wellingtons wrote:

There were about 300 wounded lying in the gully ... we lay there in the sun ... each man looked after himself ... and you would speak to a man, one of your own men and later on you would get no reply, they were dying, dying out as the day went on.

At 10.30 p.m. on 8th August what was left of the Wellingtons was relieved. Charles Bean described this moment:

Of the 760 of the Wellington Battalion who had captured the height that morning, there came out only 70 unwounded or slightly wounded men. Throughout that day not one had dreamed of leaving his post. Their uniforms were torn, their knees broken. They had had no water since the morning; they could talk only in whispers; their eyes were sunken; their knees trembled; some broke down and cried.

As darkness settled on Chunuk Bair, numbers of seriously wounded men, who had been unable to move during daylight on account of the heavy fire, began to make their way down the hill to the dressing station. The stretcher-bearers came out from the Apex position and, working magnificently all night, were able to remove a great number of wounded too badly hit to walk. Before midnight, the remnants of the Wellington Regiment were relieved in the front line and returned to the Apex position.

At the beach below Chunuk Bair a small jetty had been built – Embarkation Pier – to take off the wounded to the hospital ships but because boats bringing in supplies also used the pier, it was shelled by the Turks. From the pier, hundreds of walking wounded struggled down the 'long sap' to Ari Burnu point and on to Anzac Cove. The sheer numbers of wounded overwhelmed the medical services.

Throughout the battle the men of the Australian, New Zealand and British Army Medical Corps, along with the battalion stretcher-bearers, worked night and day to the point of personal collapse. Some died as they tried to carry the wounded down from the heights. Corporal William Rusden saw two lots of stretcher-bearers shot within minutes as they worked their way

down a valley. In one of these valleys Private Ormond Burton, New Zealand Medical Corps, witnessed the plight of some 300 wounded:

No one appeared to be responsible for them. Their wounds were uncared for and in the heat some were in a shocking state. They had no food and no water .... Many were hit a second and third time as they lay helplessly ... Many died there–some able to see the hospital ships with their green bands and red crosses no distance out to sea. On one trip I gave my water bottle to a Turkish officer with four or five of his men about him. He gave every drop to his men and took not a mouthful himself. I saw nothing more dreadful during the whole war than the suffering of those forgotten men.

At 8.00 pm on 9th August the New Zealanders finally left Chunuk Bair. In their place stood soldiers of the British 6th Battalion of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment and the 5th Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment. Beyond the British trenches, the Turks were massing for a great attack. The position was taken by a determined and overwhelming counter-attack. The loss of Chunuk Bair marked the end of the effort to reach the central hills of the Peninsula. So far as this sector of the front was concerned, the line remained unaltered between Chunuk Bair and Rhododendron Spur until the evacuation in December 1915.

There were 760 men in the Wellington Regiment at the time of the attack. Only two officers and 47 men were alive and unwounded when they were relieved a day later. The furthest the Anzacs penetrated into Turkey was 1.2km. It is all harsh, hilly, barren country. You would go a long way to find a less hospitable area.

The Death of Colonel Malone, Commanding Officer of the Wellington Regiment

'Towards 5 p.m., the shelling seemed to have ceased and Lieutenant-Colonel Malone and Major Schofield stood up together in the trench with the idea of looking over the ground and deciding the dispositions of the troops to be maintained during the night and where the men of the Auckland Regiment might most profitably be employed. Just at this moment, the Turk fired his last salvo and the gallant Colonel fell with a ball through the head while Colonel [sic] Schofield received a ball through the lung. Throughout that long and arduous day, Lieut.-Col Malone had fought with his men and none knew better what a magnificent fight they had put up. Armed only with an entrenching tool, he had, time after time, dashed in among the firing lines when the Turks threatened to break through, encouraging his men with his words and example. He was firmly resolved that the Regiment would rather perish than yield the hill.'

It is now known that Colonel Malone was in fact killed by 'friendly fire'; a shell fired either from a British warship or from within the old Anzac lines.

He died on the same day as Private Shoemark

Private Shoemark was posthumously awarded the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal as well as the Gallipoli Medallion



1914-1915 Star British War Medal Victory Medal



The Inscription on the Chunuk Bair Memorial

The ANZACs were evacuated from Gallipoli by December 20th 1915..
8,556 New Zealand troops served on Gallipoli.
2,721 died and 4,752 were wounded.

14882 Private Reginald Albert BLAKE
7th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry

Son of Charles and Catherine Blake of Townsend, Montacute

Died 16th September 1916

Aged 20

Name included on the Thiepval Memorial, in France which commemorates those who fell in the Battle of the Somme 1916 and have no known grave.

The Thiepval Memorial is off the main Bapaume to Albert road (D929).



Thiepval Memorial

7th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry

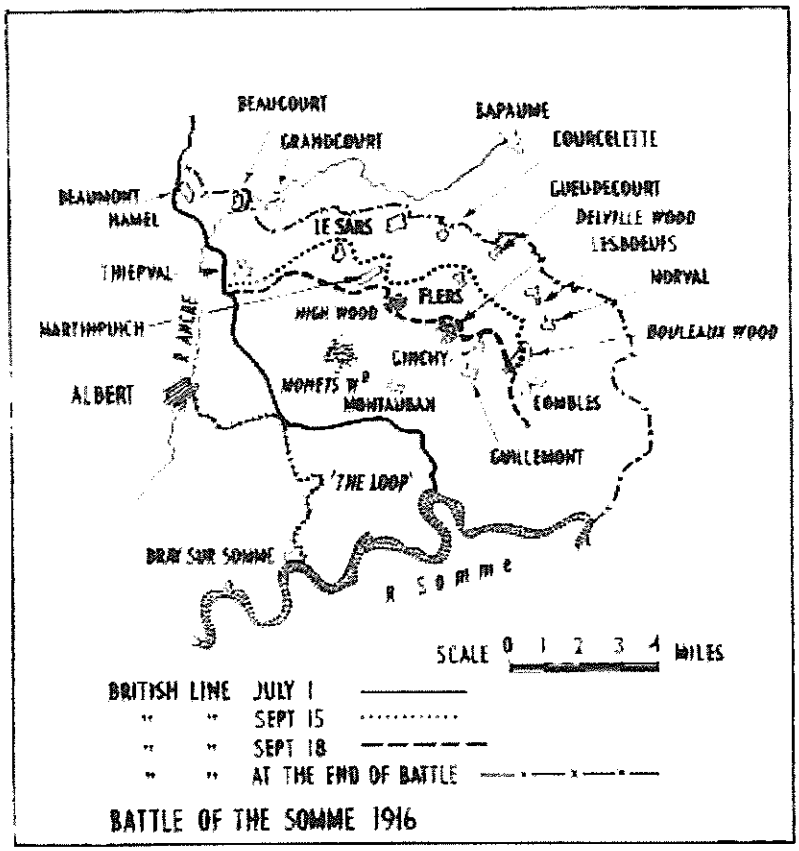


The 7th (Service) Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry was formed at Taunton on 13th September 1914, as part of the 2nd Kitchener Army. It was attached to the 61st Brigade, 20th (Light) Division.

Details of the action in which Private Blake probably met his death

Assuming that Private Blake met his death in action, which seems likely as his body was not recovered, then this was at:

The Battle of Flers-Courcelette - 15th - 22nd September 1916



Plan of the overall area involved in the Battle of the Somme 1916

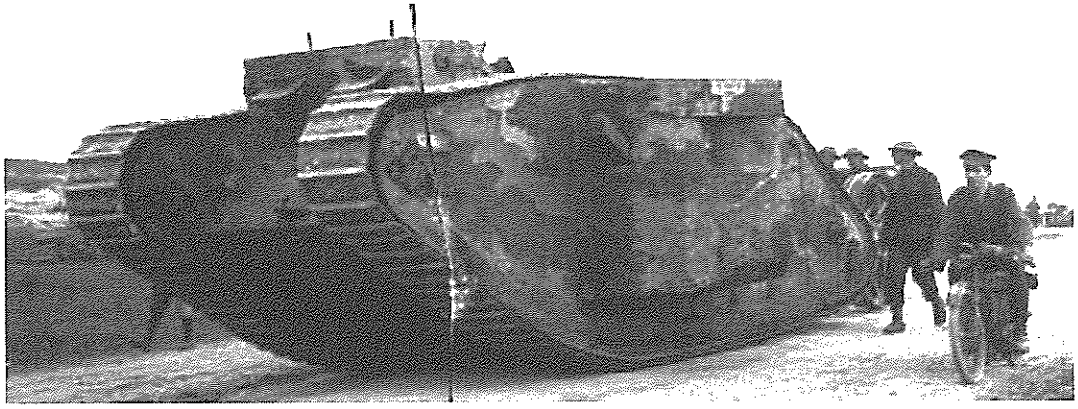
The 20th Division (including the 7th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry) was part of XIV Corps of the British Fourth Army.

The attack at Flers-Courcelette was part of the larger offensive at the Somme. The attack was launched across a 12 km front from the Fourth Army salient on 15th September 1916. Twelve divisions were employed, along with all the tanks the British army possessed: 49.

Sir Douglas Haig, the British Commander-in-Chief, took the controversial decision to use this operation to test out the tank. This went against the advice that they should be employed when they could be used en masse to

ensure a major breakthrough, it having been argued that the tanks would be of little practical use in such small numbers.

These early tanks proved notoriously unreliable during testing and application. Weighing approximately 28 tons, they could only move forward at a half mile per hour. They were impervious to small arms fire, and to a lesser extent machine gun fire However shell fire could easily destroy a tank. Navigation and visibility were poor - the latter leading on more than one occasion to the tank directing friendly fire from its guns onto its own forces. Radio communication was not available until late in the war: carrier pigeons were used instead.



Mark I Tank similar to the ones used at Flers-Courcelette

On 11th September the 49 tanks began to move slowly into position in the line. As a measure of their fundamental unreliability, 17 tanks were unable to make it as far as the front line. Of the 32 tanks that left their starting points on that day, 9 broke down due to mechanical problems and 5 were ditched. The remaining 18 met with varying success.

However, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), together with the Canadian Corps, made initial gains of some 2 km within the first three days, something of an achievement at the time, and particularly during the Battle of the Somme. Led by tanks the villages of Martinpuich, Flers and Courcelette fell to the Allies, as did the much sought-after High Wood.

Nevertheless, a combination of poor weather and extensive German reinforcements halted the British and Canadian advance on 17th September; the Allies had again suffered heavy casualties. The attack was called off on 22nd September.

The use of tanks had by no means led to any anticipated breakthrough, but they nonetheless impressed Haig, who requested that 1,000 more be constructed.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE 7TH BATTALION SOMERSET LIGHT INFANTRY IN THE BATTLE OF FLERS-COURCELETTE

The following is an extract from the official history of the Somerset Light Infantry in the First World War:

'Of the operations of 16th September (the day on which Private Blake died), in which the 7th Somersets were engaged, Col. Troyte-Bullock, the Commanding Officer, said it was a platoon and section commander's battle, and when the records are examined it will be seen that this description is in every way accurate.

In early September 1916, the 7th Somersets were resting and refitting in Maricourt. But on the 12th the Battalion moved from Maricourt to the Sandpits, Meaulte, thence to Citadel on 14th and to Talus Boise on 15th, where the Somersets were formed up and awaited orders. At midday these orders came to hand and the Battalion (in Brigade) moved forward to the neighbourhood of Waterlot Farm in the old British front line north of Guillemont. The 61st Infantry Brigade was now attached to the Guards Division and the Brigade Diary contains the following entry which throws useful light upon the general situation:-
"15th Sept. 5.8 p.m. Divisional (20th) wire received stating situation still uncertain, but believed Guards had entered Les Boeufs. 6th Division (on the right of Guards Division) still held up, presumably on 1st objective. 61st Infantry Brigade to be placed at disposal of Guards Division, with proviso that it is to be used on south flank towards Morval. Intention later to interpose 20th Division between Guards and 6th Divisions."

The general plan of the combined Allied attack, which had begun at 6.20 a.m. on 15th September, was
"to pivot on the high ground south of the River Ancre and north of the Albert-Bapaume Road, while the Fourth Army directed its whole effort to the rearmost of the enemy's original systems of defence between Morval and Le Sars."

On the right of the Fourth Army, Sir Douglas Haig had arranged with the French "to continue the line of advance in close co-operation. . . from the Somme to the slopes above Combles, but directing their main efforts northwards against the villages of Rancourt and Fregicourt, so as to complete the isolation of Combles and open the way for their attack on Sailly-Saillisel."

In this attack two of the enemy's main defence systems had been broken into and the British line had been pushed forward on a front of over 6 miles to an average depth of a mile. Three large villages - Flers, Martinpuich and Courcelette - had been captured and the line had been pushed forward to within assaulting distance of Les Breufs; Combles, and a strong point - The Quadrilateral - north of it, had, however, defied capture.

At 9.45 p.m. on the 15th orders were received by the Guards Division stating that the attack of the XIV and XV Corps would be continued at 9.25 a.m. on. 16th, and this Division, with 61st Infantry Brigade on the right and 3rd Guards Brigade on the left, would assault Les Boeufs. At midnight, 15/16th, therefore, the 7th Somersets (in Brigade) moved up through Ginchy to within 600 yards of the German position protecting Les Boeufs.

Here the Battalion dug in preparatory for the attack at 9.25 a.m. on 16th. A series of casualties on the morning of 16th resulted in the Battalion at the hour of attack being under the command of a second-lieutenant. Captain W. E. Whall was hit by a bullet in the chin at an early hour. Before the attack began Major Lyon (temporarily in command of the 7th Somersets) was mortally wounded whilst trying to get in touch with troops on his left. He had already sent out two runners, but both of them had become casualties. He then very gallantly went out himself with the result that he was mortally wounded and died later at Corbie. The acting Adjutant-Lieutenant - F. Humphries - was also wounded, and when Zero hour arrived the senior officer was 2/Lieutenant. Jenne, who commanded the Battalion throughout that day of brilliant fighting.

In this attack the objective of the 7th Somersets was the German frontline trench, which the Battalion was to capture and hold until a new line was dug just west of it, to the north of the Ginchy-Les Boeufs road.

All the honours of war fell that day to the 7th Battalion. The attack, splendidly carried out, began at 9.35 a.m. (Zero plus 10 minutes); the German front line on a front of 150 yards was captured and held while the new line was dug just west of it, and about fifty prisoners were captured. Having used up all their bombs, as well as a large quantity captured from the enemy, the bombers were unable to cover the Battalion, which then fell back to the new trench which had been dug and held it until relieved on the night 16th/17th September by the Shropshire Light Infantry. That is the story contained in the official Diary. Bald indeed; bare of all those little details and thrilling episodes which make military history live. Yet none the less they did happen. Two incidents occurred which alone should live for all time in the history of the 7th Somersets. With bayonet and bomb the Battalion had cleared the Germans out of their front-line trench, two bombers of B

Company - L/Cpl. Hill and Pte. Barrow - single-handed, bombing the enemy out of 150 yards of his trench, using German bombs. Brilliant as was the bombing affair, it was outshone by the extraordinary gallantry of Private Hill (also of B Company, and a Lewis gunner). With another man of his section Hill pushed forward with the gun to a new position some 60 yards in front of the Battalion's most advanced posts. For no less than 36 hours Hill held on to his post, at one time, with his comrade taking a prominent part in breaking up a hostile counter-attack, by bringing heavy enfilade fire on the attacker He fought on and on until at last, his comrade being killed and his ammunition exhausted, he picked up his gun and empty magazines and retired to where he imagined the Battalion to be, only to find that it had been relieved 12 hours previously. Eventually he rejoined the Battalion at Talus Boise.

Ten officers and about 162 other ranks (including Private Blake) were the casualties suffered by the Battalion on 16th September.

12113 Private Thomas William EVERY
6th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry

Died 18th August 1916

Shown as 'of Montacute' in the Regimental records

Name included on the Thiepval Memorial, in France which commemorates those who fell in the Battle of the Somme 1916 and have no known grave.

The Thiepval Memorial is off the main Bapaume to Albert road (D929).



Thiepval Memorial

6th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry



The 6th (Service) Battalion Somerset Light Infantry was formed at Taunton, in August 1914, as part of the First Kitchener Army. It was attached to the 43rd Brigade, 14th (Light) Division.

Order of Battle 14th (Light) Division C June 1916 France

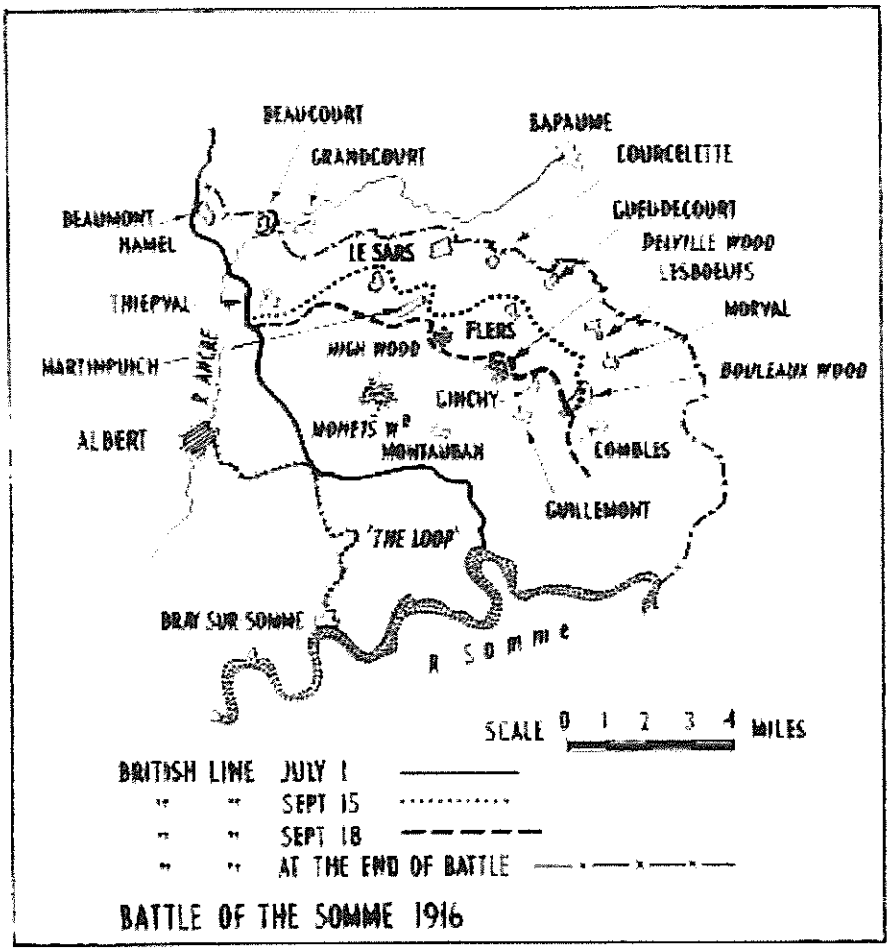
43rd Brigade; Brigadier General P.R. Wood

- 6th (Service) Battalion The Somerset Light Infantry
- 6th (Service) Battalion The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry
- 6th (Service) Battalion The King's Own (Yorkshire Light Infantry)
- 10th (Service) Battalion The Durham Light Infantry
- 43rd Brigade Machine Gun Company
- 43rd Trench Mortar Battery

Details of the action in which Private Every probably met his death

Assuming that Private Every met his death in action, which seems likely as his body was not recovered, then this was at:

The Battle of Delville Wood - 15th July - 3rd September 1916



Plan of the overall area involved in the Battle of the Somme 1916

British Units taking part consisted of:

Fourth Army

XIII Corps : 2nd Division, 3rd Division, 9th Division, 24th Division, 18th Division (53rd Brigade)

XV Corps : 7th Division, 14th Division (Private Every's Division)

XIV Corps : 20th Division, and 24th Division.

A subsidiary attack of the Somme Offensive, and fought from July 15th until 3rd September 1916, the Battle of Delville Wood saw the capture of the wood that had been skirted during the Battle of Bazentin Ridge when Longueval fell to the British on 9th July.

It was essential to the British that the wood be cleared of Germans before any attack could be launched on the formidable, and notorious, German Switch Line. The task of capturing the wood was handed to the South African Brigade. On July 15th at dawn the South African regiment went in following a heavy artillery battle: they managed to clear the southern edge of German forces. The remainder of the wood remained in German hands.

Hand to hand fighting ensued until the South Africans were relieved on the night of July 19th, having lost 766 dead among the four battalions alone; the dead outnumbered the wounded by four to one. Throughout poor weather (it rained often) and enemy artillery fire which reached a crescendo of 400 shells a minute, the surrounding landscape was transformed into a mess of broken, stumpy tree roots and massive shell holes.

Mud and rainwater covered bodies of South African and German forces alike - many bodies remain in the wood today (which is now in private hands). The Germans lost 9,500 men by August alone.

The wood was never entirely taken by the South African forces, despite huge efforts to do so. It wasn't until after another month of fierce fighting had taken place, on August 25th, that 14th (Light) Division (Private Every's Division) finally took the wood and overcame German resistance.



Delville Wood after the battle

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE 6TH BATTALION SOMERSET LIGHT INFANTRY IN THE BATTLE OF DELVILLE WOOD

The following is an extract from the official history of the Somerset Light Infantry in the First World War:

'On the 16th (August) Divisional orders had been received at 43rd Brigade H.Q. stating that on 18th the Brigade was to attack the German line along the N.E. edge of Delville Wood and trenches to the east of the Wood. The order as issued to the 6th Somersets is not available for, as the Battalion Diary states: "Owing to the close proximity of the enemy and the likelihood of a counterattack all operation orders had to be destroyed." But from the Brigade Diary the following points are gleaned: A simultaneous attack was to be made on the 18th August by three Corps, i.e. XIII and XV and III Corps. Two Brigades (43rd on the right and 41st on the left) were to carry out the attack of the 14th Division.

The 6th Somerset LI. (on the right) and the 6th D.C.L.I. (on the left) were to carry out the attack of the 43rd Brigade; the objectives allotted to the 6th Battahon were as follows:-.

"The 6th Somerset LI. will attack that portion of the enemy trenches between Hop Alley and S.l 8.d.6.4, and will consolidate themselves along the line from the junction of Hop Alley and Beer Trench inclusive to S.l 8.d.6.4, and also along Hop Alley to point T.13.a.o.5."

Other interesting points in the attack to be made by the 6th Somerset men were:
(1) For three-quarters of an hour after Zero the Divisional Artillery was to bombard that portion of Beer and Bitter trenches which lay north of Hop Alley, also Ale Alley west of its junction with Bitter Trench. The barrage was then to lift and the 6th Somersets were to bomb northwards from Hop Alley up Bitter Trench and Beer Trench.

(2) When the objectives allotted to the Battalions had been reached the O.C. 6th Somersets was to see that a communication trench was dug back to the original Brigade front line.

A preliminary bombardment was to take place from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. on 17th and open again at 6 a.m., and continue until 2.50 p.m. on 18th August, the day of attack.

The assembly positions of the three Companies of the 6th Battalion, who were to make the attack, are given approximately, as they could not be ascertained accurately from the Diary. A Company, on the right, was to attack the southern portion of Beer Trench to the junction of the latter with Pilsen Lane. To D Company had been allotted that portion of Beer Trench northwards from Pilsen Lane to the junction with Hop Alley. C Company was to attack Hop Alley. B Company was held in reserve in order to construct a communication trench from Beer Trench back to the original Brigade front line, when Beer Trench had been captured (it is not known in which Company Private Every served).

The attack on Hop Alley by C Company was a particularly desperate operation, as it necessitated the Company moving out in single file of platoons and then turning to the left and waiting till the barrage lifted. This movement would only be possible if the bombers rushed the junction of Beer Trench and Hop Alley and immediately established a post in order to keep down hostile enfilade machine-gun fire from Hop Alley, which would not only prevent the capture of the latter trench; but in all probability hold up the remainder of the attack.

On the morning of 18th, at 3 a.m., all four Companies of the 6th Somersets moved up from Montauban to their assembly positions in the S.E. corner of Delville Wood, the two flank assaulting Companies (A and C) occupying the forward trench and the centre assaulting Company (D) the rear trench. B, the Reserve Company, was in rear of D Company.

The 6th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry were on the left of the Somersets, who were in position by 6 a.m. At that hour the preliminary bombardment opened with guns of all calibre pouring shell on to Beer Trench and Hop Alley. With the exception of two "intense bombardments" with enemy guns firing rapid at 8.45 a.m. and 12.10 p.m. the guns continued during the morning to shell the enemy's trenches, but so difficult was observation for the gunners that some of the "heavies" fired short and 15 casualties were suffered by the Somersets "from their own guns."

No reply was made by the enemy to the bombardment which, at 2.45 p.m. (Zero hour), again became intense. At 2.35 p.m. the two flank assaulting Companies, A and C, had "closed up outwards" and the centre Company, D, came in between them. It was not possible to get all three Companies in the front line earlier as the Northern end was very close to Hop Alley, then being heavily shelled.

At Zero hour the attacking troops advanced, and once in No Man's Land found themselves right under the barrage from 20 to 25 yards from German

trenches. Here the men halted waiting for the barrage to lift – a matter of five minutes. At 2.50 p.m. the screen of fire moved on and almost immediately the Somerset men were in the German trenches, bayoneting or shooting down all those who refused to surrender.

A Company came up against two hostile machine guns mounted in a salient in the German line, though only one was in action. This was rushed and the gun team bombed. The Battalion narrative records that "two good N.C.O.'s were killed doing this." A German was seen trying to get the second machine gun into action, the remainder of the gun team having bolted; he was dealt with. There was little further resistance along the front of this Company, for the enemy had been taken by surprise, and although his "S.O.S." rockets had been fired soon after the attack began, most of the captured Germans were found without equipment. Their resistance was futile in the extreme; the terrific bombardment to which they had been subjected had done its work and had spread demoralization amongst the enemy's troops, whose one idea was to surrender. Some of them, in their mad desire to get away from their horrible trenches, literally ran over to the British lines, others bolted back towards Ginchy. Most of the latter were shot down. A party of from 30 to 40 made off towards Waterlot Farm, where they circled about in the open like a herd of deer, with their hands above their heads until they were eventually taken prisoner. A Company, having reached its objective, began consolidating the position immediately, being helped by a party of the King's Regiment.

The centre Company (D) was able to follow close on the barrage, over Bitter Trench to Beer Trench. Only ten Germans were found in the former and these were either killed or forced to surrender. In Beer Trench some 30 Germans suffered a similar fate. Two German officers, one of whom said in English, "You English are too villainous for words," refused to surrender and were shot. Other Germans were seen crawling from shell hole to shell hole back towards Ginchy. A portion of the trench lying between the junction of Vat Alley with Beer Trench and the junction of the latter with Hop Alley, had been completely obliterated by shell fire, so that it was difficult to tell when the objective had been reached. As a consequence one platoon of the Somersets rushed on towards Ginchy, but returned and joined up with the remainder of the Company and consolidation was proceeded with, a more useful post for bombers and Lewis guns being established some sixty yards up Vat Alley.

The left flank Company (C), whose task it was to capture Hop Alley, had the stiffest job. The bombers found little difficulty in rushing and establishing a post at the junction of the Alley with Beer Trench. But at the western end of the Alley, where it joined up with Delville Wood, the Germans had two

machine guns in a sap, and they also put down a heavy trench-mortar barrage in front of the second wave of the Somerset men. A young subaltern was the first to reach the enemy's trench in which some 90 Germans were killed and a few prisoners taken. In this part of the line the enemy's troops were found ready, wearing their equipment.

The whole of Hop Alley having passed into the hands of the Somerset men, the latter then began to bomb northwards up Beer Trench to the junction of the latter with Ale Alley. But the Battalion on the left of C Company had been unable to work up Ale Valley and join hands as arranged. The Somersets were therefore forced to retire, but a barricade was established in Beer Trench some 30 yards N. of Hop Alley.

Of B Company which, as soon as the attacking Company had gone forward, began to dig like mad the new communication trench ordered between Beer Trench and the old British line, the C.O. reported: "This Company worked very hard. They dug new C.T. under a heavy fire and did it quickly and well. Also carried wire, stakes, etc., to the front line. Sent back 82 prisoners under escort. Carried bombs and sand-bags. Put up artillery boards. Sent 20 men to fill gap on our left. Sent 20 men to make and hold a strong point in gap between right Companies. Sent 30 men to support C Company in Hop Alley." And then, when night had fallen, the remainder of this gallant Company carried bombs, S.A.A., water, etc., to the front line.

The inevitable German counter-attack came about 6 p.m. In extended order the enemy advanced from Pint Trench, but rifle fire and Lewis-gun fire met their advance and the attack melted away. At 6.30 p.m. they again attempted to advance, this time in small batches, but were again repulsed. This last attack cost the enemy about 200 casualties.

All along the line snipers were very active, and the Somerset snipers, lying some 25 yards out in front of their new trenches, had difficulty in coping with the enemy's marksmen, who were everywhere.

At 8 p.m. the Germans were again observed from Hop Alley massing for an attack, but Lewis and Vickers guns took them in flank, and with the guns which opened fire about 8.30 p.m. the threatened attack was broken up.

The night of the 18th/19th August was a terrible trial to the 6th Battalion, for by the time darkness had fallen the enemy's artillery had got the range of the newly won trenches and had put down a very heavy bombardment from guns of all calibre on the Somerset men, who worked strenuously in consolidating their position, but all the same casualties were heavy.

The Somersets were relieved at 4.15 a.m. on the 20th September. Thus ended another phase of the Battle of Delville Wood, a phase which cost the Regiment: 5 officers killed, and seven other officers wounded. In other ranks 48 had been killed and 220 wounded and missing (including Private Every). On the 22nd the 43rd Brigade was paraded and the Brigadier complimented the 6th Somersets especially on the fine behaviour of the Battalion in Delville Wood.

SOLDIER'S SONG

"In Delville Wood - in Delville Wood,
The German foe in thousands lay,
And no-man's land, with British blood,
Ran red as wine that summer's day -
We'd sworn to take it - and we would!
God help the Bosche in Delville Wood!

"In Delville Wood - in Delville Wood.
As inch by inch the ground we gained,
With bullet, steel, and smashing butt,
We fought and fell, till few remained;
But Boer and Briton steadfast stood,
For Freedom's sake - in Delville Wood!

"To Delville Wood, to Delville Wood,
We faced his fire, and forced our way
To where his grim machine-guns stood,
And where he fiercely turned at bay -
We'd sworn to beat him - and we would!
We'd turn him out of Delville Wood!

"In Delville Wood - in Delville Wood,
'Midst splintered trees and shattered wrack,
From morn till night we still made good
'Gainst shot and shell and massed attack,
We'd sworn to win, so firm we stood -
Or died like men - in Delville Wood!

"In Delville Wood - in Delville Wood,
The shattered trees are green with leaves,
And flowers bloom where cannons stood,
And rich the fields with golden sheaves -
Sleep soft ye dead, for God is good -
And peace has come to Delville Wood!"

43987 Private Frederick EVERY
9th Battalion
King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

Husband of Margaret Ellen Pritchard (formerly Every) of 12 Downside Terrace, Trebanog, Porth. Glamorgan

Died 4th June 1917

Aged 29

Buried in Achiet-Le-Grand Communal Cemetery Extension, Pas de Calais, France

Achiet-Le-Grand is a village 19 kilometres south of Arras.



Achiet-Le-Grand Communal Cemetery Extension

Achiet-le-Grand was occupied by the 7th Bedfords on 17th March 1917, lost on 25th March 1918. From April 1917 to March 1918, the village was occupied by the 45th and 49th Casualty Clearing Stations. Achiet station was an allied railhead.

9th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry



The 9th (Service) Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was formed at Pontefract in September 1914, as part of 3rd Kitchener Army. In October 1914 it was attached to 64th Brigade, 21st Division.

The 64th Brigade consisted of:
1st Battalion East Yorkshire Regt.
9th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.
10th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.
15th Battalion Durham Light Infantry..

It seems likely that Private Every was injured in action and taken to the Field Casualty Clearing Station at Achiet le Grand where he died of his wounds. It is therefore not possible without further research to know exactly in which action he was injured.

The Battalion was involved in the following actions during 1917 until June when Private Every died.

- First Battle of the Scarpe. 9th-14th Apr 1917, including the capture Monchy le Preux and the Wancourt Ridge.
- Third Battle of the Scarpe. 3rd-4th May 1917, including the capture of Fresnoy.
- Actions on the Hindenburg line. 20th May-16th Jun 1917.

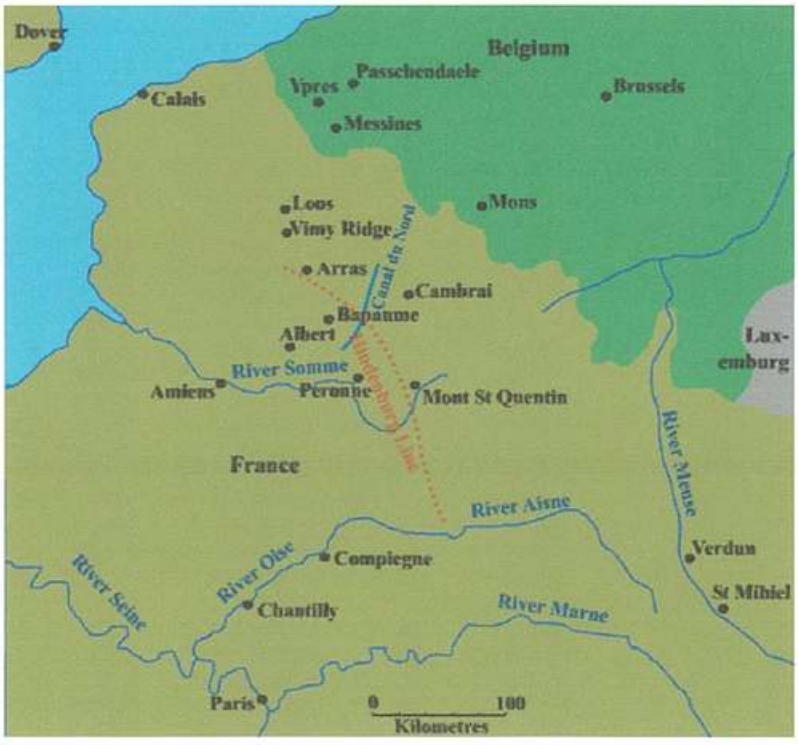
It is probably during the last action that he received his injuries. No regimental or divisional accounts of the actions around the Hindenburg Line have been found to be able to ascertain details of the circumstances in which Private Every may have been injured.

HINDENBURG LINE



German bunker in the Hindenburg Line, Spring 1917

The Hindenburg Line was a vast system of defences in Northern France constructed by the Germans during the winter of 1916-17. It ran Cerny, east of Soissons, on the Aisne to a point near Beaurains and Neuville Vitasse, just south of Arras and consisted of deep and wide trenches, thick belts of barbed wire, concrete machine-gun positions, concrete bunkers, tunnels and command posts. It was considered virtually impregnable by the Germans. The British offensives of 1917-1918 were to prove otherwise.



The Hindenburg Line

THE GERMAN WITHDRAWAL TO THE HINDENBURG LINE

The close of the Battle of the Somme in November 1916 left both the British and German Armies exhausted. In order to save manpower the Germans decided to reduce the length of their front and shorten their lines of communication. In the case of their retreat to the Hindenburg Line at St. Quentin they fell back a distance of almost 40 miles. The German withdrawal was a complete surprise to the British and it was only towards the end of February 1917, when a patrol of the 21st Manchesters at Serre on the Somme battlefield discovered that the trenches opposite them were empty, that it was realised that the German retreat eastwards had commenced.

Making every effort to delay the following British troops, the Germans lay waste everything before them. Wells were poisoned, trees felled, houses destroyed, bridges blown up. Every now and again the Germans would halt and a pitched battle would ensue, but by the 21st March 1917 the retreating Germans had reached St. Quentin and occupied the Hindenburg Line defences. The British and French Armies now "dug in" on the outskirts of the city with the Cathedral well within view.

But the Germans were to prove difficult to dislodge and the first attacks outside the town at Savy and Francilly-Selency proved costly to the attacking British battalions. Entry into the city eluded the Allies and with the British battalions required elsewhere, the French XI Corps took over the trench line on the 20th May 1917 – but the British would be back.

Sir Douglas Haig's 3rd Despatch (German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line), 31st May 1917

The Enemy's Retreat
The General Withdrawal

For some time prior to this date a number of indications had been observed which made it probable that the area of the German withdrawal would be yet further extended.

It had been ascertained that the enemy was preparing a new defensive system, known as the Hindenburg Line, which, branching off from his original defences near Arras, ran south-eastwards for twelve miles to Queant, and thence passed west of Cambrai towards St. Quentin. Various "switches", branching off from this line were also under construction.

The enemy's immediate concern appeared to be to escape from the salient between Arras and Le Transloy, which would become increasingly difficult and dangerous to hold as our advance on the Ancre drove ever more deeply into his defences.

It was also evident, however, from the preparations he was making that he contemplated an eventual evacuation of the greater salient between Arras and the Aisne Valley, north-west of Reims.

By this date (early April 1917) our troops were established on the general line Selency, Jeancourt, Epehy, Ruyaulcourt, Doignies, Mercatel, Beaurains, East of Selency, and between Doignies and our old front line east of Arras, our troops were already close up to the main Hindenburg defences.

Between Selency and Doignies the enemy still held positions some distance in advance of his new system. During the succeeding days our efforts were directed to driving him from these advanced positions, and to pushing our posts forward until contact had been established all along our front south of Arras with the main defences of the Hindenburg Line.

The German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line

by German Journalist Karl Rosner (published in March 1917)

Our retreat from the old positions on the Ancre and the Somme [note: - the retreat to the Hindenburg Line] has frustrated the whole of the planned great French and English spring offensive against our centre. The enemy, advancing behind us, finds a zone which has been prepared by us as a battle glacis in front of our new positions.

Every German who knows the character and sensibilities of our highest leaders knows that it was no easy decision for them to make the terrain, which for two and a half years we had carefully spared, now ruthlessly serviceable for military purposes. But here there were greater things at stake than considerations for part of a country which had refused us peace. Here the guiding principle for our military decisions could only be that which would bring us the greatest advantages, and for the enemy the most frightful disadvantage.

Therefore, in the course of the last month great strips of France were converted by us into a dead land, which, ten, twelve to fifteen kilometres broad, stretches in front of the whole length of our new positions and offers a ghastly wall of emptiness for every enemy who designs to get at them.

No village, no hamlet, remains standing in this glacis - no street remains traversable; no bridge, no railway tracks, no railroad embankment, remains. Where once were woods, only stumps are left. The wells have been blown up; wires and cables destroyed.

Like a vast band, a kingdom of death stretches before our new positions. And this is the terrain over which the enemy must now attack us.

No cellar that might serve his troops for shelter remains from which he might build. All our own material was long ago removed, and all local sources from which they might be obtained have been annihilated. The giant trees lining the chaussees have been felled and lie across the roads, and the meadows were ploughed up in the early rain; cannon that would attempt to pass here would be swallowed up.

As far as the eye can see, the land is bare and desert, a uniform, forbidding, open field of fire, through which the ribbon of road we are following runs as a last remnant of extinct civilization. And even the road will only give passage for a few days longer across the desert. At the crossways it is mined.

17219 Corporal Charles CLARK
6th Battalion
Somerset Light Infantry

(Listed as Clarke in the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission)

Died 23rd March 1918

Shown as 'of Montacute' in the S.L.I. records

Buried in Noyon New British Cemetery, France



Noyon New British Cemetery

Noyon Old British Cemetery was made by the 46th Casualty Clearing Station and the 44th Field Ambulance in March, 1918, in a woodyard near the railway station. All the graves except the French were removed, after the Armistice, to the New British Cemetery on a hill North of the town. Noyon. It was made after the Armistice by the concentration of graves from other burial grounds and from the battlefields. There are now over 250 1914-18 war casualties commemorated in this site. Of these, nearly 100 are unidentified and 108 other identified collectively but not individually, are marked by headstones superscribed: "Buried near this spot'. The date of death in every case is in 1918.

6th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry



The 6th (Service) Battalion Somerset Light Infantry was formed at Taunton, in August 1914, as part of the First Kitchener Army. It was attached to the 43rd Brigade, 14th (Light) Division.

43rd Brigade.

6th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry.
9th Battalion Cameronians.
6th Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.
7th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps..

Details of the action in which Corporal Clarke probably met his death

From the details above and given the date of his death (23rd March 1918) it seems likely that Corporal Clarke was injured in action and taken to the Field Ambulance or Casualty Clearing Station at Noyon where he died.

The only action in which his Brigade was engaged at about the time of his death was the Battle of St. Quentin. 21st-23rd March 1918. The 43rd Brigade then formed part of the 3rd Corps of the 5th Army. Noyon is some 25 miles from St. Quentin but considerably less than that from where Corporal Clarke was probably injured.

Background

Following the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line in the Spring of 1917, the British Army moved into the sector around St Quentin in April (see Private Frederick Every). During this period there were many small unit actions among the villages while the new British line was established. A final line was formalised in an arc around St Quentin and it differed from the rest of the British front in that it wasn't always a continuous line of trenches – there were many outposts, gaps in the line and large areas of disputed territory. During the winter of 1917/18 the positions in this part of the British sector were vastly improved, revolving around 'defence in depth' – an outer battle zone, a redoubt line and a rear line. While most of the redoubts were complete by March 1918, the rear zone was still under construction. By mid-February 1918, the Germans had moved many Divisions from the now collapsed Eastern front to the West. It was believed that they had 177 Divisions in France and Flanders, out of their world-wide total of 241. Of these, 110 were in the front line of which 50 faced the short British front. A further 67 were in reserve, with 31 facing the BEF. With British intelligence sure that a German offensive was coming, this was the situation the Fifth Army found itself in by mid-March 1918.

The Battle of St Quentin - 21st/23rd March 1918

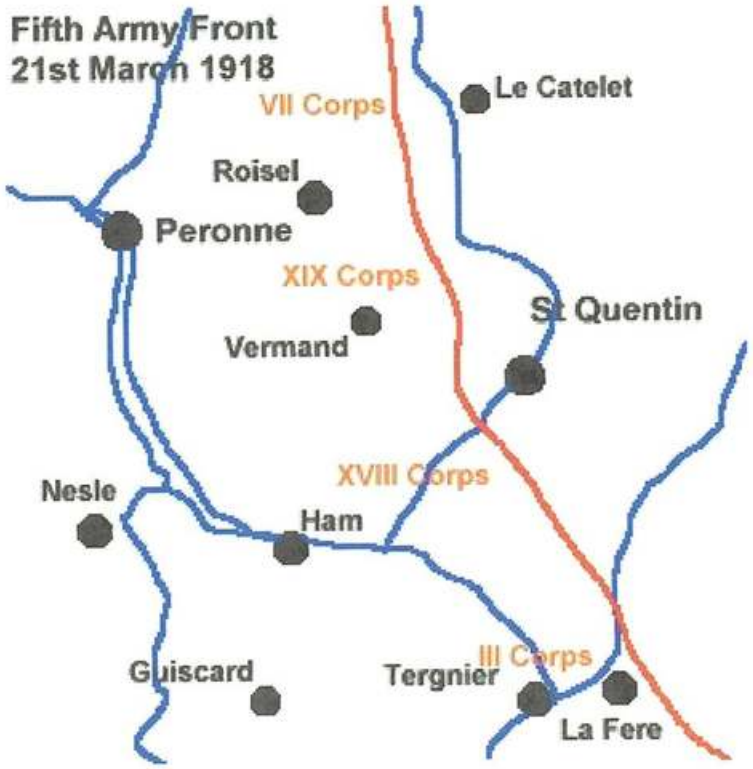
Most of the area that was about to be attacked had only very recently been taken over by the British. The 'line' taken over from the French barely existed, and much labouring and construction work would be needed to put it in a defensible state. Unfortunately, there was also a manpower crisis in the army and the labour was just not available. When the battle opened, few of the defensive positions were ready, and the second and third lines did not exist at all.

21st March 1918 - Exceptionally heavy German shellfire hit all areas of British front occupied by Fifth Army, most of the front of Third Army, and some of the front of First Army, at 4.40a.m. The main weight of attack was

between Arras and a few miles south of Saint-Quentin. The intense barrage was concentrated not on the infantry holding the forward posts, but on British artillery and machine-gun positions, headquarters, telephone exchanges, railways and other important centres of communications. In other words it was a very deep barrage designed to knock out the British ability to respond.

German infantry began to attack between 7.00a.m and 9.40a.m. New infiltration tactics meant that infantry continued to probe forward through gaps regardless of what was happening either side, while follow-up units besieged and engaged British posts and defended villages. Many of these held out, and only fell once entirely surrounded and hopeless.

The weather was damp with thick fog in the early morning. This, combined with smoke from the bombardments of both sets of artillery, made visibility poor throughout the day although the fog itself cleared by late morning.



The 14th (Light) Division was holding a 2.5 mile front, with 6th Somersets, 9th KRRC and 8th/KRRC holding front positions. These were overwhelmed by just after 9a.m, and the enemy reached the Battle Zone by 11a.m. Some posts in Forward Zone near Urvillers held out until 4p.m. They were opposed by 4 Divisions who had a superiority of 4:1.

By the close of the day the Germans had broken through on a large front – all along the sector held by Fifth Army. The offensive was to continue until

it finally broke at Villers-Bretonneux and north of Albert in April 1918. By this time both sides had lost on average more than 11,000 men each per day of the offensive.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE 6TH BATTALION SOMERSET LIGHT INFANTRY IN THE BATTLE OF ST. QUENTIN

The following is an extract from the official history of the Somerset Light Infantry in the First World War:

'Three German Armies, the Seventeenth, Second, and Eighteenth, were to launch the enemy's offensive on 21st March. The Seventeenth Army was to attack the British line from Croisilles to Mreuvres, and the Second and Eighteenth Armies the line from and between Villers Guislain and La Fere. The Flesquieres Salient (called by the Germans the Cambrai re-entrant) was only to be attacked indirectly "by the inner flanks of the Seventeenth and Second Armies, the enemy hoping to pinch it off by the weight of his attacks north and south of the Salient.

For some time preceding the 21st March, the enemy had deluged the British front all along the line with a particularly virulent type of gas shell, known as mustard gas. Its effects were deadly. Men who had worn their gas masks for six hours, long after the shelling had ceased, were gassed as soon as they took their masks off, the fumes of the gas having clung to their clothes. The gas clung everywhere, to the ground, to the woods, to anything in fact of an absorbent nature.

Just before dawn on 21st the enemy opened a terrific bombardment with gas and high-explosive shells, from guns of all calibre, including trench mortars, along practically the whole front of the Fifth (right) and Third (left) Armies. Not only were the front-line and communication trenches swept by a continuous storm of shell, but the road centres and railways as far back as St. Pol were under fire from high-velocity guns. A thick mist hung over the whole battle field and the S.O.S. signals sent up by the outpost line were hidden from the British O.Ps. and the machine guns of units in the front line.

On the trenches and sub-sector held by the 6th Somersets the enemy's bombardment appears to have fallen about 4.30 a.m., and the Battalion Diary talks of the mustard gas as a new kind of shell, the smell of which was not pleasant, but had the effect of sleeping gas. At 8.30 a.m. the gas shelling ceased though the hostile guns continued to pour high-explosive shell on to the British lines, but long before that hour all telephone wires were cut and

visual signalling, owing to the fog, was impossible. The Battalions in the front line were isolated, unable to communicate the situation to Brigade Headquarters or call on their artillery to assist them.

The hour of the enemy's infantry assault varied in different sectors, but shortly before 10 a.m. it had become general along the whole front. Favoured by the thick fog, in massed formation, shoulder to shoulder, and singing songs to hearten them, the German infantry came on, wave after wave, with the intention of breaking everywhere through the British front and sweeping the remnants back to the coast. The 6th Somersets had posted extra sentries at all points, but the enemy was upon the front line ere ever the gallant troops had an opportunity of repelling them. All detachments holding the outpost positions were overwhelmed or surrounded, in many places before they were able to pass back information concerning the enemy's attack. Behind the front line men had been brought up and battle stations manned, and it was these troops who were able to bring the enemy to a standstill, or hold up the advance after he had overrun the front line. The forward companies of the 6th Somersets held out in their strong points till late in the afternoon. No assistance being sent them these strong points eventually fell one by one, the last falling at about 5 p.m. At about 10.20 a.m. a runner had arrived, breathless almost, with the news that the enemy was in the Battalion's front line. The Support Company of the Somersets and Battalion Headquarters then moved into a strong point named Egypt, but they had scarcely established themselves there when fighting began. Two pigeons, with messages calling for assistance, were then despatched, all papers were burnt and the garrison of the strong point prepared to sell their lives dearly. By 10.30 a.m. the enemy's troops in great numbers were streaming down the St. Quentin from from both flanks: they poured into and overran La Folie Quarry and, five minutes later, were reported pushing towards Benay and Cerizy.

It is probable that by this time the 6th Somersets, as a Battalion, had almost ceased to exist, for now a tiny party consisting of the Adjutant, six runners and two signallers began to fight their way back to Brigade Headquarters to warn the Brigadier and all strong points on the way. At 11.10 a.m. the officer reached Brigade Headquarters. He was followed ten minutes later by two of the six runners, and finally one of the signallers succeeded in reaching Brigade Headquarters. They were the sole survivors of 20 officers and 540 other ranks of the 6th Somerset Light Infantry actually in the front line at the time of the attack.'

62068 Lance Bombardier George LOWMAN
'D' Battery, 20th Brigade
Royal Field Artillery

Son of George and Elizabeth Jane Lowman of Lowertown, Montacute

Died 3rd October 1918

Aged 23

Buried at Sarigol Military Cemetery, Kriston, Greece

Kriston is a village some 40 kilometres north of the town of Thessalonika, Greece



Sarigol Military Cemetery, Kriston

From April to June 1917, the 35th Casualty Clearing Station was at Sarigol. It was replaced by the 21st Stationary Hospital, which remained until December 1918. From these two hospitals, 150 burials were made in the cemetery, many of them men who had been wounded in the Allied attack on the Grand-Couronne and Pip Ridge in April-May 1917, and September 1918. With a few exceptions, the burials were made from 31st Casualty Clearing Station between August 1916 and October 1918. Sarigol Military Cemetery now contains 682 Commonwealth burials of the First World War and 29 war graves of other nationalities.

D' Battery, 20th Brigade Royal Field Artillery



The Royal Regiment of Artillery was divided into the Royal Horse Artillery (RHA), Royal Field Artillery (RFA) and Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). Each of these groups was further divided into brigades and batteries. Brigades were numbered and consisted of three or four batteries. Each battery had a strength of about 200 officers and men and comprised of four or six guns divided into two or three sections of two guns each. The RFA were attached to infantry divisions and used 18-pdr guns or 4.5-inch howitzers. The 20th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery was part of the 27th Division from its formation in November 1914 to November 1918.

Details of the action in which Lance Bombardier Lowman met his death

As he is buried in Sarigol Cemetery it is likely that Lance Bombardier Lowman was injured or taken ill, suffering from say malaria, and transferred to the 21st Stationary Hospital where he died. It is therefore not possible to be precise as to when he suffered his injuries or was taken ill but it was almost certainly at the time of an engagement on the Grand Couronne or Pip Ridge.

Macedonia (Salonika) 1918

SALONIKA EXPEDITION OVERVIEW

Background



The following is information from various sources and give some idea of what was involved in the Salonika campaign where, for every casualty of battle, three died of malaria, influenza or other diseases.

The campaign in Macedonia (Salonika) was considered by many to be a "side-show". The Allied army was known back home as the "Gardeners of Salonika" due to the apparent lack of activity and people would comment "*If you want a holiday, go to Salonika*".

Despite the view of those at home, life in Macedonia was far from easy. The British Salonika Force not only had to cope with the extremes in temperature but also malaria. Many men suffered numerous relapses made worse by having to remain in Macedonia. Even when they were finally evacuated many would still suffer relapses for many years to come.

In October 1915, a combined Franco-British force of some two large brigades was landed at Salonika at the request of the Greek Prime Minister. The objective was to help the Serbs in their fight against Bulgarian aggression. However the expedition arrived too late, the Serbs having been beaten before they landed. It was decided to keep the force in place for

future operations, even against Greek opposition. The outcome of the Gallipoli campaign was in the balance and most shipping in the area was involved so they really had no choice.

The original two Brigades eventually were reinforced by larger units until 22nd, 26th, 27th and 28th Divisions were there. At the beginning of 1918, the Allied troops in Salonika were prepared for a major offensive intended to end the war in the Balkans. The Greek Army had been reorganised and joined the Allied force. The offensive began in July 1918, but the British contingent did not play a significant part until early September. Then the British attacked a series of fortified hills. The final assault began along the whole front on 15th September 1918, the British being engaged in the Lake Doiran area.

This Battle was really on the 18th and 19th September 1918 and was a disaster for the British Divisions. They had to frontally assault 'Pip Ridge' which was a 2000 foot high heavily defended mountain ridge with fortresses built on some of the higher mountains, notably Grand Couronne. They sustained very heavy casualties. Whilst as an artilleryman Lance Bombardier Lowman would not have been directly involved in the assaults, the following report from one involved gives some idea of what the men went through.

By 'An Unprofessional Soldier' on the Staff of 28th Division.

"The Battle of Doiran is now a forgotten episode of the Great War, overshadowed by the doings of Haig in France and Allenby in Palestine. ....The very name of the battle is unknown to most. Yet, in singularity of horror and in tragedy of defeated heroism, it is unique among the records of British arms.

The real work of the assault was entrusted to the men of the 22nd and 26th Divisions, who were to attack the Doiran hills, co-operating with the Cretan Division of the Greek Army and a regiment of unreliable Zouaves. (French Colonial troops)

Our attack on 'Pip Ridge' was led by 12th Cheshire's. The battle opened with a crash of machine-gun fire, and a cloud of dusty smoke began to blur the outline of the hills.

Almost immediately the advancing battalion was overwhelmed in a deadly steam of bullets which came whipping and whistling down the open slopes. Those who survived were followed by a battalion of Lancashire men, and a remnant of this undaunted infantry fought its way over the first and second lines of trenches – if indeed the term line" can be applied to a highly complicated and irregular system of defence, taking full advantage of every fold or contortion of the ground. In its turn, a Shropshire battalion ascended the fatal ridge.

By this time the battle of the "Pips" was a mere confusion of massacre, noise and futile bravery. Nearly all the men of the first two battalions were lying dead or wounded on the hillside. The attack was ending in a bloody disaster.

No orders could reach the isolated cluster of men who were still trying to advance on the ridge. There was only one possible ending to the assault. Our troops "fell back to their original positions". Of this falling back I will say nothing. There are times when even desperate heroism has to acknowledge defeat.

The Welsh Brigade was advancing towards Grand Couronne. No feat of arms can ever surpass the glorious bravery of those Welshmen. There was lingering gas in the Jumeaux Ravine (probably ours!) and some of the men had to fight in respirators.

Imagine if you can, what it means to fight up a hillside under a deadly fire, wearing a hot mask over your face, dimly staring through a pair of clouded goggles, and sucking the end of a rubber nozzle in your mouth. At the same time heat is pouring down on you from a brazen sky. In this plight you are called on to endure the blast of machine-gun fire, the pointed steel or bursting shell of the enemy. Nor are you called on to endure alone; you must vigorously fire back, and vigorously assail with your own bayonet. It is as much like hell as anything you can think of.

Welsh Fusiliers got as far as the Hilt, only half a mile below the central fortress, before being driven back by a fierce Bulgarian charge. Every officer was killed or wounded. Following these came the 11th Welsh, who were also compelled to retire fighting. A third Welsh battalion was offered up, to perish, on that awful day. The 7th South Wales Borderers nobly stormed up through the haze of battle until they had come near the hills of The Tassel and The Knot, Then, all at once, the haze lifted, and they were left exposed in the open to a sweeping and overwhelming fire. Melting away as they charged, a party of Welshmen ran up the slopes of Grand Couronne itself and fell dead among the rocks. Of the whole battalion, only one officer and eighteen men were alive at the end of the day. All night, unheard in the tumult of a new bombardment, wounded men were crying on the hillsides or down in the long ravines.

Those troops had been flung against positions no infantry in the world could ever have taken by a frontal attack, and they had proved themselves to be good soldiers. Two entire Brigades had been practically annihilated.

Fighting on into a maze of enemy entanglements, the Scotsmen were being annihilated, their flanks withering under a terrible enfilade. A fine battalion of East Lancashire's attempted to move up in support. The 65th Brigade launched another forlorn attack on the Pip Ridge. The broken remains of two Brigades were presently in retreat, leaving behind more than half their number, killed, wounded or missing.

We had now sustained 3,871 casualties in the Doiran battle. Our troops were incapable of any further effort. A terrible high proportion had been lost or disabled. We gained only the unimportant ruins of Doiran Town and a cluster of small hills immediately above it, never of any value to the enemy or strongly defended. The fortress of Grand Couronne was unshaken, with crumpled bodies of men and a litter of awful wreckage below it.

No one can view the result of the operation as anything but a tactical defeat. Had it been an isolated engagement, there would have been every prospect of disaster. The whole plan of the battle and its conduct are open to devastating criticism; but so are the plans and the conduct of a great majority of battles".

On 30th September 1918 (three days before the death of Lance Bombardier Lowman) the Great War ended in Salonika.

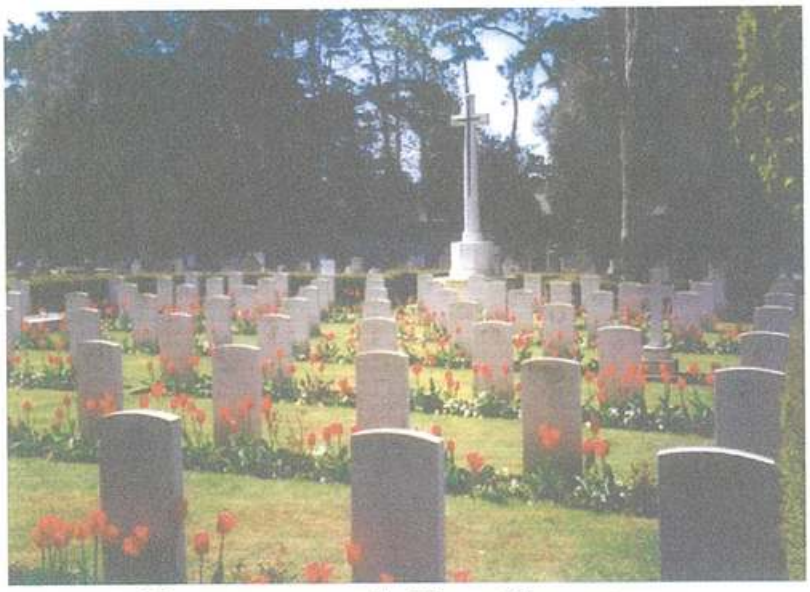
30746 Private Ernest Sydney Thomas LOWMAN
4th (Reserve) Battalion Somerset Light Infantry

Son of George and Elizabeth Jane Lowman of Lowertown, Montacute

Died 25th February 1917

Aged 19

Buried at Bournemouth East Cemetery, Bournemouth, England



Bournemouth East Cemetery

Some of the 120 First World War burials in this cemetery are those of soldiers who died in Bournemouth's auxiliary and private hospitals

4th (Reserve) Battalion Somerset Light Infantry



In 1908 the Somerset Light Infantry were allotted two Territorial Force battalions, the 4th and 5th. These were formed from the members of the three existing volunteer battalions which were amalgamated for this purpose. Headquarters of the 4th Battalion were placed at Bath, its recruitment area being the northern part of the county.

Upon formation, the 2/4th Battalion joined the 45th Division, and on 12th December 1914, sailed for India. The 3/4th (presumably Private Lowman's Battalion) provided the 4th (Reserve) Battalion. This Battalion remained in UK throughout the war.

The cause of the death of Private Lowman is not known but it would seem probably not to have been the result of enemy action as his battalion was in the UK at the time of his death and the remainder of the 4th battalion was in Mesopotamia.

P/1868(S) Private Edgar G. MALE
Royal Marine Light Infantry

(Listed as E. R. Male in the records of the
Commonwealth War Graves Commission)

Unit: Royal Marine Depot, Deal

Son of George and Sarah Male of Bishopston, Montacute

Died 27th January 1917

Aged 19

Buried at Deal Cemetery, Kent, England

For many years, Deal has had associations with the Corps of Royal Marines. Deal Cemetery contains war graves of both wars. The 127 First World War burials (including those of three unidentified Naval ratings) are scattered throughout the cemetery grounds.

Royal Marine Light Infantry



The Royal Naval Division

At the outbreak of the War, there was a surplus of some 20-30,000 men on the Reserves of the Royal Navy who would not find jobs on any ship of war. It was recognised that this was sufficient to form two Naval Brigades, and a Brigade of Marines who became known as the Royal Naval Division and fought as land soldiers, mainly infantry. The Division transferred from the authority of the Admiralty to the War Office on 29th April 1916, and was redesignated the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division on 19th July 1916. The Division moved to France, arriving Marseilles 12th-23rd May 1916, after which it remained on the Western Front.

There were originally four Royal Marine Light Infantry Battalions, Chatham Deal, Plymouth and Portsmouth. They were re-organised in 1915 into two - the 1st (from Chatham and Deal Battalions) and 2nd (from Plymouth and Portsmouth Battalions) Battalions.

When Chatham and Deal Battalions amalgamated the new Battalion (1st Royal Marine Light Infantry) contained a mix from all previous Battalions. When Portsmouth and Plymouth Battalions amalgamated (2nd Royal Marine Light Infantry), their Marines came from these two Divisions only, but Portsmouth and Plymouth Marines could join either 1st or 2nd Royal Marine Light Infantry.

In view of the above, it is difficult to ascertain in which battalion Private Male was serving. He seems to have a Plymouth service number (P/1868(S)) but was serving at Deal so it was likely to 2nd Royal Marine Light Infantry.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission record lists him as serving at Royal Marine Depot, Deal at the time of his death so it is probable that this

was not due to enemy action, but without his service record or a detailed regimental history it is impossible to be certain.

Both the Royal Marine units were serving in France at about the time that Private Male met his death and had been engaged in the battle of the Ancre 13th – 18th November 1916, where they suffered severe casualties. If Private Male had been repatriated home because of injury then this the likely battle he would have been involved in.

The cost of this operation was great. The Royal Naval Division was decimated. The casualty figures which follow are by deduction from various sources, bearing in mind that the battalions were around 500 men strong.

1st Royal Marine Light Infantry
The war diary states that the battalion advanced 490 strong and returned with 138, having had 47 other ranks killed, 210 wounded and 85 missing. Of the 22 officers engaged only 2 returned, 6 being killed, 11 wounded and 3 missing.

2nd Royal Marine Light Infantry
The diary for this unit wasn't so comprehensive in accounting for its casualties. It is reasonable to assume that the battalion started with roughly the same number of men. An educated guess for 13th November is: Killed: 3 officers 81 other ranks Wounded: 12 officers, 200 other ranks.

201833 Private Frank PARSONS
2ND/4TH Battalion Hampshire Regiment

Died 22nd November 1917

Buried at Jerusalem War Cemetery



Jerusalem War Cemetery

Jerusalem War Cemetery is 4.5 kilometres north of the walled city and is situated on the neck of land at the north end of the Mount of Olives, to the west of Mount Scopus.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Palestine (now Israel) was part of the Turkish Empire and it was not entered by Allied forces until December 1916. The advance to Jerusalem took a further year, but from 1914 to December 1917, about 250 Commonwealth prisoners of war were buried in the German and Anglo-German cemeteries of the city. Jerusalem War Cemetery was begun after the occupation of the city, with 270 burials. It was later enlarged to take graves from the battlefields and smaller cemeteries in the neighbourhood. There are now 2,514 Commonwealth burials of the First World War in the cemetery, 100 of them unidentified.

2ND/4TH Battalion Hampshire Regiment



The Battalion, a Territorial force, was formed at Salisbury Plain in September 1914. It became part of 2/1st Hampshire Brigade, 2nd Wessex Division. On 13th December 1914, it sailed for India, becoming part of 4th (Quetta) Division, a Regular Division of the Indian Army. In April 1917 it was transferred to the 75th (British) Division and on 29th April 1917 left for Egypt, landing at Suez. 15th May 1917.

The 75th Division was formed in Egypt in April/May 1917 from first and second line Territorial Force Battalions from India. As British units were disbanded or posted to other units they were replaced with Indian units.

It comprised the following Infantry Units:

232nd Brigade.
1/5th Bn Devonshire Regt.

2/4th Bn Somerset Light Infantry.
2/5th Bn Hampshire Regt.

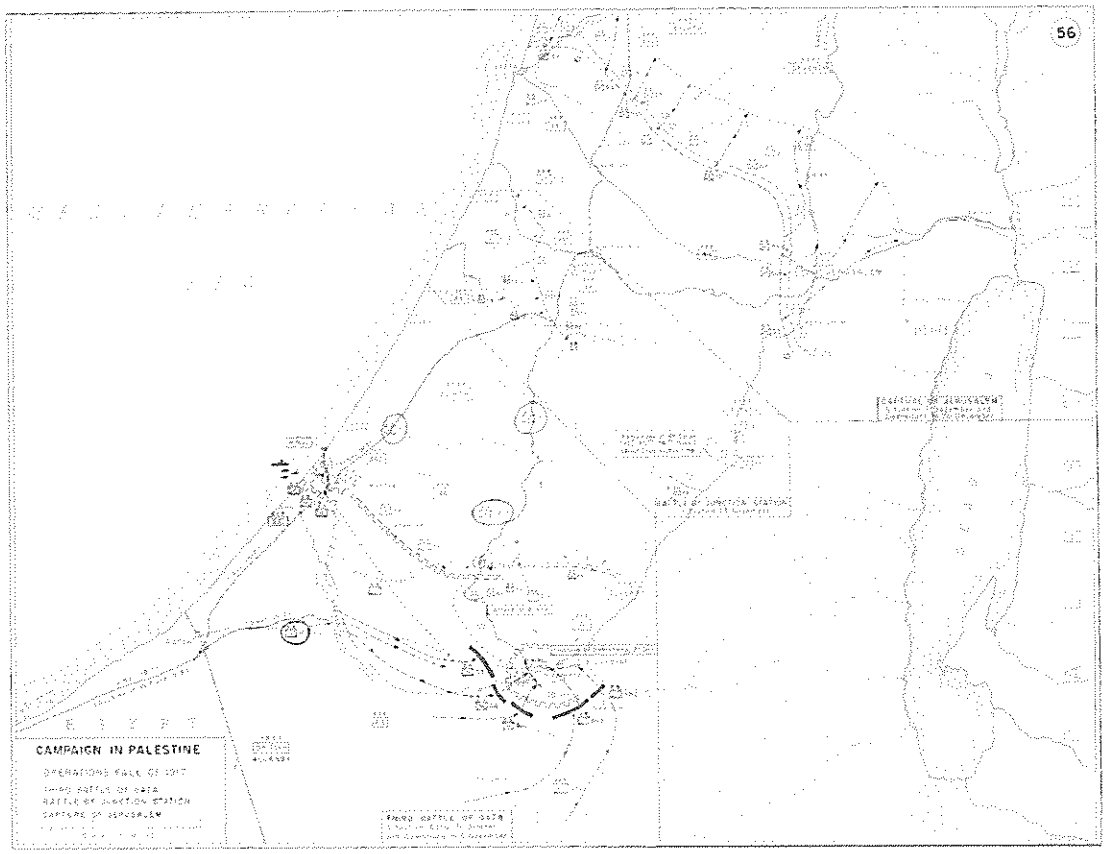
233rd Brigade.
1/5th Bn Somerset Light Infantry.
2/4th Bn Hampshire Regt.
1/4th Bn Wiltshire Regt.

234th Brigade.
1/4th Bn Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.
2/4th Bn Dorsetshire Regt.

Attached Troops.
2nd Bn Loyal North Lancashire Regt.

It was involved in the following Battles and Engagements
Second Battle of Gaza. 17th-19th April 1917.
Third Battle of Gaza. 27th October-7th November 1917.
Capture of Gaza. 1st-7th November 1917.
Capture of Junction Station. 13th-14th November 1917.
Battle of Nabi Samweil. 20th-24th November 1917.

Details of the action in which Private Parsons met his death



Map of the Campaign for the Capture of Jerusalem

From the above list of engagements it is almost certain that Private Parsons was killed at the Battle of Nabi Samweil. which was fought from the 20th-24th November 1917.

Background

General Allenby replaced General Murray as Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, in June 1917.

Allenby was convinced that the direct frontal offensive approach, which had failed in the First and Second Battles of Gaza, in March and April 1917, was not the way to proceed. The War Office met his demands for additional resources.. One infantry division (the 10th) was relocated from Salonika and another (75th) (Private Parsons' Division) constituted from various formations of the British and Indian troops stationed in Eygpt.

Thereafter, with the instruction of the War Cabinet to '...strike the Turks as hard as possible', Allenby's newly organised Palestine Force was largely on its own.

Allenby's Plan was to avoid a direct assault on Gaza, but rather to establish a defence line from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea through Jerusalem and Jaffa. Gaza would be initially be by-passed and he would concentrate on Beersheba seizing its water sources, which was considered essential. The advance on the Turkish positions protecting Beersheba began on 31st October 1917 and the water sources were captured.

The way was now open to Gaza. and it and Sheria fell to the British forces on 7th November 1917 This led to the withdrawal of most of the Turkish forces northwards from the Gaza-Beersheba line, leaving behind small rearguard forces in some redoubts.

Allenby's next move was to cut off the retreating Turkish armies. Various factors slowed this advance, including lengthened transportation lines. Meanwhile, some British units remained stalled in the Beersheba/Gaza area awaiting transport northwards.

Taking advantage of this, the Turkish Eighth Army, having largely escaped the Allies encircling net, prepared to make a stand around Junction: a town where the Jerusalem branch railway line joined the main line. Here, the Turks once again faced the British full on.

On 13th November 1917, the British launched an attack with XXI Corps (75th and 52nd Divisions), the Yeomanry Division and the Cavalry Brigade, up the Gaza road to Junction. After determined resistance by the Turks centred on El Maghar Ridge, a retreat started and the Turks fell back toward Junction. The 75th Division then successfully assaulted Junction, with the aid of armoured cars, and captured it on 14th November 1917. This broke the railway connection to Jerusalem. The road connection was also severed the following day by a spirited action of the ANZAC and British cavalry, and a breach between the two Turkish Armies was achieved.

Meanwhile, on the coast, Jaffa was taken on 16th November 1917 and the Turkish Seventh Army retreated to a new defence line behind the River Auja; about 4 miles north of Jaffa. This meant, despite losing 10,000 as POW's and a considerable number of dead, the weakened Turkish 7th and 8th Armies were still largely intact, although now intractably divided.

British casualties in the 16-day offensive were over 6,000.

The Battle for Jerusalem

The question for Allenby was whether to rest and consolidate his infantry and cavalry, or to push on regardless to seize the initiative and capture Jerusalem. Not least in his consideration was the weakened physical state of his own army. Many had suffered severely from a lack of water, the adverse weather, illness and the sheer physical effort required by the rapid advances of 40 to 60 miles respectively in the Eastern and the Western Sectors.

Military and political considerations demanded that the campaign should continue. So, after only one day of rest, on 17th November 1917, the campaign was renewed in a two-pronged offensive. Firstly, in the East, the weakened 7th Army was to be dislodged from the Judean Hills, so as to open up the road to Jerusalem. Secondly, in the West, the 8th Army would be curtailed within its defensive positions on the Mediterranean coast until Jerusalem had been taken.

The advance northwards into the Judean Hills by the main British force began on 18th November 1917. Not wishing to subject Jerusalem to a destructive direct assault, Allenby's aim was to approach the city from the rather more tactically problematic direction of the Northwest, via Nablus, thus isolating the Turkish forces in and around the city.

XXI Corps (including Private Parsons' Battalion) led the advance by clearing obstacles on the Jaffa-Jerusalem road. The cold winter rains had begun, with fog, and the poor roads and rocky hillsides made progress difficult. On November 21st British forces fought the Turks at Nebi Samweil, traditional site of Samuel's tomb and the slope was captured by the British that evening (this is almost certainly where Private Parsons was killed). Progress ground to a halt on 24th November 1917.

Jerusalem was captured on the 9th December 1917. Allenby's overall campaign had incurred casualties of 18,928 men set against 28,433 Turkish losses. Twelve thousand Turks were made POW's and 100 Turkish artillery guns were taken.

27231 Private Cyril ANDREWS
7th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry

Died 30th November 1917

Name included on the Cambrai Memorial, Louveral, in France as someone with no known grave.

The small village of Louverval is on the north side of the N30, Bapaume to Cambrai road, 13 kilometres north-east of Bapaume and 16 kilometres south-west of Cambrai.



Cambrai Memorial, Louveral

The Cambrai Memorial commemorates more than 7,000 servicemen of the United Kingdom and South Africa who died in the Battle of Cambrai in November and December 1917 and whose graves are not known.

7th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry



7th (Service) Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry was formed at Taunton, on 13th September 1914, as part of the 2nd Kitchener Army. It was attached to the 61st Brigade, 20th (Light) Division. The 20th (Light) Division arrived in France in July 1915 and served in France and Flanders until the Armistice.

Battles and Engagements
France and Flanders
The battle of Cambrai
The tank attack. 20th-21st November 1917.
Capture of Bourlon Wood. 23rd-28th November 1917.
German counter attacks. 30th November -3rd December 1917.

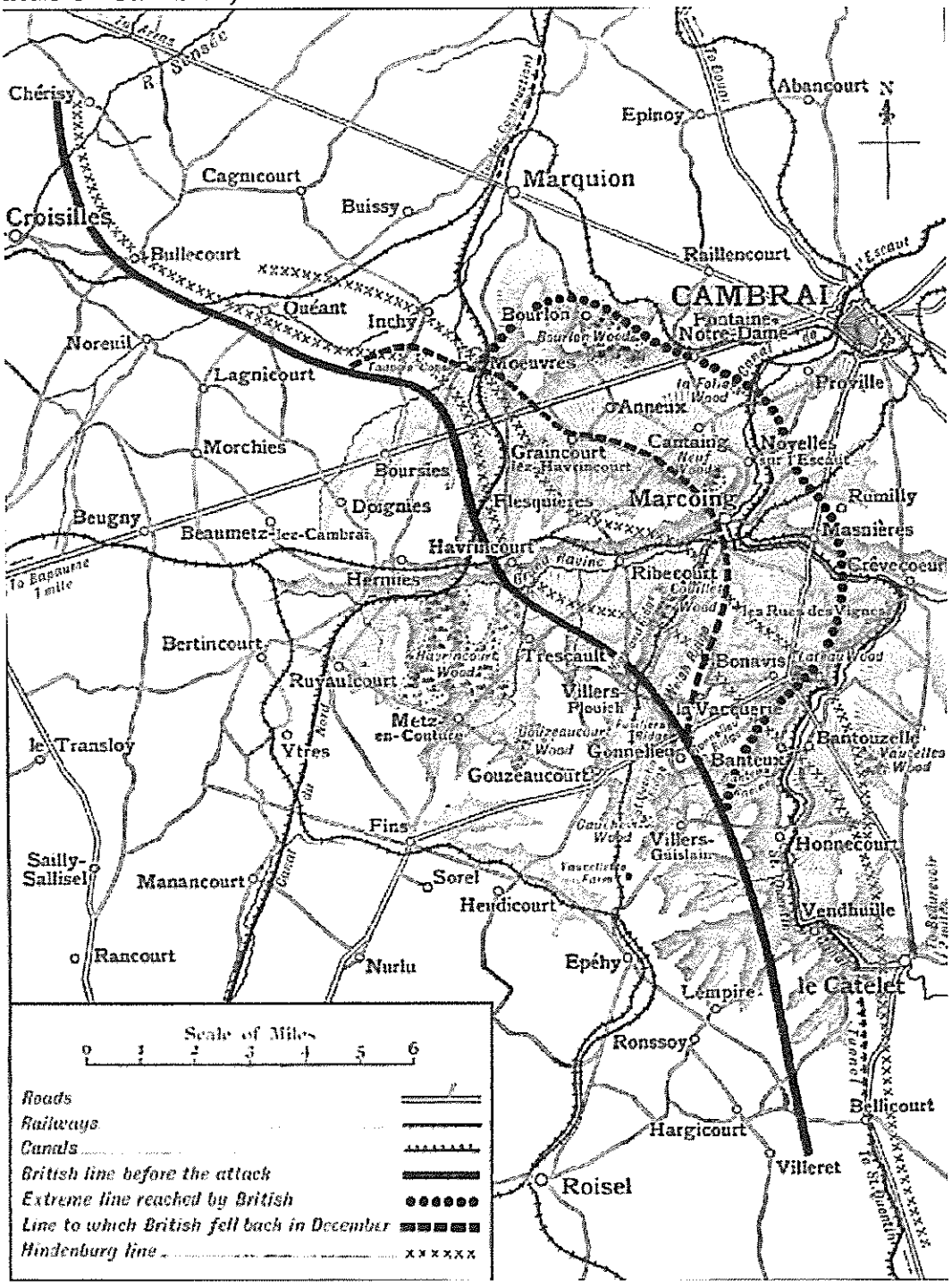
It consisted of :
Infantry Units
59th Brigade.

60th Brigade.

61st Brigade.
12th Battalion King's.
7th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry
7th Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.
7th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

Details of the action in which Private Andrews met his death

Battle of Cambrai, 20th November-7th December 1917



In early 1917, after losing ground at the Battle of the Somme, the Germans retired to a newly prepared line of strong fortifications - the Hindenburg Line - this consisted of two lines of seemingly invincible fortifications

On the 31st July 1917 the battle of Third Ypres began and with it came the rain. As the attacks on the Passchendaele Ridge subsequently ground to a halt, the proposal for an attack before the town of Cambrai was first made.

Lieutenant-Colonel JFC Fuller, chief of staff to the Tank Corps. He realized that armoured forces advocated a massed attack on ground not ravaged by battle and capable of carrying the weight of the tanks without bogging down.

Cambrai lay seven miles behind a sector of the Hindenburg line an was one of the most important railheads and HQ towns behind enemy lines. The topography of the rolling ground, in front of Cambrai offered the opportunity to test out the capability of the Mark IV tank to break through the new German defences. Not only was the ground suitable for tanks being relatively flat and well drained, but it had the advantage of having its flanks protected by the twin water features of river and canal, making a limited attack on a narrow frontage less problematic.

In mid-October Haig gave his approval for the Cambrai attack to take place on the 20th November. The intention was to break through along a 10,000-yard frontage between two canals, the Canal de L'Escaut on the right and the earthworks of the Canal du Nord on the left. In the west, the attack would pierce the Hindenburg Line and seize the ridge dominated by Bourlon Wood. In the east, the cavalry divisions would follow the tanks and infantry. They would cross the St Quentin Canal and break free to 'the green fields beyond'. Then would begin a cavalry sweep that would link up with the western arm of the pincer movement, encircling and capturing Cambrai in the process.

Initially the three brigades of Mark IV tanks would be supported by six infantry (12th, 20th (Private Andrews' Division), 6th, 51st, 62nd and 36th) and three cavalry (1st, 2nd and 5th) divisions. These would be supported by 1,002 guns of the Royal Artillery. 14 squadrons of the Royal Flying Corps, 300 aircraft in all, would fly in airborne reconnaissance, fighter, ground attack and interdiction roles, bombing the rail head at Cambrai. All told, 104,000 British and allied troops would be involved.

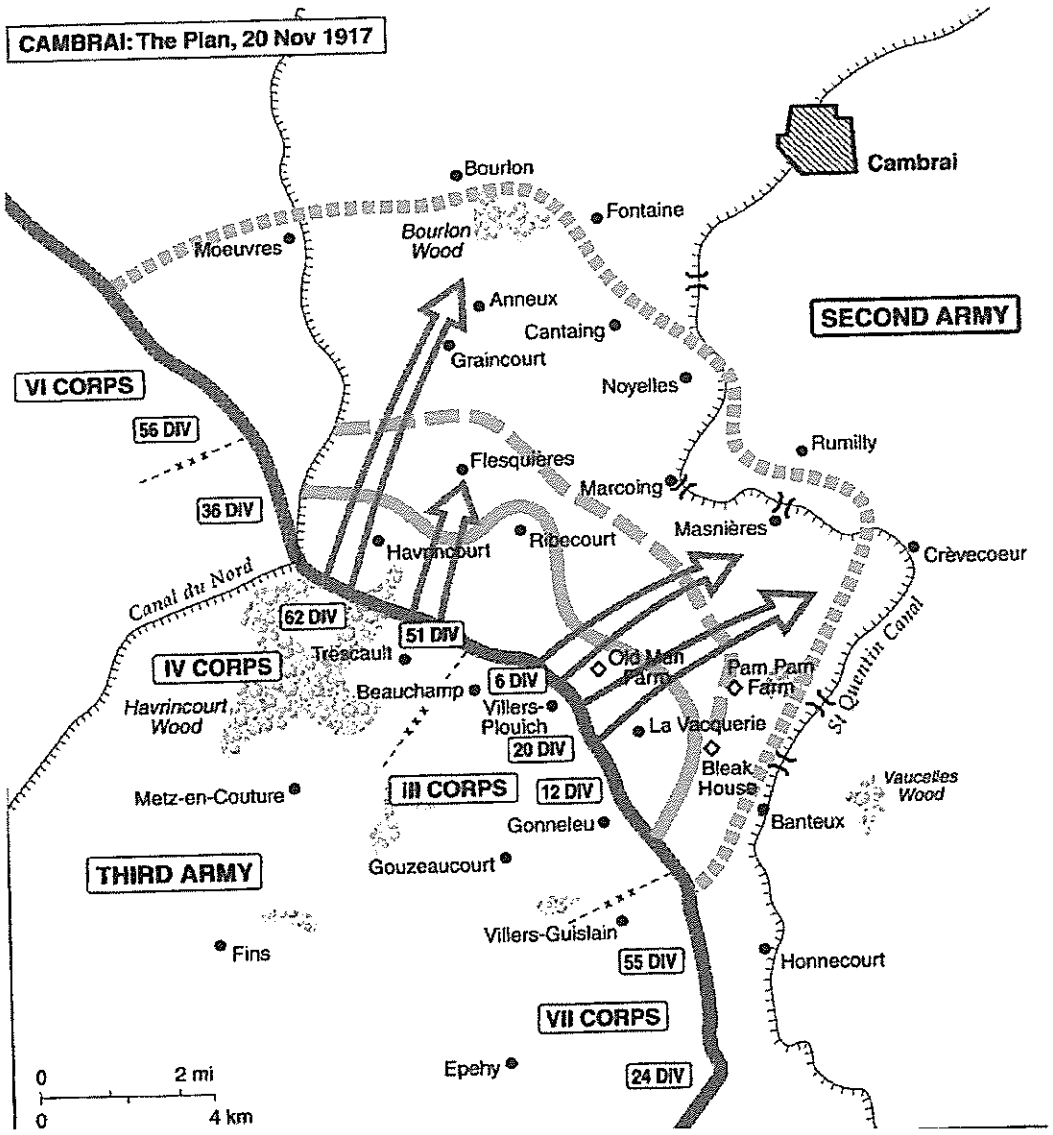
The tanks' vital role would be in cutting the wire and achieving a breakthrough for the infantry and cavalry to exploit. The tanks would crush the barbed wire flat, but to make sure that wire up to 50 yards deep was effectively cleared, special hook-like grapnels were attached to the rear of 32

tanks to hook and gather up the wire into great skeins and snap/drag it aside. 378 Mark IV fighting tanks, 88 supply tanks (many pulling sledges of ammunition, water and fuel) and 5 special wireless equipped command tanks were to take part in the battle.

Previously, long drawn out artillery barrages were employed. At Cambrai, the British were to use a short but highly accurate barrage however, using a new technique of predicted fire. The artillery guns were specially calibrated and registered onto specific targets using a grid system. It caused less cratering and damage to wire, trenches and installations - and the tanks could keep pace, cut the wire and fall on the Germans before they had time to respond.

At 6.20am, one thousand British heavy guns opened fire and the creeping barrage began to roll forward. The 20th Division captured La Vacquerie after a hard fight and then advanced as far as Les Rues Vertes and Masnieres where there was a bridge crossing the St Quentin Canal. Securing the bridge was going to be vital for the 2nd Cavalry Division, planning to move up to the east of Cambrai. However, the weight of the first tank to cross the bridge broke its back. Infantry could cross slowly by a lock gate a couple of hundred yards away, but the intended cavalry advance was effectively halted.

The first day of the battle of Cambrai was an outstanding achievement for the British Army. All three trench lines of the Hindenburg Line - the line the Germans had believed was impregnable - had been broken. The British infantry were allowed to cross no-mans-land and captured many sections of the German front line with relative ease and precious few casualties. The British casualties were just 4,000. The British had advanced nearly 5 miles on a 13,000-yard front - the largest gain in one day ever.



key to Cambrai maps

original Front Line 20 Nov

planned Allied attacks

Allied objectives

1st

2nd (Hindenburg Support Line)

3rd

The success of the attack had taken the British General Staff by surprise however. Valuable time was wasted in evaluating the results. The whole of the morning's objectives, with one important exception, had been taken with relative ease. The advancing infantry could not believe their luck and many failed to keep up with the advancing tanks. The captured German trench systems were far better built and equipped than their counterparts and British Commanders were tempted to consolidate their gains against counter attack. The tanks were slow and steady, but often outpaced their

infantry supports, leaving them easy targets for artillery and anti-tank fire against which their armour was largely ineffective. Of the 378 tanks that went into action that morning, 179 were now knocked out. The remainder had been fighting, continually, for almost 16 hours, and was in much need of maintenance and rest. When fuel and ammunition supplies ran low, the tanks were obliged to return and lager behind the lines in order to replenish.

Whilst the advance continued the following day, it was beginning to run out of steam. The Germans, on the other hand, were bringing in fresh reserves and the defences around Cambrai were being strengthened. Three fresh German divisions had recently arrived from the Eastern Front with the arrival of another eleven divisions over the next few days.

The dilemma for the British was now either to halt the attack and retreat to defensible positions or to continue with the aim of consolidating on Bourlon Ridge. The British High Command decided to commit the limited reserves available in seeking to achieve this consolidation. In the following week Haig was to achieve little more than the success he had already gained in the first few hours of fighting on the 20th November. The British troops were becoming increasingly more and more fatigued and there were insufficient fresh troops being fed in as reserves. At their defensive positions along Bourlon Ridge, the Germans resisted stubbornly. Unsuited for combat amongst the shattered tree stumps, the remaining British tanks were unable to decisively assist the British troops in their assault on the Ridge and on Fontaine Notre-Dame. The remaining tanks were frittered away in piecemeal attacks. The British Tank Corps was being thrown away as the battle degenerated into the attrition, which characterised trench warfare on the western front. Haig had no alternative but to call a halt to the proceedings.

On the morning of the 30th November (the day Private Andrews died), whilst the British were carrying out an orderly withdrawal to the Hindenburg support line, the Germans unleashed their counter-attack. In the south, Byng's exhausted forces were overwhelmed by a massive barrage of poison gas and high explosive rounds and an influx of fresh, specially trained troops. The result of this was, when it petered out due to bad weather on the 7th December, the Germans had regained much of the ground originally lost, although the British still held on to Flesquieres and its Ridge, Ribecourt and Havrincourt. The cost in terms of casualties and prisoners taken was about an even balance for both sides - about 40,000 men on each side. After days of fighting, British troops were left with small gains, and the tank force was spent.

The following is an extract from *The Somerset Light Infantry 1914-1919* by E. Wyrall which describes the actions of the 7th Battalion on the day Private Andrews was killed.

THE GERMAN COUNTER-ATTACKS: 30TH NOVEMBER-3RD DECEMBER

"*From our old front line east of Gonnelieu the right flank of our new positions lay along the eastern slopes of the Bonavis Ridge, passing east of Lateau Wood and striking the Masnieres-Beaurevoir line north of the Canal de l'Escaut at a point about half-way between Crevecour and Masnieres. From this point our line ran roughly N.W. past (and including) Masnieres, Noyelles and Cantaing to Fontaine, also inclusive. Thence it bent back to the south for a short distance, making a sharp salient round the latter village, and ran in a generally western direction along the southern edge of Bourlon Wood, and across the southern face of the spur to the west of the Wood, to the Canal du Nord, southeast of the village of Moeuvres. From Moeuvres the line linked up once more with our old front at a point about midway between Boursies and Pronville.*"- Official Despatches.

The above quotation gives the British line after the first phase of the Battle of Cambrai, i.e. the Tank Attack on 20th and 21st November. Between the 23rd and 28th November Bourlon Wood was attacked and captured, but the 7th Somersets were not actually engaged during these operations. (see above maps).

During the evening of 23rd November the 88th Brigade (to which the 7th Battalion was still attached) was relieved by the 87th Brigade and, as the C.O. facetiously said: "The Battalion was handed over as trench stores" to the incoming Brigade. At 7 p.m. the enemy put down a very heavy bombardment on Masnieres and the line of the Canal. Everyone stood to in anticipation of a strong counter-attack which the enemy was expected to make, but no infantry attack developed. Casualties on this day were three other ranks killed and four wounded. On the 24th the 7th Somersets occupied the same position, supplying large working parties to work on the trenches of the 87th Brigade. The next evening, however, at dusk, the Battalion rejoined the 1st Brigade and went into Brigade Reserve in the rear system of the Hindenburg Line. The 26th was a quiet day - ominously quiet - for no one imagined that the enemy would take the beating he had received sitting down. Snow fell during the day, and the men were hard at work putting up shelters.

On 28th the 7th Somersets relieved the 7th K.O.Y.L.I. in the front line, the relief being completed by 9 p.m.: the Battalion occupied the left sub-sector of the 61st Brigade front. The main line of the 20th Division at this period ran from Lateau Wood (held by the 12th Division) in a south-easterly direction along the Spur, thence northwards to the Canal. The 59th Bngade

held the right sub-sector and the 61st Brigade the left. The trenches taken over by the Somerset men consisted of a system of posts dug on the top of the Spur. On the night of 29th the outpost line was pushed forward some 200 yards and the men dug themselves in. There was a reserve line in a deep ravine which ran roughly parallel with the main Gouzeaucourt-Masnières road.

On the 28th, when the Battalion went into the front line, Colonel Troyte-Bullock, (in common with all C.O's) had been ordered back to the Detail Camp for a short rest and Major R. P. Preston-Whyte took command of the Battalion.

Nothing of importance happened during the 29th though everyone was watchful. The enemy had been heavily reinforced, though as yet, made no heavy counter-attack. The position of the 61st Brigade was no sinecure; the ridge upon which the Brigade (and indeed the 20th Division line) was extended was dominated by higher ground on the enemy's side of the Canal and was open to hostile artillery fire from the south-west, east north-west - not a pleasing prospect. Moreover, in front of the line held by the Somerset men, and on their side of the Canal, there was a small house held by the enemy with machine guns, which were particularly active.

The night of 29th/30th was quiet, and when dawn broke on the 30th the ground was heavy with mist. About 7 a.m. a very heavy trench-mortar barrage, from the other side of the Canal, fell suddenly on the front-line posts. Fortunately, these posts had been evacuated during the night, the intention being to reoccupy them by day. The posts were practically wiped out and, had they been occupied, heavy casualties must have been incurred.

Immediately behind the trench-mortar barrage the enemy's infantry could be seen advancing in great strength. It was indeed a sight which almost made men gasp. Line after line, in massed formation, the Germans advanced to the attack, providing splendid targets for Lewis guns, machine guns and rifles. By sheer weight of numbers they intended recapturing the line which had been wrested from them. Swarms of low-flying aeroplanes, the observers using machine guns, crossed from the enemy's side and flew up and down above the British trenches at an altitude of from fifty to one hundred feet. Above the Somerset men, at least forty-five hostile machines were counted.

The German counter-attack was not general along the whole front, but directed at the southern and northern portions of the salient: on the south between Vendhuille and the Canal at Masnieres and on the north between Fontaine and Moeuvres. It was another of those German attempts to "pinch

off" salients. During the War both the Allies and the enemy made many; such attacks and they were invariably costly in the extreme. In this instance; the German losses were terrible. The heaviest attacks were on the northern portion of the salient, where at one time eleven waves of German infantry advanced successively to the attack - the enemy's casualties here were enormous.

With rifle and Lewis-gun fire the 7th Somersets did great execution as the Germans advanced from the Canal towards the front-line posts: seldom had the Battalion been offered such splendid targets, but now they took full advantage of their good luck and shot the Germans down by scores. But presently ammunition began to run short and to everyone's dismay it was discovered that a Battalion on the right of the Somersets had given way in the face of sheer numbers: also that the enemy was working round the right. flank and rear of the Battalion. Orders were then given to withdraw to the reserve line in the ravine running roughly parallel with the main Gouzeaucourt-Masnieres road. Here a short stand was made, but the enemy again worked round the right flank and a further withdrawal was made to the Hindenburg Line, then being held by the 7th K.O.Y.L.I. and 61st Brigade Headquarters. Here the enemy was held and though, throughout the day, he made brave efforts to force the line back farther, all his attempts were fruitless and time after time he was bloodily repulsed.

But the 7th Somersets had been practically wiped out. The only officers who survived were Lieuts. Spark and McMurtrie with the remnants of their Companies, acting C.S.M. J. Bulson, Sergt. Peaty and about sixty other ranks. The total casualties suffered by the Battalion on the 30th November 1917 were 12 officers and 332 other ranks. (158 wounded and 174 missing (including Private Andrews)).

PO/1807(S) Private Richard James FORTE
1st Battalion, Royal Marine Light Infantry
Royal Naval Division

(the name is shown in some family records as Fort)

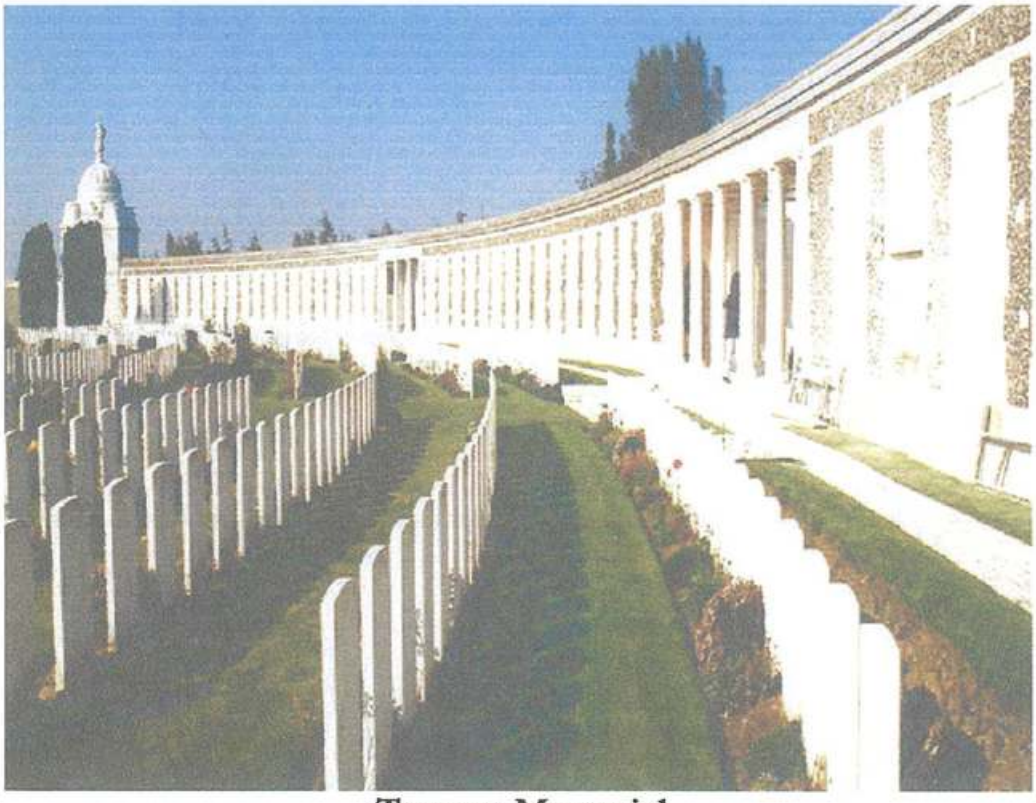
Son of the late Luke and Mary Forte, husband of Annie Forte of Townsend, Montacute, Somerset

Died 26th October 1917

Aged 39

Name included on the Tynecot Memorial, Zonnebeke, West Vlaanderen, Belgium as someone with no known grave.

The Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing forms the north-eastern boundary of Tyne Cot Cemetery, which is located 9 kilometres north east of Ieper town centre, on the Tynecotstraat, a road leading from the Zonnebeekseweg (N332).



Tynecot Memorial



Aerial View of Tynecot Cemetery and Memorial

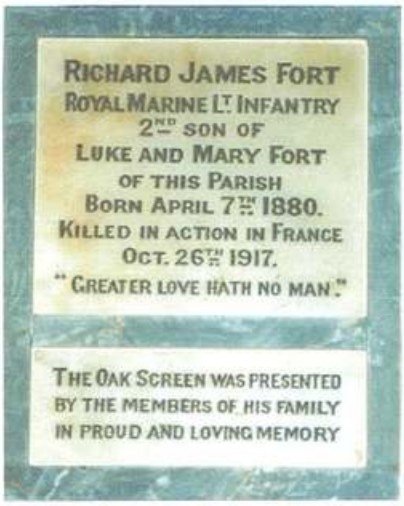
The Tyne Cot Memorial is one of four memorials to the missing in Belgian Flanders which cover the area known as the Ypres Salient. Those United Kingdom and New Zealand servicemen who died after 16th August 1917 are named on the memorial at Tyne Cot, a site which marks the furthest point reached by Commonwealth forces in Belgium until nearly the end of the war. The Tyne Cot Memorial now bears the names of almost 35,000 officers and men whose graves are not known. The memorial was unveiled in July 1927.

Richard James Forte



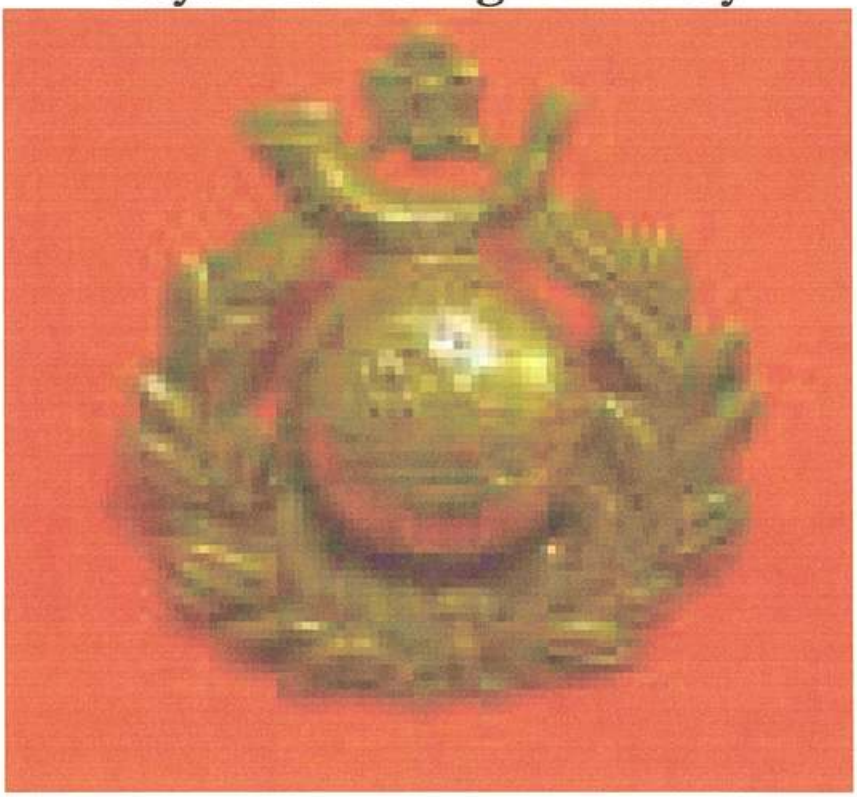
He was the second son of Luke and Mary Forte of Thorne and was born on the 7th April 1880. He lived at No. 22 Townsend, Montacute with his wife, Annie, next door to where his granddaughter, Mrs. Shirley Hann, now lives. In civilian life he was a road contractor.

There is an oak screen in Thorne Church to his memory which says:





Royal Marine Light Infantry



The Royal Naval Division

At the outbreak of the War, there was a surplus of some 20-30,000 men on the Reserves of the Royal Navy who would not find jobs on any ship of war. It was recognised that this was sufficient to form two Naval Brigades, and a Brigade of Marines who became known as the Royal Naval Division and fought as land soldiers, mainly infantry. The Division transferred from the authority of the Admiralty to the War Office on 29th April 1916, and was redesignated the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division on 19th July 1916. The Division moved to France, arriving Marseilles 12th-23rd May 1916, after which it remained on the Western Front.

There were originally four Royal Marine Light Infantry Battalions, Chatham Deal, Plymouth and Portsmouth. They were re-organised in 1915 into two - the 1st (from Chatham and Deal Battalions) and 2nd (from Plymouth and Portsmouth Battalions) Battalions.

When Chatham and Deal Battalions amalgamated the new Battalion (1st Royal Marine Light Infantry) contained a mix from all previous Battalions. When Portsmouth and Plymouth Battalions amalgamated (2nd Royal Marine Light Infantry), their Marines came from these two Divisions only, but Portsmouth and Plymouth Marines could join either 1st or 2nd Royal Marine Light Infantry.

The above rather complicated reorganisations show how Private Forte with a Portsmouth service number (PO/1807(S)) came to be serving in the 1st Royal Marine Battalion when he was killed.

The Royal Marine battalions were part of the 188th Brigade of the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division by the time of the Battle of Passchendaele.

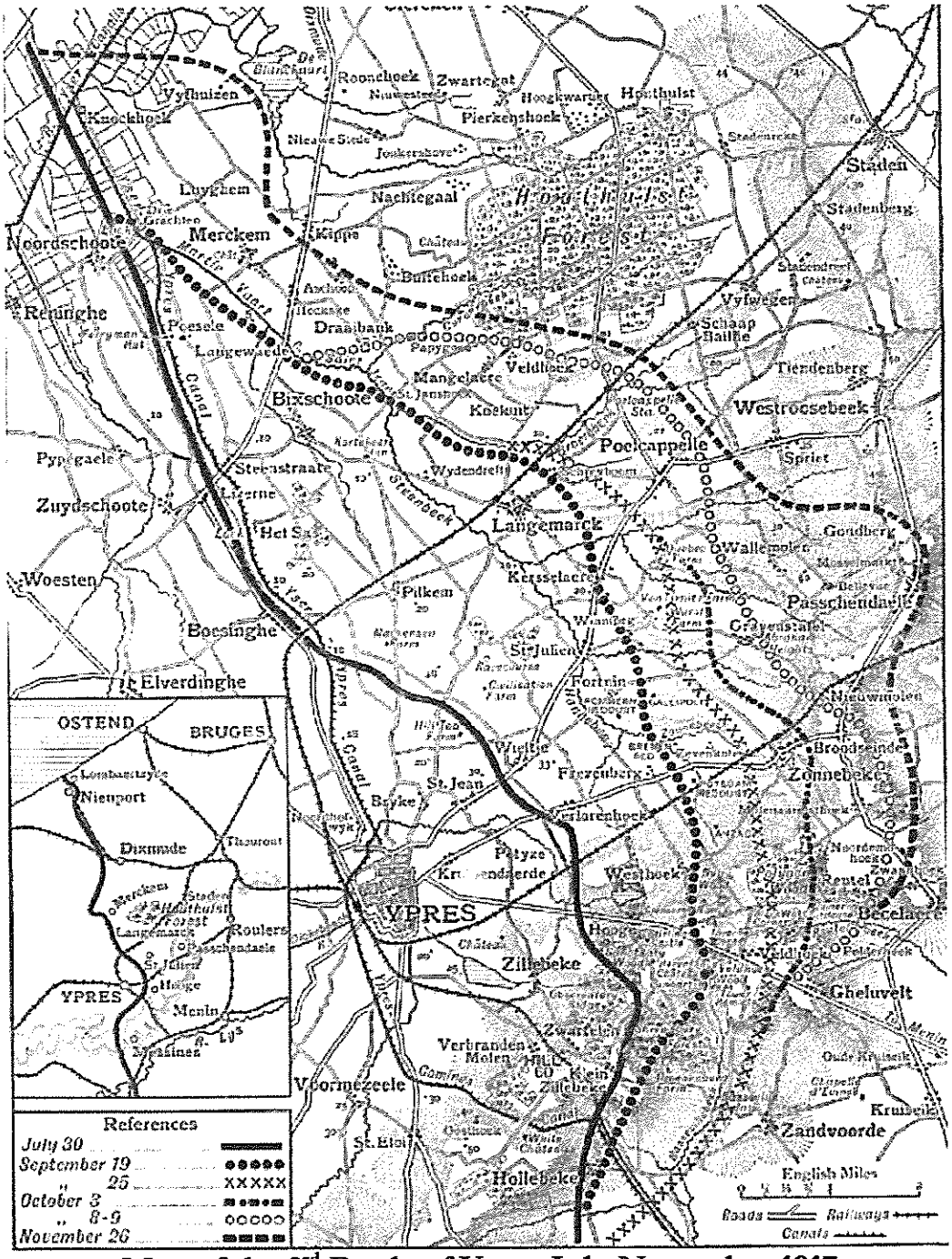




Photograph of the 1st Battalion Royal Marine Light Infantry
(it is not known which is Private Forte)

Details of the action in which Private Forte met his death

Second Battle of Passchendaele – 26th October - 10th November 1917



Map of the 3rd Battle of Ypres July-November 1917



Map of the area around Passchendaele

Units Involved:

Second Army

II Corps: 1st Division, 58th Division, 63rd Division

IX Corps: 19th Division, 37th Division

X Corps: 5th Division, 7th Division, 14th Division, 21st Division, 23rd Division, 39th Division

Canadian Corps: 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions

1st ANZAC: 1st, 2nd and 5th Australian Divisions

Fifth Army

XIV Corps: 35th Division, 50th Division, 57th Division

XVIII Corps: 58th Division, 63rd Division (Private Forte's Division)

XIX Corps: 17th Division, 18th Division, 35th Division, 50th Division, 57th Division

Background

The third major battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele, took place between July and November 1917. General Sir Douglas Haig, was convinced that the German army was now close to collapse.

The opening attack at Passchendaele was carried out by the British Fifth Army with the Second Army joining in on the right and the French First Army on the left. After a 10 day preliminary bombardment, with 3,000 guns firing 4.25 million shells, the British offensive started at Ypres a 3.50 a.m. on 31st July.

The Germans held off the main British advance and restricted them to small gains on the left of the line. Allied attacks on the German front-line continued despite very heavy rain that turned the Ypres lowlands into a swamp. The situation was made worse by the fact that the British heavy bombardment had destroyed the drainage system in the area. This heavy mud created terrible problems for the infantry and the use of tanks became impossible. Eventually Haig called off the attacks and did not resume the offensive until late September.

Attacks on 26th September and 4th October enabled the British forces to take possession of the ridge east of Ypres. Despite the return of heavy rain, Haig ordered further attacks towards the Passchendaele Ridge. Attacks on the 9th and 12th October were unsuccessful. As well as the heavy mud, the advancing British soldiers had to endure mustard gas attacks.

Three more attacks took place in October and on the 6th November the village of Passchendaele was finally taken by British and Canadian infantry. The offensive cost the British Expeditionary Force about 310,000 casualties. Haig was severely criticised for continuing with the attacks long after the operation had lost any real strategic value.

Involvement of the Royal Naval Division

The following is an extract from a history of the Royal Naval Division during the First World War. This takes the account of the battle up to the 26th October 1917, the day that Private Forte died. It is a very detailed exposition and is explicit on the conditions facing the troops in this battle.

'The situation on the evening of October 4th was a simple one. The allied line from the northern arm of the Ypres salient ran almost due north to Nieuport, and the German line was parallel to our own. Both lines were drawn across flat country intersected with innumerable dykes and small streams, uniformly marshy and liable to flooding in the event of heavy rains. Behind our lines the country was equally flat, but behind the enemy's front

was the Passchendaele ridge, not parallel to their line but running northeast from a point on their line opposite Ypres. This ridge had thus menaced the flank of any advance from our line north of Ypres, while it afforded corresponding protection to any German attack on that line. By October 4th, the main advance had reached a point 9,000 yards along the ridge, and from here to the north our line was bent back roughly north-west. It was clear that a further advance along the ridge offered the best prospect of improving our own defensive position. To secure the whole ridge, we had to advance along it for another four thousand yards. The most difficult task was the advance across the western slopes of the ridge and the particularly marshy country at the bottom of those slopes. Unless, however, we could press forward here, any advance along the ridge itself must have created an almost impossible salient. On the ridge and down the western slopes lay the Canadian Corps. In the marshes at the foot lay the XVIIIth Corps, to which the Naval Division was attached. It was to assist the XVIIIth Corps in the advance necessary to cover the flank of the Canadian Corps that the Naval Division had come north, and for this advance they were now to prepare.

The sector allocated to the Division was on the flank of the Canadian Corps, where our front line of posts ran north-west from Wallemolen Cemetery to the Lekkebokkerbeek. This front was held on October 4th by the 9th Division, and small advances were made by them on October 9th and 11th. A further effort here was judged imperative, and the Naval Division was asked to arrange for three successive attacks, each by one brigade. The first attack was to be made on October 26th by the 188th Brigade (1st Royal Marine was part of this Brigade), and the second on October 28th by the 190th Brigade.

It is safe to say that the Division was never confronted with a task which, on the lines laid down for them, was more impossible of fulfilment. Flanders mud had become proverbial, and even under ordinary conditions exposed the troops in the front system to exceptional hardships. Front line and communication trenches were non-existent. The forward system consisted of posts isolated from each other by a sea of mud, and the support line of another line of posts, the elements of a trench, or, more probably, of a ruined farmhouse and outbuildings where a company or so could be concentrated. These forward positions were scattered in depth over a wide area, and each was dependent on itself for protection. The enemy posts lay often between our own, and every ration and water party had to be prepared to fight its way forward. Communication with the reserve positions was equally dangerous, if less difficult. All supplies and reinforcements had to be brought up on duckboard tracks, which with every advance stretched further and further forward. Off these tracks progress was impossible, yet the reliance placed on them was an evil necessity; they marked to the enemy,

as to ourselves, our line of supply, and, though used only at night, they were a perilous substitute for the old communication trench. From an accurate bombardment of these tracks no party using them could escape. To turn aside by so much as a yard was to plunge waist-deep in a sea of mud, where the bodies of the dead were rotting unburied.



Conditions at Passchendaele

The enemy positions were equally precarious but the advantage lay overwhelmingly with the defence. No comparable strain fell on the enemy in these operations. Their lot was to live in shell-holes or in verminous ruins, inadequately clothed and fed, and to open fire periodically on an enemy vainly endeavouring to move towards them across a sea of mud. The lot of our troops was to suffer, under conditions hardly less revolting, the risks of a continuous offensive across ground which made our barrage virtually useless as a protection against the enemy's machine guns. Our barrage was slowed down, and the most careful preparations were made whereby every known enemy post, in the area to be crossed, was attacked by a separate and self-supporting unit with no other objective. The mobility, however, of the

enemy posts, which were seldom where they were expected to be, the impossibility of keeping down by any barrage the enemy fire from positions scattered haphazard over perfectly level country to a depth of a thousand yards, and the difficulty of keeping up with our barrage, in those exceptional cases where everything else proceeded in accordance with plan, had in all the previous attacks neutralized, to a very great extent, every modification of our tactics.

Training behind the line, learning from carefully constructed models the supposed location of every enemy post and trench on their prospective front, the 188th Brigade was looking forward with confidence to the impending battle. The Divisional Artillery, however, in the famous St. Julien "triangle," and the 189th Brigade, who had been working on forward communications since October 10th, knew better. Every gun position, every shell-hole, was under fire, and the physical impossibility of a rapid advance made any very substantial success unattainable.

The chief tactical features on the intended front of attack were the Paddebeek, a flooded streamlet running parallel to our front at a distance of some five hundred yards, and some higher ground a thousand yards to the right front, on which stood the ruins known as Tournant Farm. This side of the Paddebeek, the main enemy posts were believed to be in five groups of ruins and pill-boxes known as Berks Houses, Bray Farm, Banff House, Sourd Farm and Varlet Farm, and in an isolated trench, near our junction with the Canadians, known as Source Trench. Across the stream to our right were Source Farm and Tournant Farm, and on the right a number of isolated pill-boxes and fortified shell-holes. The first objective of the 188th Brigade included all the enemy positions this side of the Paddebeek except Sourd Farm; the second objective comprised the remaining position, as far as a line drawn north-west through Tournant Farm. The first objective was to be attacked by the Anson Battalion on the right and the 1st R.M. Battalion on the left. Through these battalions, the Howe and the 2nd R.M. Battalions were to advance across the Paddebeek to the second objective. The attack was fixed for dawn on the 26th.

General Prentice decided to take over the front line on the night of the 24th-25th, thus giving his battalions a day to study, at first hand, the ground over which they had to advance. The time was, of course, too short, but this was only another instance of the impossibility of the conditions; no troops could stay longer in the line and be fit for an advance.

The morning artillery barrage had become a matter of habit for both armies, and this routine had the advantage that we could make a good guess where the German counter-barrage would fall and could fix our assembly positions

accordingly. When, however, we intended a serious attack the addition of the machine-gun barrage relieved the enemy of any uncertainty as to our intentions, and there could thus be no question of surprise.

By 2 a.m. on the morning of the 26th, all battalions were in position. The inevitable rain had begun at midnight and continued steadily and when the time for the advance was notified to the enemy in the usual manner the ground was as impassable as had been expected.

The advance was on a very wide front, the 1st Marines having a frontage of nearly nine and the Anson of nearly six, hundred yards. Each battalion adopted much the same formation: two thin lines of skirmishers went in front and behind them were small columns of sections or platoons according to the objective to which each was detailed. Two platoons from each battalion were required for duty as stretcher-bearers, the normal complement being inadequate to the nature of the fighting. At 5.45 a.m., in heavy rain, the advance began. Our bombardment of the enemy positions during the previous forty-eight hours had turned the ground over which our troops had to advance into a mass of shell-holes flooded to a depth of several feet; between them a path had to be picked over ground only less impassable.

Despite these difficulties, the first waves kept fairly well up to the barrage and especially on the left (the 1st Marine Battalion) substantial gains were recorded. Banff House (the last objective of the 1st Marine Battalion) was reported at 7.20 a.m. as having been captured. These successes were however, no indication of the nature of the battle. The enemy machine-gun fire from across the Paddebeek was extremely severe, and almost all the Company Commanders of the attacking battalions had become casualties. They were but small parties who had reached such of the enemy posts as had fallen and there were other posts, notably in the centre of the German outpost position, which we had never reached. Here was the unsolved tactical problem. The rigidity of our attacking formation was opposed to a fluid defence. The troops who had reached their objectives had, according to explicit orders, accomplished their task. They expected to be isolated, and had no means of knowing, under conditions which made swift movement of patrols impossible, whether the parties detailed to capture the other posts had succeeded. Company and Battalion reserves were in a better position, but, by the time it was clear that the enemy at a given point was still in possession, and a fresh movement had been organized, we had lost the barrage. And so by 8 a.m. the attack in the centre had died down, and only on the flanks did the Howe and 2nd Marine Battalions effect an advance towards the second objective.

So merciless was the position in the centre at 8 a.m. that Commander Asquith, watching the attack from our old front line, ordered up two companies of his battalion, which had been attached for these operations to 188th Brigade as a "counter-attack" battalion. Their function was to be in a position to deal effectively and without delay with any counter-attack which the enemy might deliver against the (possibly disorganized) assaulting troops. A little later, a reconnaissance showed that the enemy were still holding their ground, and threatening to get between our advanced troops and our old line, and a third company was ordered up at 8.00 a.m. When no reports came back from the 188th Brigade, and the Canadians reported that they were not in touch on their left Commander Asquith and Lieutenant Garnham, R.F.A. (forward observation officer), with one man went forward to investigate. Commander Asquith and his party got in touch with the Howe and Anson on the right and were able to inform them of the position and to establish touch between them and the Canadians. This reconnaissance was a decisive incident in the day's fighting, for it enabled our artillery to safeguard the line won, and prevented any incursion on the flank of the Canadians, who were thus able to make a more appreciable advance. Plain facts are often obscured by technical terms. A reconnaissance on this front meant a two hours' walk in full view of the enemy under heavy fire, and such a prosaic description of the achievement of these officers, with their solitary rifleman, gives a truer idea of the quality of mind and spirit necessary to support it, than do the more hackneyed phrases of the official reports.

No further advance was attempted in the afternoon of the 26th. To renew the attack it would have been necessary to bring up fresh troops, which could only be done by night, or to throw once more against the enemy the disorganized and cruelly depleted units clinging to their slender gains. This would have meant risking the little that we had won. At 5 p.m. the wisdom of the decision was seen, for the enemy counter-attacked in force on the right, and only the prompt intervention of "C" Company of the Hood Battalion averted a retreat. As dusk fell Commander Asquith moved up his whole Battalion, which had suffered heavy casualties during the day, to relieve the Anson and Howe Battalions, and the Hawke Battalion was ordered to relieve the two Marine Battalions. The situation on the left flank was by now less satisfactory. The party which had crossed the Paddebeek with such gallantry had been forced to retire, being almost surrounded and without ammunition or water, and in their retirement had carried with them the garrisons of Banff House, Bray Farm and Berks Houses. "C" Company of the Hawke Battalion recaptured all three positions and established touch with the Hood Battalion.

The policy of delimiting the objectives deprived the attack of all cohesion, and produced a sense of isolation. Many men were lost through mistaking enemy posts for our own; only investigation could show the truth; many, it is feared, reached their objective and were cut off because no one knew of their success. Only under cover of darkness could communications, inevitably severed in a daylight advance against irregular and discontinuous defences, be re-established. Yet without the maintenance of communications enabling local success to be exploited, nothing could in the prevailing conditions enable us to reach and consolidate our objectives.

Nevertheless, the line finally won by the relieving battalions comprised at least five strongly fortified enemy posts and represented an advance of from three to four hundred yards from our old front; and this in spite of the fact that, in the words of Sir Hubert Gough, "no troops could have had to face worse conditions." Success achieved under such conditions had to be bought dearly, and the four assaulting battalions lost heavily in officers and men. The losses were severe, averaging more than five hundred a battalion in the 188th Brigade; this was the pitiful slaughter of the men of the 188th Brigade, struggling vainly in the mud to find each other and their objectives.'

It was in these conditions that Private Forte lost his life on 26th October 1917 and his body was never recovered.

275207 Private Harold Estcourt MORRIS
3rd Battalion London Regiment
(Royal Fusiliers)

Son of John and Sarah Morris of 24 The Borough, Montacute

Died 19th September 1917

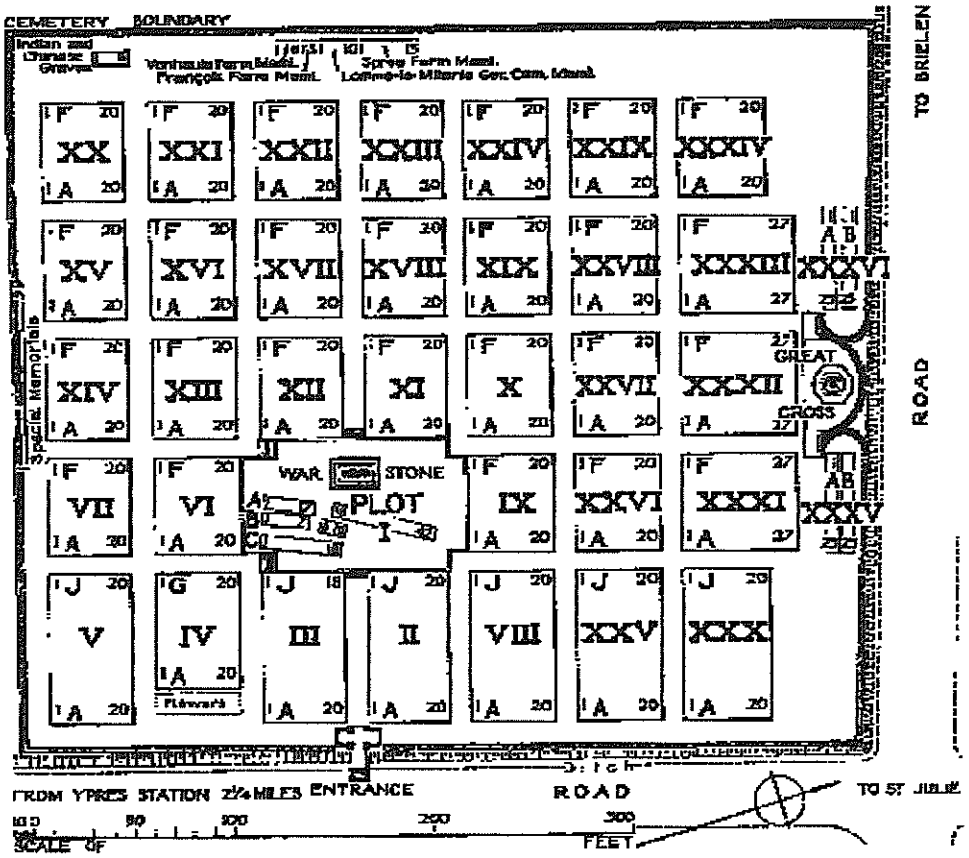
Aged 27

Buried in the New Irish Farm Cemetery, Ieper (Ypres)

The cemetery is located to the north-east of the town of Ieper.



New Irish Farm Cemetery



NEW IRISH FARM CEMETERY. ST. JEAN-LES-YPRES

Private Morris' grave reference is XII. B. 16.

There are now 4,715 commonwealth servicemen of the First World War, who fell north east of Ypres, buried or commemorated in this cemetery, 3,267 of the burials are unidentified. The cemetery was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield.

3rd Battalion London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers)



At the outbreak of war the British Army numbered around a quarter of a million men, they were almost unique in Europe in that they had no conscription pre-war instead relying entirely on volunteers.

The regulars were backed up by system of long standing locally raised militia units. These had been shaken up in 1908 when the territorial force came into being.

The Infantry Territorial Force. was organised by every line regiment forming its own Territorial Force. battalion. In London where no line regiment strictly existed (though the Royal Fusiliers, Middlesex and East Surrey's recruited heavily in the capital) the old volunteer companies formed themselves into 26 battalions.

Many of the London units recruited two battalions or more, when this occurred they were numbered thus;

1st/3rd Battalion London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers)
2nd/3rd Battalion London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers)
3rd/3rd Battalion London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers)

Most of the London units were recruited from a local area, factory or social club. They were formed into the 56th (1st London) Division



The Divisional flash of the 56th (1st London) Division

The division was principally raised from north east and south east London, their Infantry battalions being based in Bloomsbury, Westminster, Hampstead, City Road, Bunhill Row (2), Farringdon Road, Finsbury Square, Berkeley Square, Hackney, Pentonville and Bedford Square. Its Artillery was based in Bloomsbury, Woolwich, Eltham, City Road, Lewisham and Islington. Like many Territorial Force units most of its men were on their annual camp when war was declared, they promptly mustered at their headquarters in Bloomsbury awaiting orders. These followed shortly and they were sent out to Malta to relieve the regular units out there who were garrisoning the fortress island. They set sail on the 4th September and over the next two years they were split up and sent bit by bit to France.

Finally in February 1916 the Army Council authorized the reformation of the division in France around Hallencourt and were numbered the 56th Division.

1/3rd (City of London) Bn (Royal Fusiliers). Territorial Force. 4 August 1914 at 21 Edward Street, Hampstead Road NW
2/3rd (City of London) Bn (Royal Fusiliers). Territorial Force. Formed in London in September 1914.
3/3rd Bn. Territorial Force. Formed in January 1915.
4/3rd Bn. Territorial Force. Formed in May 1915. Supplied Drafts to the 1/3rd, 2/3rd and 3/3rd Bns.

It is not known with which part of the 3rd Battalion Private Morris was serving or why someone from Somerset was serving with a London Territorial unit.

The Infantry Battalions that served overseas with the division were as follows;
<u>167th Infantry Brigade</u>
7th Middlesex
8th Middlesex
1st London's (Royal Fusiliers)
3rd London's (Royal Fusiliers) (Private Morris' Battalion)
<u>168th Infantry Brigade</u>
<u>169th Infantry Brigade</u>

The Division saw action in the following battles in mid/late 1917 about the time of Private Morris' death;

<u>1917</u>
Battles of Ypres
Battle of the Menin Road. 20th-25th September 1917.

Details of the action in which Private Rogers met his death

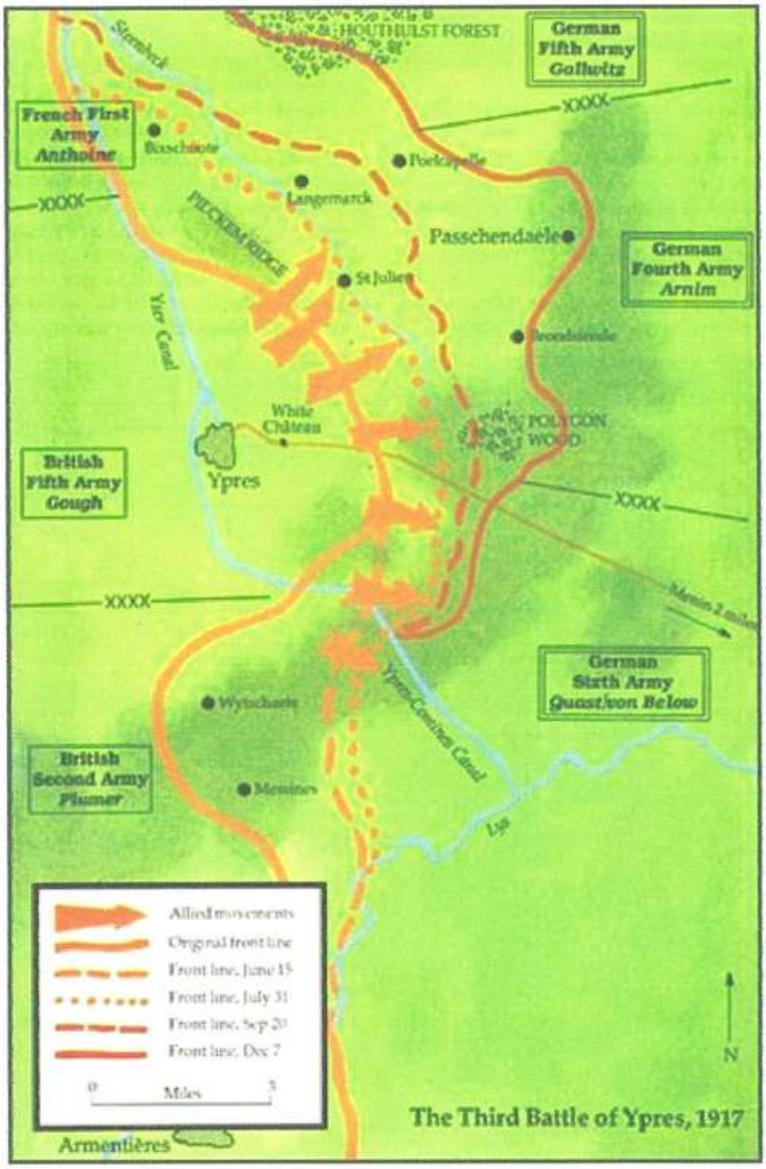
This is difficult in the case of Private Morris as it is not certain with which part of the 3rd Battalion he was serving when he died. As he is buried in a cemetery near Ypres it is almost certain he was in that sector at the time of his death and was involved in the Third Battle of Ypres; of what particular aspect of that battle we cannot be sure. He died the day before the commencement of the battle of the Menin Road in which his Division was involved. The following is a general account of the battle and the conditions under which the troops had to fight.

The Battle of 3rd Ypres (Passchendaele)
In 1915, at the second Battle of Ypres, the Germans succeeded in driving the British back to the town of Ypres. Here a bulge, or salient, was formed in their front line which left the town exposed on three sides to shellfire. The town was gradually destroyed, although of course it continued to be used as an important military centre for the Allied lines and all troops left for the front line through the Menin Gate.

In 1917, the area of Flanders to the east of Ypres had great strategic importance because it was dominated by a German occupied ridge from the East to the South of Ypres. This was the only high ground in a flat, featureless plain and, if the British could only break out of the Ypres salient and take it, they could turn North and drive the Germans from the Belgian coast and capture the ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge from the enemy. The German position in Belgium would be outflanked and their industrial heartland in the Ruhr would be under threat. U-boats were operating out of Zeebrugge with great success and the Admiralty was increasingly gloomy about what would happen in the English Channel if the Belgium ports were not closed to the enemy.

Pressure had consequently been put on Field Marshal Haig to make an attack in Flanders. Haig's plan was to strike out of Ypres to the North and East and, in conjunction with a seaborne landing on the coast of Belgium at Nieuport, he would capture the high ground at Passchendaele which was the key to the whole area. This would allow the cavalry to be released in open country and sweep all before them to the coast.

An attack in Flanders would also hold down the German reserves and relieve the pressure on the French, who needed time to recover from the shambles of Verdun.



1. The Battlefield

The Ypres salient occupied a lowlying, gently undulating pastureland, which had been reclaimed from marsh over the years by an elaborate drainage system. The water table was near the surface, even at the height of summer, and this reclaimed land was extremely vulnerable to shellfire that would destroy the drainage system and allow the land to flood. There was no layer of gravel and flooding would rapidly turn the whole battlefield into mud once the shelling started.

The low ridge from Keppel to Passchendaele was shaped rather like a sickle with the handle at Messines and the blade sweeping round Ypres with Passchendaele at the tip and this ridge dominated the battle area.

The Steenbeeck was one of a number of insignificant little streams that were to achieve great importance, after shelling and rain transformed them into

an insurmountable barrier across the axis of the attack, because of the bog created by the shelling.

Although Haig had been warned about this, he hoped that the breakthrough would be so swift that the land would not have time to bog.

2. The weather

Flanders was notorious for wet weather that usually started in the late autumn and the plan was for the attack to start in July, after the successful but limited Battle of Messines in June. It was known that July and August were the most unpredictable months of the year and heavy thunderstorms were possible at any time. September was the best month as it was dry for one out of four years (1917 was one of those years!). October was usually the wettest month of the year and usually marked the beginning of winter. The weather forecast before the battle opened on July 31st. was that "the weather is likely to improve generally but slowly" but although the average rainfall for the beginning of August was only 8mm. of rain, in fact 76mm. fell over the next 4 days!

3. The German defences

The Germans were well aware of the strategic importance of Flanders and that is why this was the most heavily fortified part of their line. Four days before the battle was due to begin they had carried out a tactical retreat from their front line back to the Passchendaele ridge. This left a zone of real and potential marshland in the low lying land between their new front line and the British.

Their new positions, the Hindenburg line, were a defence in depth of three lines, the third being beyond the range of the British guns. Between these lines was barbed wire, scattered concrete pillboxes and machine gun nests. The barbed wire funnelled the attackers into killing zones swept by machine guns and carefully registered by the artillery so that the attackers could be annihilated by a crippling concentration of shells.

The Germans had developed a very effective technique of counterattacking as soon as they were driven out of their positions. They held fresh troops in reserve, specifically for the purpose of counterattacking, and these would be able to assault their exhausted enemy who would then be occupying the completely unfamiliar German trenches.

German artillery was also better than the British, it had a longer range and was more accurate and with better shells. They also had mustard gas delivered by shellfire. This was a liquid that caused blistering of the skin if touched or if the unfortunate soldier even walked through the zone of

evaporation and the effect on the eyes was disastrous. If inhaled, it could cause pulmonary oedema. No antidote was to be found and after its first use in a barrage on July 26th, one man in six out of the 5th Army who were assembling for the assault became a casualty! The assembling troops and artillery were under direct vision from the high ground of the Ridge and the German shellfire was used with great effect to disrupt Haig's preparations for battle; the effects of high explosive and gas bombardment forced Haig to make two delays from the original start date of the 19th July.

These effects of the geography and the weather were made worse by Haig's insistence on a preliminary bombardment of the German lines. Many shells fell short and the result was to turn a very difficult battle ground into an absolutely impossible one because it created a quagmire. Nevertheless the preliminary 2 weeks bombardment was so severe that one German division actually deserted its front. The German counter-battery fire was not affected and the British artillery suffered greatly as it had to be exposed on the open flats. The Germans used a mixture of shells; high explosive, mustard gas and "sneezing gas".

The Battle

The official name of the battle is 3rd Ypres, but it is universally known as the Battle of Passchendaele because it was really a series of engagements with the one objective of taking Passchendaele Village and its Ridge.

It commenced on the 31st. of July with an attack on the Northern Flats at Pilcken to the left and the Gheluvelt Ridge to the right. The troops at Pilcken were to be supported by massed tanks and this attack was initially successful but, unfortunately, the right flank was held up and failed to reach its objective of the Gheluvelt Ridge. Then at 4.00 p.m. the rain started. It lasted for days and of course the flooding made it impossible for the tanks to operate.

Although Haig had originally only proposed a short battle to break through the German Lines he continued the battle at Langemarck to the North. General Gough advised Haig to cease the battle but it continued despite horrific losses for another three weeks until August 26th.

The axis of attack was changed from the North to the East and General Plumer, commander of the 2nd Army, was put in charge of the next assault. Plumer, one of the most astute of the Generals, was an advocate of a small-scale limited advance under cover of a creeping barrage which would also prevent the German counterattacks. This would lead to a concentration of force on a narrow front, it would be easier to relieve the tired men and food and ammunition could readily be brought up to them. The men were to

advance behind the shelter of the exploding shells and be hidden from the enemy by the smoke and dust of the barrage. He planned to secure the ridges east of Ypres by three battles, each with limited objectives. Aided by the drying out of the ground, the operation opened with the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge (20^{t} -25th September), and continued at Polygon Wood (26th September) and at Broodseinde (4th October).

Private Morris' regiment would have been involved in these preparations and it was the day before the commencement of the Battle for Menin Road that he was killed, although we do not know in what circumstances.

The Third Battle of Ypres cost the British nearly 310,000 casualties (the Germans slightly less) and had consumed all of the available reserves. The Germans could no longer look down on the Ypres salient, which had been deepened by about five miles.

SECOND WORLD WAR

D/JX 156508 Able Seaman Edward Howard INGLETT
H. M. S. Jaguar
Royal Navy

Son of William and Edith Inglett of Montacute

Died 26th March 1942

Aged 20

Name included on the Plymouth Naval Memorial as someone with no known grave.

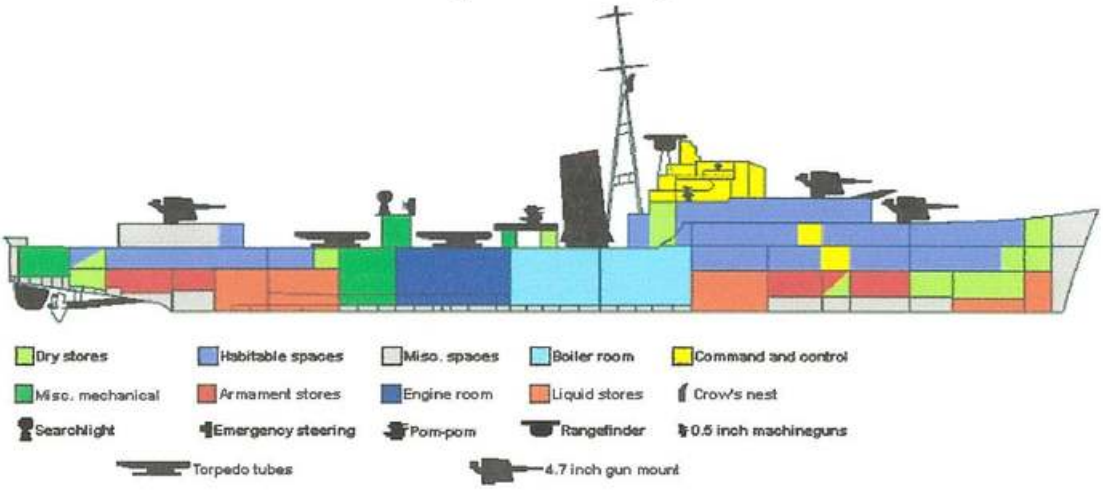
The Memorial is situated centrally on The Hoe which looks directly towards Plymouth Sound.



Plymouth Naval Memorial

After the First World War, an Admiralty committee recommended that the three manning ports in Great Britain - Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth - should each have an identical memorial of unmistakable naval form, an obelisk, which would serve as a leading mark for shipping. The memorials were designed by Sir Robert Lorimer. After the Second World War it was decided that the naval memorials should be extended to provide space for commemorating the naval dead without graves of that war. The architect for extension at Plymouth was Sir Edward Maufe. Plymouth Naval Memorial commemorates more than almost 16,000 from the Second World War.

HMS Jaguar (F 34)
Destroyer of the J class





H. M. S Jaguar

Type:	Destroyer
Class:	J
Penant:	F 34
Built by:	William Denny & Brothers (Dumbarton)
Laid down:	25th November 1937
Launched:	22nd November 1938
Commissioned:	12th September 1939
Specifications:	
Displacement:	1,690 tons standard, 2,330 tons full load
Length:	356 ft 6 in (108.66 m)
Beam:	35 ft 9 in (10.90 m)
Draft (Standard):	9 ft (2.74 m)
Draft (Full Load):	12 ft 6 in (3.81 m)
Propulsion:	40,000 SHP (29.8 MW)
Speed:	36 knots - 32 knots full load

Weapons:

Main Guns :	6 x 4.7 in (119 mm) in 3 mounts
Other Guns:	4 x 2 pound (0.91 kg) pom-poms in 1 mount 8 x 0·5 in (13 mm) machine guns in 2 mounts AA armament 40mm (1.6 in) and 20mm (0.8 in), some pom-poms
Torpedo Tubes:	10 x 21 in (533 mm) torpedo tubes in 2 mounts
Depth Charges:	2 mortars - 1 rack (20 depth charges, + 10 additional during wartime)
Complement:	183

Modifications: 1940-1941

Added:
Single 4 inch AA gun
4 x single 20 mm AA
Air warning radar
Air ranging radar

Removed:
5 torpedo tubes (Aft)
Machineguns

Destroyers were small warships no more than 1,850 tons, and armed with light weapons. In the Royal Navy during World War II a ship must also be fitted with torpedo tubes to be classed as a destroyer. They were usually equipped for anti-submarine work, although some may alternatively be equipped for minelaying operations.

Before World War II, British destroyers were generally designated as fleet destroyers, for work in support of the main fleet, which included cruisers and capital ships. Experience during the war lead to older destroyers often being refitted and re-designated as escort destroyers (principally because older destroyers lacked the speed of modern warships) and used for less glamorous tasks such as convoy escort. The need for new specialist escort destroyers was recognised, however, and these were also built during the war. The J class ships are fleet destroyers, equipped for anti-submarine work.

Eight ships formed the J class (HMS Jervis as the flotilla leader, with the others being HMS Jersey, HMS Jaguar, HMS Juno, HMS Jupiter, HMS Janus, HMS Jackal, and HMS Javelin). They mainly served in the Mediterranean (where Able Seaman Inglett was killed) and were fitted with improved anti-aircraft armament compared to all previous British destroyers. Only two ships survived the war, with five being sunk before the end of 1942. Despite the heavy losses of J class it was generally accepted that the design was sound, and formed the basis for the 'emergency' designs

that followed. A total of 124 ships entered service as variations on the J class design.

The J class were fitted with a total of six main guns and 10 torpedo tubes. This increase in torpedo tubes represented a significant improvement in the capabilities of the ship giving them a bigger punch against capital ships. The reduction in main guns from eight to six was in practice not significant, and as most British destroyers were only armed with four guns the J class were considered to be heavily armed.

For air defence a four barrelled pom-pom was fitted. This at last gave British destroyers some defence against dive-bombers, as they fired 115 rounds per minute per barrel, and were effective out to 1100 metres (1203 yards). Finally, eight 0.5 inch (13 mm) machineguns were installed in two mounts of four guns each, although these were found to be prone to jamming and were removed.

For the anti-submarine role the ships were fitted with asdic and depth charges. Asdic was a standard feature of British destroyers at this time. It was effective out to about 2500 yards (2286 metres), although high speed and bad weather both adversely affected its operation. Generally asdic was ineffective if the ship was travelling above about 18 knots, and was unable to detect anything within about 200 yards (183 metres) of the ship. Two racks of depth charges were provided at the stern of the ships, as well as two depth charge throwers on either side. Depth charges had to explode within about 20 feet (6.1 metres) of a submarine to breach its hull, and in the initial stages of the war the British depth charges' maximum setting was over 100 feet (30 metres) shallower than the maximum depth that a U-boat could dive to.

The J class was the first to have only a single funnel, with improvements in boiler design allowing the ships to be fitted with two more powerful boilers rather than three. .

A destroyer's primary assets were speed and manoeuvrability. As with all destroyers, no attempt was made to provide armour. This was because the amount required to protect the ship from enemy weapons would result in a prohibitive increase in weight, greatly reducing speed whilst increasing the size of the ship.

They cost £390,000 each to build

Wartime History of H.M.S. Jaguar.

She was involved in Operation Dynamo (Evacuation of Dunkirk) on the 29th May 1940 and sustained bomb damage.

The following is a painting of her during Operation Dynamo.



On 10th and 11th October 1940, the battleship H.M.S. Revenge sailed from Plymouth with the destroyers H.M.S. Jaguar, H.M.S. Kashmir, H.M.S. Kipling and H.M.S. Javelin to shell the French port of Cherbourg.

We do not know when Able Seaman Inglett joined H.M.S. Jaguar but if he was with her during the six months before she sank then he went through some difficult times.

The Mediterranean represented a particularly difficult challenge as an understanding between Britain and France had allocated the Mediterranean to the French. It was expected that France would neutralise any threat there with their fleet (which was equal to the Italian fleet), supported from bases on the south coast of France. With the French capitulation Britain was forced into allocating scarce resources to respond to the additional threat, leaving the Royal Navy very stretched across the globe. To make matters

worse, the situation in North Africa, the loss of Crete and the basing of German aircraft in Sicily deprived British shipping of air cover whilst exposing them to the attention of the Luftwaffe.

In this environment shipping losses were heavy, and destroyers were especially vulnerable with their lack of armour and light air defence. To meet this threat the air defence capability of all ships was improved rapidly and radar was provided as soon as it became available.

At this time H.M.S. Jaguar was operating out of Alexandria. The assault in the Western Desert was meeting fearsome resistance and the Eighth Army had not so far linked up with the Tobruk garrison. So, immediately after divisions and church on Sunday, the 30th November 1941, Jervis, Jackal, Jaguar and Kipling sailed at high speed to intercept three Italian destroyers reported to be approaching Derna. The same ships had previously made a round trip to that port carrying petrol and diesel oil for the Axis desert armour.

At 0300 on the 1st December the destroyers went to action stations; for a light had been sighted on the starboard bow. The destroyers, in line ahead closed at 30 knots, altering course to place the target between themselves and the moon; then, as Captain Mack (C.O. of H.M.S. Jervis – Squadron Commander) was about to order the destroyers to open fire, the light could be seen to be the starboard light of a hospital ship showing very dim lights and poor illumination of its International Red Cross identifications.

At daybreak, under cover of a torrential downpour, the line of destroyers closed the land. When the rainstorm suddenly cleared, the ships less than four miles off-shore could clearly see the houses of Derna, roads and vehicles moving along them but no sign of the enemy destroyers in the small port; the birds had flown.

Captain Mack knew that the sudden appearance of his destroyers off Derna would provoke enemy air activity. He did not have long to wait after the ships had turned back eastward in line abreast, zig-zagging and at the same time carrying out an anti-submarine search. Five torpedo carrying Heinkel 111's came in at low level from the desert coast and released their torpedoes. Each destroyer took separate avoiding action. Jackal, having combed the track of one torpedo, was hit by a second on her stern, remarkably with no casualties but her quarter-deck was a mass of wreckage. The screws and shafts were relatively undamaged but her rudder was jammed hard a-port.

The other flotilla ships circled on anti-submarine and anti-aircraft protection

patrol until Jackal re-centred her rudder; then, steering by main engines, she resumed her course eastward at 20 knots. At dusk, with the night closing in fast, the destroyers overtook a convoy out of Tobruk being harassed by low flying aircraft. The destroyers opened up with a low angle 2000 yard barrage which seemed to take the enemy by surprise and they broke off their attack.

Then came one of the tragedies which are the inevitable consequences of war. After cease fire had been ordered, the Gun-Captain of No 2 mounting in Jervis asked for permission to clear a shell remaining in one of his hot gun barrels. Authority was given to 'Clear gun' and he was ordered to train to port and fire his gun on the ship's disengaged side. Out of her station and unseen by the Jervis bridge lookouts, Jaguar was 2000 yards on the port beam when the gun fired. George Kean was one of the signalmen on the bridge of the Jervis:

'Captain Mack remarked that the shell burst was near her and told me to ask if she was all right. This I did and was stunned to get a reply that the Captain was killed. I think my voice was very small when I told our Captain and he asked me to get a repeat, which I did.'

An able seaman had been killed with his captain, Lieutenant Commander J.F.W. Hine, another able seaman was mortally wounded. It was a shattering and bitter blow to Captain Mack: he had had a special regard for Hine, who was the youngest commanding officer in his flotilla. The two men were buried at dawn on 21st December. In the four ships with ensigns at half mast, men stood bare-headed and silent while Jaguar buried her dead. In the swept approach channel to Alexandria a tug met Jackal to assist her into port whilst Jervis went on ahead with Jaguar- her first lieutenant in command.

As soon as Jervis had secured to the oiler, the motor cutter was called away to take a deeply moved Captain Mack, still in his sea-going gear, across to Jaguar, where he addressed the ship's company cleared from the lower-deck. Half an hour later when Philip Mack left to return to his ship, Jaguar's men crowded the rails and cheered their Captain (D), a poignant and emotional moment.

On 5th December H.M.S. Jaguar moved to Malta. On 18th December H.M.S. Neptune was the senior ship of a British force consisting of the cruisers Neptune, Aurora and Penelope together with the destroyers Kandabar, Lance, Uvely and Havock which sailed from Malta to intercept an Italian convoy. At 0039 hrs on the 19th, Neptune exploded a mine in one of her paravanes and immediately went full astern in order to clear the minefield. As she did so Neptune struck a mine which blew off her propellers and

rudder and left the ship dead in the water. Penelope and Aurora, steaming astern of Neptune, immediately opened out to port and starboard; both struck mines but were able to reach Malta. At 0100 hrs Neptune hit a third mine. Kandahar went into the minefield in a brave attempt to rescue Neptune's ship's company and in turn had her stern blown off by a mine. At 0400 hrs a fourth mine exploded under Neptune's bridge. Five minutes later she rolled over and sank.

Throughout the 19th Kandahar drifted, sinking lower in the water all the time. However, she remained unmolested by enemy aircraft and was able to send signals to Malta. The destroyer Jaguar (Commander L.R.K. Tyrwhitt RN) was despatched to her assistance. Though aided by a radar-equipped Wellington bomber it was not until 0400 hrs on the 20th that Jaguar found the Kandahar. The sea was now so rough that it was impossible for Tyrwhitt either to take Jaguar alongside the Kandahar or to go bow to bow with her. Instead Kandahar's survivors had to swim across, after which Jaguar sank her by torpedo. 67 men died on the Kandahar but 164 were saved by Jaguar..

The Action in which Able Seaman Inglett lost his life

There are varying accounts of the circumstances under which H.M.S. Jaguar was sunk. Together with the Queen Olga from the Royal Hellenic Navy, she was escorting a small convoy carrying fuel for the 5th Destroyer Flotilla at Tobruk.

There seems to be no dispute that at 0445 hours on March 26th 1942 H.M.S. Jaguar was struck by two torpedoes from the U-652 (commanded by Kapitanleutnant Georg Werner Fraatz), north of Sidi Barini (31.53'N, 26.18'S) and sank at once. Three officers and 190 ratings were lost. Eight officers and forty-five other ranks were rescued by the South African anti-submarine whaler Klo.

One account says that one of the convoy ships R.F.A Slavol was torpedoed by a U Boat, U652. She caught fire and Jaguar went in alongside to take off the crew while Queen Olga carried out an anti-submarine search. U652 fired two more torpedoes which hit Jaguar and broke her into three parts causing her to sink instantly.

A second account says Jaguar was sunk first and Sloval two hours later, both being torpedoed by U652. Yet another account says, whilst Jaguar was sunk first by U652, Sloval was torpedoed later by U205.

Whatever the actual sequence of events, this was the action which cost Able Seaman Inglett his life, being one of the 190 ratings on Jaguar who perished.

U-652 had been commissioned on 3rd April 1941 under the command of Oblt. Georg-Werner Fraatz, who was her only commander. She sank 5 ships (including Jaguar and possibly Sloval) for a total of 11,450 tons. 3 ships were damaged for a total of 20,835 tons. She was badly damaged by depth charges from a British Swordfish aircraft and scuttled on 2nd June, 1942 in the Gulf of Solum in the Mediterranean, position 31.55N, 25.11E, by torpedoes from U-81. There were 46 survivors (no casualties).

5671917 Private Reginald John WILTON
7th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry

Son of William Robert Glover and Elizabeth Wilton of Montacute

Died 9th August 1944

Aged 25

Buried in St. Manvieu War Cemetery, Cheux, Calvados, France

Cheux is about 10 kilometres west of Caen.



St. Manvieu War Cemetery, Cheux

Those buried in St. Manvieu War Cemetery died for the most part in the fluctuating battles from mid June to the end of July 1944, in the region between Tilly-sur-Seulles and Caen. The cemetery contains 1,627 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War, 49 of them unidentified. There are also 556 German burials.

7th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry



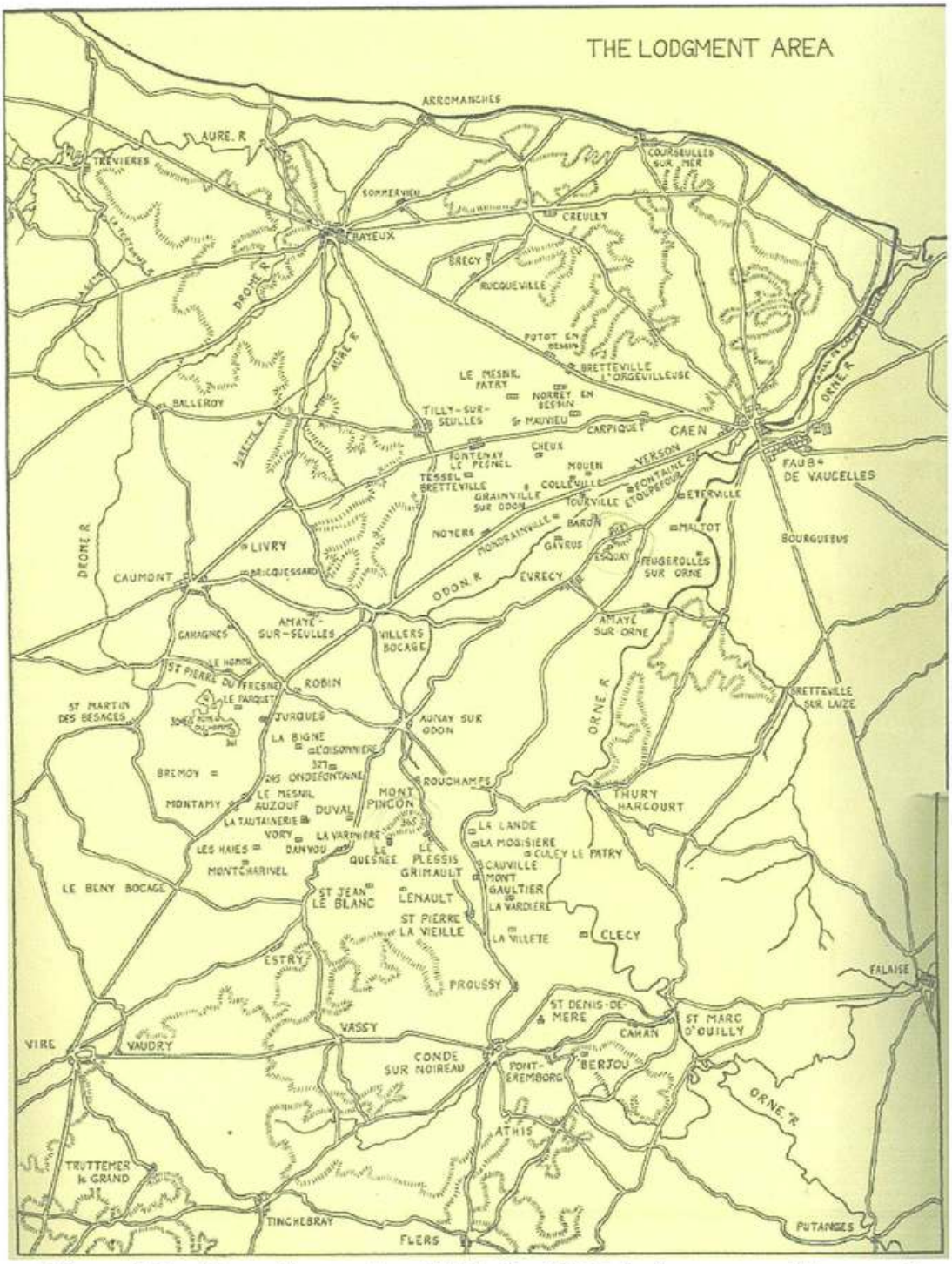
The Battalion was formed in 1939 as a duplicate of the 5th Battalion at Taunton, the battalion remained in the UK until 1944, when it took part in the NW Europe operations. It formed part of the 214th Infantry Brigade, 43rd Wessex Division in the 21st Army Group of the 2nd Army.



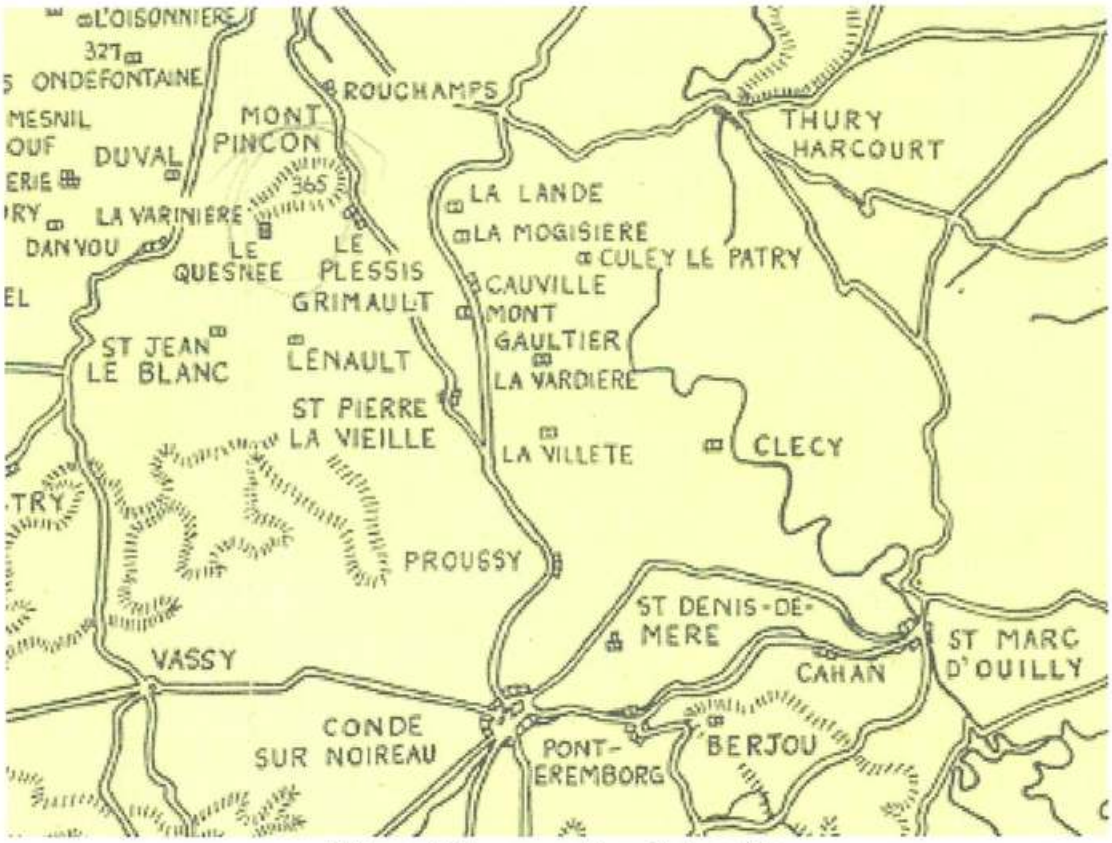
43rd Wessex Division

The Division landed in France on the 24th June 1944 (D Day +18) and was involved in actions at The Odon, around Caen, Bourguebus Ridge and, in early August 1944, Mont Pincon.

The Action in which Private Wilton lost his Life



Map of the Overall area in which the British Army was Engaged



Map of the area involving the
7th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry – August 1944

The following is from the history of the 43rd Wessex Division:

Despite the capture of Mont Pincon, La Variniere cross-roads was still cut off from Le Plessis Grimault by enemy holding out immediately south of the road. Vicious mortar and machine-gun fire from here and the villages of Le Quesnee and Crepigny, only three hundred yards short of the crossroads, continued throughout the day. On 8th August the 1st Worcestershire were given the task of cleaning up this surviving opposition and they disclosed the great strength of the enemy's defences in this area. They first turned their attention to the pocket between La Variniere and Le Plessis Grimault. The strength of this surviving opposition was first revealed by 204 Field Company who suddenly found themselves caught in heavy machine-gun fire from both sides of the road. They deployed to attack, but found the fire of their five Brens swamped by a dozen Spandaus. They withdrew section by section, to their vehicles. The party then shot its way through to Le Plessis Grimault, followed by the Field Park Company armoured bulldozer. Skilfully concealed in orchards, bushy hedgerows and sunken lanes, the enemy continued to fight skilfully and stubbornly. Spandaus hidden in enfilade positions and enemy artillery observers took their toll, and after

severe losses the attacking company of the Worcestershire had to be withdrawn. They had, however, forced the enemy to show his hand.

The removal of this opposition had become most urgent, for 50th Division were resuming the thrust on Conde due south from Le Plessis Grimault on the afternoon of the 9th. To protect their right flank, 7th Somerset Light Infantry had been ordered to attack and capture Les Hameaux, Hameau au Roi and Le Saussay - three hamlets forming a triangle of which Les Hameaux was the apex about a mile south of Mont Pincon.

Until 1st Worcestershire had cleared the start line, this operation could not be mounted. A hot battle ensued, and it was not until this company had been reinforced that the position was finally carried, and even then not cheaply.

7th Somerset Light Infantry, under Lieut.-Colonel J. W. Nichol, were now able to move forward from their assembly area at the western end of the mountain and to advance to their start line, four hundred yards south of the road.

On the right, D Company was directed on Le Haussay and, on the left, A Company on Les Hameaux. C and B Companies were to follow up at a distance of six hundred yards and mop up. Each forward company was allotted a troop of tanks and an assault section of pioneers. The carrier platoon had the task of protecting the right flank.

The attack started at 12.30 p.m. on the 9th August, after many delays and alterations in the fire programme and under heavy bombardment from enemy mortars and 88's. The supporting tanks soon got into difficulties, for the thick hedges, interspersed with sizable trees, were tank obstacles and the tracks were heavily mined. The Pioneers started to clear a safe lane up the axis. Major Young, commanding D Company, however, pushed boldly ahead and by 3.30 p.m. had advanced twelve hundred yards and captured Les Hameaux and Le Haussay.

A Company, under Major Baker, found itself faced with hedgerow fighting all the way. It was a question of short bounds of fire and movement across the luxuriant meadows and sharp assaults against the enemy machine-guns dug into the strong hedges. They too gained their objective. On the right, Captain Baden with the carrier platoon fought his way through. C Company now forged ahead to capture Hameau au Roi. Their commander, Captain U. S. Bailey, was wounded. Major Young therefore came forward to help the only surviving officer, Lieutenant Wreford. Large numbers of prisoners now began to surrender.

Nine hundred yards ahead lay the battalion's final bound, Le Saussay. B Company, organized in two parties each slightly below platoon strength, burst through the tangle of hedgerows, farms and enemy strong-points. Second Lieutenant E. A. Murcott led his party through our own artillery barrage on to his objective and caught the enemy cowering in slit trenches, dug-outs and farms. By 6.30 p.m. all objectives were securely held. Two hundred and forty-two prisoners had been taken. The price, however, had not been light, for the battalion had suffered 79 casualties (including Private Wilton although it is not known with which Company he served). As night fell and his patrols pushed ahead, Lieut.-Colonel Nichol had every reason to be proud of his conduct of a difficult battle and the fighting qualities of all ranks of his battalion. The tough opposition encountered by the 50th Division on the immediate left makes their success all the more remarkable.

614936 Private Patrick Henry FALL
4th Battalion
Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment

Son of Frederick Charles and Elizabeth Amelia Fall of Montacute

Died 13th April 1944

Aged 24

Name included on the Rangoon Memorial, in Myanmar as someone with no known grave.

The memorial is about 35 kilometres north of Yangon (formerly Rangoon).



Rangoon Memorial

The Rangoon Memorial bears the names of almost 27,000 men of the Commonwealth land forces who died during the campaigns in Burma (now Myanmar) and who have no known grave. The memorial stands in Taukkyan War Cemetery.

The Action in which Private Fall lost his life



It was in one of the most gallant but little known engagements of the Second World War – the battle of Kohima - that Private Fall was killed. Not for nothing is Field Marshal Slim's 14th Army in Burma known as 'The Forgotten Army'.

Private Fall was serving with the 4th Battalion, The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, a Territorial Unit. It is not known why a man originally from Montacute was serving with a Kent Territorial Infantry Regiment. The Battalion was part of the 161st Infantry Brigade of the 2nd British Division, the 33rd Indian Corps in the 14th Army.

"At Kohima in April 1944, the Japanese invasion of India was halted" So reads the inscription on the 161st Brigade memorial at Kohima. So simply stated and yet this crucial turning point in the defence of the then Indian Empire has been largely unheralded. At Kohima, 446 men of the 4th Battalion of the Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment, along with the Assam Regiment and the Assam Rifles, held nearly 12,000 Japanese soldiers for sixteen days until relieved. It was a triumph for dogged determination and the fighting spirit of the British and Indian soldiers.

On March 6th 1944, the Japanese launched the U-Go offensive in northern Burma. U-Go had twin aims: to pre-empt the Allies own plans to retake Burma and to break into India itself. The attack on India intended to seize British supplies in Assam, inspire a rising by the Indian populace against British rule and to take pressure away from the U.S. advances in the Western Pacific. The Japanese would rely on mobility, infiltration and captured supplies to maintain the momentum of the attack. The failure of successive British offensives had reinforced the Japanese high command's low opinion of their opponent's abilities as jungle fighters.

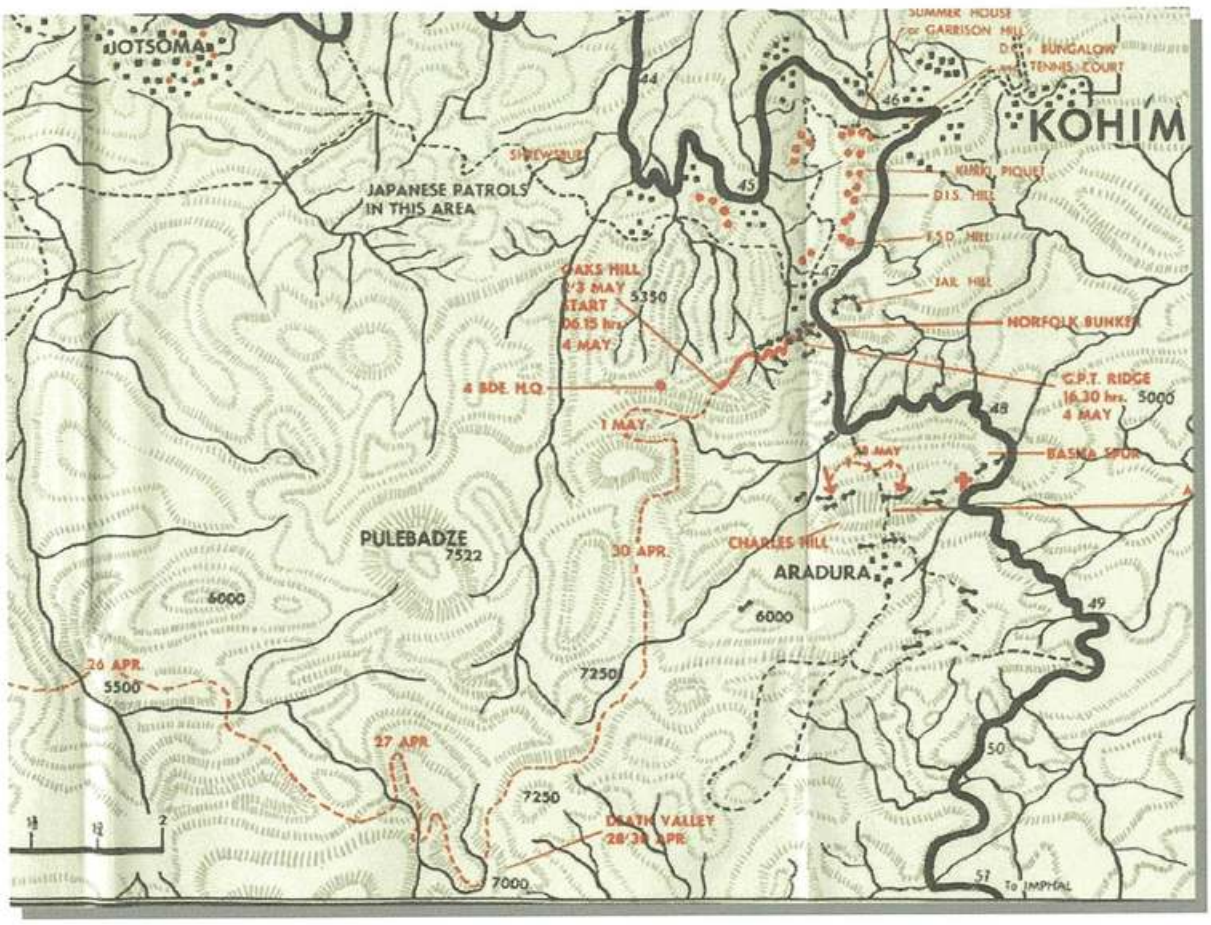
The gateway to India lay through the isolated border town of Imphal in the then district of Manipur. A 130-miles road wound north from Imphal to the hill town of Kohima before running on to the railhead at Dimapur. It was Kohima's only contact with the outside world and would link the two remote settlements in the high hills of Assam in some of the most savage fighting of the war.

Two divisions of the Japanese 15th Army crossed the Chindwin River and moved on Imphal. The third headed for Kohima. Both the Japanese and the British were operating under severe disadvantages. Time was not on the Japanese side. Once battle was joined, the troops could rely on no more than a month's supplies. In May, the monsoon would arrive, making offensive operations all but impossible. The British 14th Army had been preparing to go over to the offensive and was not best placed to receive an attack in a sector where there were such poor communications and few facilities for the basing of large numbers of troops now committed to the front.

Under Slim's leadership, the Fourteenth Army had been transformed from the shattered force which had been driven out of Burma in the spring of 1942 into a highly motivated army but it had yet to fight a full-scale battle against experienced Japanese troops.

The British were prepared for the Japanese thrust. Ample evidence of the build-up was provided by aerial reconnaissance. Nevertheless, Slim was surprised by its initial speed. He ordered his subordinate commanders not to withdraw without permission from higher authority. It was imperative to deny the Japanese the mountain roads which led down into the Indian plain. Imphal and Kohima, the latter situated on a saddle ridge, would have to be held at all costs.

Fighting began on the 30th March as the Japanese 31st Division pushed back the scattered units of the Assam Rifles and other regiments which were defending the approaches to Kohima. By April 4th the Japanese had reached Kohima and on the next day the 4th Battalion, The Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment (Private Fall's Battalion) was sent to reinforce the garrison which consisted of untried Indian troops, a handful of British soldiers at a Convalescence Depot and the administrative staff.



The road from Dimapur rises sharply up a valley to the Kohima Ridge at 5,000 feet which is at right angles to the road. It then turns and runs along that ridge, it then bends away again to the south down a valley to Imphal. The ridge contains hillocks which rise either side to commanding positions above Kohima. At the start of the battle the garrison held all these hillocks but as they were forced back the Japanese began to take control of them till only one remained in the defenders' hands.

The commander at Kohima, Colonel Hugh Richards, had a force of approximately 1200 men (estimates of the size of his force vary from 1200 to 3000, presumably depending on whether non-combatants are included or not – these were said to number nearly 2,000) to resist the all-out attack of 12,000 Japanese jungle veterans.

The Japanese attacked on April 5th. In the teeth of desperate resistance they took the strong-points on the hills and hummocks around Kohima. On April 6th the Japanese launched a strong attack and the Indian troops were forced to withdraw from two positions on the southern perimeter. On the 8th the Japanese established a machine gun position which overlooked the area. Lance Corporal Harman (of the Royal West Kents) went forward alone, threw a grenade into the post, annihilated the crew and returned with

the machine gun. For this act of gallantry, and more the following day during which he was killed, John Harman was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

The pattern of the battle was now set. Men crouched in slit trenches sometimes only yards away from the enemy. One officer of the West Kents calculated that from the plop of a grenade being fired to its arrival was no more than 14 seconds. The intensity of Japanese artillery, mortar and sniper fire in such a small space meant that movement between units was virtually impossible by day and extremely hazardous at night. Few of the men locked in this fight for survival had a clear idea of what was happening beyond the lip of their own trench.

Kohima was now under direct artillery fire from three sides. Many wounded were hit for a second time and the water reservoir had fallen into Japanese hands. Men now had to crawl out at night to try and fill their water bottles from a spring. Later on water as well as medical stores and ammunition had to be dropped from the air to the garrison.

Day and night the British and Indian troops were subjected to Japanese broadcast appeals to them to surrender. Their aim was to exhaust the defenders of Kohima. Japanese artillery was most active at dawn and sunset, shredding nerves as well as destroying targets. When darkness fell, the Allied troops stood to in the dark before the moon rose, straining to catch the rustle of Japanese infiltrators moving behind them. As one of Kohmia's defenders observed, this stoked the fear that when he awoke the occupants of the next gunpit might be the enemy.

On April 11th Stopford sent the 5th British Infantry Brigade up the Dimapur-Kohima road. Two days later it had smashed its way through to the Jotsoma 'box' held by 161st Brigade. By now, the situation at Kohima was desperate. A message was sent to the 5th Brigade that unless help arrived within 48 hours Kohima would fall: 'The men's spirits are all right but there aren't many of us left....'

The fighting at Kohima was so close that even the District Commissioner's garden was divided between the opposing forces, the Japanese holding his bungalow, to take it the British drove a tank up to the front door and released shells into it. At dusk the Japanese delivered a half hour of gun and mortar fire and when the sun sank the infantry would attack slowly gaining ground.

Supplies were now getting short and Allied planes were sent in with supply drops, as the defending area got smaller the job of dropping supplies got

harder and more dangerous. Water was as difficult to obtain as this was within 50 yards of the enemy line, the men had to crawl singly to fill up their water containers, the ration was one pint a day. The onslaught was without end and the sleep could only be got for two hours at the most.

Supplies for the wounded were also short and Colonel Young, D.S.O., a British doctor passed through enemy lines to help them. He organised a raid on the Japanese stores with some of his staff and they obtained medical valuable supplies for the wounded, 75% of his staff were Indian. Young brushed aside his staff's bravery by saying of the wounded *"They were the real heroes of the Kohima Siege. No tribute is too fine for them."* The wounded were being re-wounded because of the fierce fighting. The Japanese did not leave a wounded man alive and did not waste bullets on them, they were bayoneted. Young said, after the third shell hit the dressing station,: "*The shambles of that place after its second direct hit will remain always in my memory, it was a frightful task collecting medical equipment mixed in all that blood and filth - there was a head on the floor and dismembered limbs on all sides - in order to carry on our work".* Over 600 casualties were handled by Young and his staff in the siege.

The area of the battle was being drawn in further and was now named 'Summerhouse Hill'. The constant bombardment from the Japanese above them seemed never ending and the fighting reached new peaks of ferocity. So bitter was the fighting that the Japanese gave up trying to make an assault in daytime and left their guns to pound the garrison. They attacked only at night still gaining ground on Terraced Hill with their overwhelming numbers only for the Durham Light Infantry to take it back next morning.

On the 17th the Japanese launched their fiercest attack on the slopes of Garrison Hill. Phosphorous bombardments were followed by howling infantry assaults with grenades and machine-guns. To the din was added the fire of the defenders' howitzers. By the night of the 18th the men holding Garrison Hill were on their last legs. The siege of Kohima had now entered its third week.

The garrison held out despite continual fierce attacks which were thrown back only by hand-to-hand fighting. The perimeter had to be shortened continually and by the 18th April the Japanese were within 40 yards of the Command Post.

The Japanese swarmed everywhere but were unable to mount a co-ordinated battalion-strength attack which would have spelled the end at Kohima. The ground around Garrison Hill - just 350 yards square - was now all that was left of the perimeter which had been held on April 5th. But the men of the West Kents hung on until dawn of the 20th when troops of the Royal

Berkshires, the advance guard of 2nd Division, broke in to relieve them. The stench of rotting corpses was so thick on Garrison Hill that many of the Berkshires were physically sick as they dug in on the battle-scarred hill, whose blasted trees were festooned with blackened shreds of the parachutes used in the air supply of the Kohima garrison.

When the Battalion was relieved, sixty-one members of the battalion had been killed in action, thirteen were missing (presumably including Private Fall), and 125 had been wounded. Its staunch defence had held up a Japanese division for 15 days, long enough to allow two British divisions to arrive and prevent the invasion of India.

Now at Kohima there is a memorial to those that lost their lives with the following epitaph:

WHEN YOU GO HOME,
TELL THEM OF US AND SAY,
FOR YOUR TOMORROW,
WE GAVE OUR TODAY.



The following is a detailed description of the battle of Kohima and the role of the 4th Battalion, Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment. It is not known in which Company Private Fall served.

'The general situation on the front changed when the 31st Japanese Division made contact with the garrison at Kohima and drove in the outposts. During the afternoon of April 4th Colonel Laverty received a warning order that his battalion (4th Battalion, Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment) would proceed to Kohima at dawn on the following day.

The battalion column, with 'D' Company' in the lead, set off at half past six on the morning of April 5th. At intervals they met stragglers returning from

Kohima, some walking beside the road, others packed in speeding lorries. Several officers whom Colonel Richards, the garrison commander at Kohima, sent out to meet the West Kents, brought news of the contact battle. They painted so grim a picture of disorganization and lack of spirit within the defence perimeter that Colonel Laverty hoped the situation would not have deteriorated to the extent of a complete collapse before he could reinforce the garrison. Although the Japanese were already in Kohima itself and east of the village, the road to Dimapur had not been cut, and fighting was as yet confined to the first of five hill features on which the defences of the garrison box were based.

Silent was the usual hum of lorries driving down the Line of Communication main road towards Imphal. Only the roar of the troop-carrying vehicles that bore the Royal West Kents and supporting arms in this last dash into Kohima was heard. The deserted hospital with its unhinged doors and the chaos of abandoned stores could be glimpsed as the column passed towards the cross-roads where the troops were to alight. As 'D' company drove in past the Indian General Hospital, the leading lorries were fired upon by rifles in Kohima Village, away to the east. 'D' company dismounted and the men marched the rest of the way to prearranged positions on a hill by the District Commissioner's Bungalow, the home of Mr. Charles Pawsey.

By five o'clock the company groups had unloaded most of their stores, and the fifty lorries had been parked in the shelter of a hill. Much of this transport, which the battalion had been definitely instructed to keep at Kohima in order not to block the rest of 161st Brigade, who moved up to the Jatsoma area on the same day, was to be wrecked in the subsequent battle.

That evening, after a day during which the Japanese had fired spasmodically, the Royal West Kents took up their positions: 'A' Company and battalion headquarters on Summerhouse Hill; 'B' Company on Kuki Picket; 'C' Company on D.I.S. Hill; and 'D' Company established themselves between battalion headquarters and the Indian General Hospital.. At six o'clock that afternoon the Japanese guns shelled the whole defensive area for half an hour, concentrating specially on the D.C. Bungalow Spur. But the night was quiet and, save for intermittent shelling and mortar fire, the enemy made no serious attempt to attack.

It was known well in advance that Kohima was an objective of the 31st Japanese Division, but it was thought, wrongly, that the enemy would not launch more than the equivalent of a brigade group against Kohima and Dimapur. In fact, they sent a full division, whose strength far exceeded that

of the assorted garrison. Apart from the Royal West Kents, its attached Gunners—20th Battery of 24th Indian Mountain Regiment—and Sappers of 2nd Field Company, the garrison numbered some 2,900 all ranks. There were the 3rd and 4th Assam Rifles, one company of the Shere Regiment, the 1st Burma Garrison Battalion, part of G.P.T. Company, men from workshop, supply, medical, engineer and 'V' Force units, some signalmen of the Burma Telegraph Company, and soldiers from the 24th Reinforcement Camp who happened to be in Kohima when the road to Imphal was cut. Those units that were organized had already marched many miles across rough country from the Chindwin river, or were generally tired out from hard rearguard fighting among the hills at Jessami and Kharasom, to the east. That part of the garrison which comprised the non-combatant administrative staffs was later to prove a liability. Not only did the special requirements of protection and disposal impose an extra burden upon the garrison commander, but the morale of these men was low and, therefore, dangerous. In many cases, quite inevitably, the troops had been collected together at very short notice; platoons and sections were composed of men from several units, under officers and N.C.Os. whom they had never seen before and, being men from non-fighting units, their infantry training was naturally inadequate.

The defences had also been neglected. Vital wireless sets had not been dug in; few or no communication trenches had been dug before the arrival of the Royal West Kents, although there had been weeks of opportunity. The water points, exposed as they were, lay outside the defence perimeter and, consequently, soon fell under enemy control. Canvas tanks were available, but little effort had been made to construct alternative water points or to form reserves within the perimeter. But to offset these shortcomings, the quantity and the dumping arrangements of ammunition were good, and the presence of the F.S.D. within the defences ensured adequate food supplies at the outset. Yet, here again, the formation of reserves in individual sectors had not been completed. On the medical side, no less than five separate uncoordinated regimental aid posts were operating when Laverty's battalion reached Kohima. Some were without stores; others had stores in abundance, but were not dug in.

This was the position at nightfall on April 5th. Brigadier Warren (C. O. 161st Brigade) had decided not to put the whole of his brigade into the Kohima box. He had several reasons for this decision: the area within Kohima was too confined for the guns of 24th Mountain Regiment to fire effectively, and they could only operate to the best advantage if two mutually supporting boxes were established. Warren's decision did much to save Kohima, for the battery of mountain guns that did go in with the Royal West Kents was unable to fire, and it was the remainder of the regiment which, tirelessly, night after night, gave brilliant covering fire to the British battalion. Most of

the fire was called for by O.Ps. in the garrison, with whom wireless communication did not fail. There were nights when the guns were never silent, one or more firing at targets that ringed Kohima. On one target alone the Regiment fired some 3,500 rounds in five hours. Nor could the infantry have held out without this support.

From 5a.m. until 11a.m. on the 6th, Jail Hill and G.P.T. Ridge were heavily shelled and mortared. The jail buildings were rapidly hit, and the crest and forward positions of the 1/3rd Burma Rifles suffered severely. Both British officers with the Burma Rifles were killed, and many casualties had to be sent down to Summerhouse Hill.

At half past ten, by which time the Japanese had infiltrated steadily on the left flank, the ninety troops remaining on G.P.T. Ridge withdrew to Jail Hill. There were not enough trenches for them and few of these trenches had overhead cover. Half an hour later the Burma Rifles were forced off Jail Hill, and withdrew towards the F.S.D.

When Jail Hill was captured, Colonel Laverty ordered 'D' Company up from near the hospital to retake the position. But they found the Japanese too firmly established to be dislodged by anything less than a full-scale attack. As the casualties that this might incur could not be afforded, 'D' Company was ordered instead to reinforce F.S.D. Hill. During that morning 'A' Company of the 4/7th Rajputs joined the garrison, came under Laverty's command, and took over the positions just vacated by 'D' Company. They had been sent into Kohima by Brigadier Warren to ensure that the road was still clear and to gain touch with the defenders. But this road to Dimapur was cut behind the Rajput column, although small patrols continued for a time to move in and out with messages. When the road was finally blocked, all evacuation of casualties from Kohima became impossible. The telephone cable back to 161st Brigade Headquarters lasted through for six hours more. Then the enemy cut it and all communication was by wireless.

It was fortunate that the siege began with the dressing stations almost empty; they did not remain so for long. It was at this stage, when desultory shelling had proved how inadequate and poorly protected were the garrison's medical arrangements, that Lieutenant-Colonel John Young, commanding Indian Field Ambulance, arrived in Kohima by a circuitous route. His arrival was indeed a blessing. At once he organized with devoted energy the centralization of medical stores for the entire garrison. Parties of non-combatant Indians were set digging trenches to protect the wounded from the worst of the shell-fire.

When night fell on April 6th a company of Japanese attacked frontally in an attempt to cross the main road from Jail Hill to D.I.S. Hill, held by 'C' Company of the Royal West Kents. While the mortars caused many casualties in the enemy's forming-up areas and on Jail Hill, men of 'C' Company killed scores of Japanese in the open. One strong attack was driven back. But under cover of the dark night an enemy platoon succeeded in infiltrating around the west flank into some *bashas* and pits between 'C' and 'D' Companies of the West Kents.

When dawn broke the situation was grave. Something must be done to restore it. Accordingly, Laverty ordered 'D' Company to destroy the Japanese who had infiltrated. This counter-attack succeeded but it was rendered the more hazardous by enemy guns only a thousand yards away on G.P.T. Ridge which fired direct into the flank of the advancing troops. The detachment of Sappers supported Easten by demolishing the brick walls of several *bashas* in which the Japanese, and some Indians whom they had captured, were hiding. At one moment, some of the enemy soldiers took shelter in brick ovens: they were forced out by grenades. Others sheltered in an ammunition dump and in the D.I.S. Hospital stores. Their choice of refuge was ill-fated, as during the fighting both these caught alight. The confusion of battle was not lessened when a burning *basha* exploded this ammunition dump. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting also occurred. Many wounded Japanese fled into a nullah on the western side, and after the fighting died down forty-four enemy bodies were counted on the ground. Then Major Easten led 'D' Company men across to reinforce 'C' Company's position, while the Rajput Company took over the defence sector that had been retrieved in this engagement.

The next night a Rajput platoon, using a route across country north of Indian General Hospital, succeeded in escorting out of Kohima to Ms.41, eighty of the walking wounded and a hundred non-combatant Indian troops. The road from Dimapur to 161st Brigade's area was still open. Supplies had been coming in and ammunition reserves were being built up as fast as possible, for it was expected that the road would be cut at any moment. During the night 'C' Company heard the Japanese forming up for an attack. Defensive fire was called for by wireless from the 24th Mountain Regiment and the attack was dispersed. On the previous night Major Yeo's mountain battery, the only one inside Kohima, had moved two of its 3.7-inch howitzers to the top of Summerhouse Hill, but only on one occasion was it possible to fire the guns from this cramped and wooded space, which was under constant enemy observation. Later, these two howitzers had to be abandoned.

By eight o'clock that morning, a carrier patrol, which drove back ten miles to Zubza, reported that the road had been blocked. Thus, both the garrison of Kohima and Warren's defensive box were surrounded by the enemy. During that day the Japanese installed 75mm. guns along the ridge south of Kohima village towards Merema and their artillery on G.P.T. Ridge was reinforced by anti-tank guns. In this way, the garrison was now exposed to direct fire from east, south and west.

And at dusk Kohima was shelled by all these enemy guns together. This concentration coincided with a really ferocious Japanese attack from Jail Hill against the thin line of 'C' and 'D' Companies. The attack was repulsed, as were two others that followed. Lance-Corporal J. Harman died performing the acts of high gallantry for which he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. By this time the two companies had inflicted about five times their total strength in casualties on the enemy.

That same night the Japanese attacked from two other directions - from D.C. Bungalow and Indian General Hospital Spurs - and obtained footholds in both these areas. The mortar fire, which was successful in helping to repulse the attacks on 'C' Company, drew counter-battery fire by the sparks of the charge which were clearly visible to the enemy in the darkness.

This fighting in the hospital area made the garrison's medical and water problems still more acute. No longer could walking wounded be evacuated across country. No place within the perimeter lay out of enemy observation or fire. And the number of stretcher cases had greatly increased. The one small water tap in the District Commissioner's garden was now little more than thirty yards from the enemy positions, and the men had to crawl forward singly at night to fill their bottles. Although later another water point was found near the Hospital, this, too, could only be used by night. So desperate had the water situation become that it was rationed to half a mug a day for each man. Subsequently, when the water was supplied by air, the garrison had just enough for drinking and for the more urgent medical purposes.

Day by day Pawsey watched his bungalow home shelled and ruined, till nothing was standing of what had been a pleasant, rambling, red-tiled house with walls of asbestos sheeting. His private asphalt tennis court became the No-Man's-Land of a battle. The Royal West Kents held trenches along its upper edge and before long the Japanese had burrowed their way into foxholes on the lower side. There were nightly, then daily, and in the end almost hourly grenade and rifle duels fought across the width of this court, without a decision for either side.

During the morning of April 9th the Japanese reinforced their hold at D.C. Bungalow Spur. Supported by the usual artillery fire, they made further limited attacks from the Hospital. Although this area was not cleared of enemy troops, heavy mortar fire and onslaughts by the Assam Rifles did relieve pressure.

As the dusk enveloped Kohima, heavy shelling coincided with a rainstorm and a strong enemy attack from beyond the Bungalow. A fierce charge, accompanied by shouts and yells, was beaten off by 'A' Company, supported by defensive fire from the Mountain Gunners, who took a heavy toll. This first attack, on a pitch-dark night, was repulsed. But the Japanese again probed from the Hospital towards the Assam Rifles, and made a dangerous thrust directed at the West Kents' now seriously depleted 'C' Company. Under cover of showers of grenades, the enemy gained a definite footing in the trenches in D.I.S. Hill, that could not be manned because of the casualties.

Next day, April 10th, Colonel Laverty decided that a counter-attack to regain the lost ground stood little chance of success; the fighting reserve remaining in the garrison was small; severe casualties could not be afforded. Accordingly, plans were made to shorten the perimeter by withdrawing 'C' Company to the F.S.D., by destroying the stores in the huts on D.I.S. Hill, by booby-trapping the approaches to the F.S.D. and by altering the defensive fire tasks of the Mountain Gunners to fit the new defence lines. During the night 'C' Company was successfully withdrawn through the Rajputs. But all this time the Japanese maintained pressure with great strength and tenacity along the two main approaches on which they concentrated throughout the siege: their thrusts from D.I.S. Hill towards the F.S.D. and also from Pawsey's Bungalow. Grenade-discharger fire was used in profusion and, in one mortar concentration, the Japanese put down a hundred bombs in ten minutes on the small area between Laverty's command post and Young's dressing station.

April 11th was a quieter day. The Kohima garrison had hopes that Brigadier Warren would be able to relieve enemy pressure. 161st Brigade was now under command of Major-General Grover's 2nd British Division that had been hurried to Dimapur from India. Its 5th Brigade, fighting its way south, was now within ten miles of Kohima. First light on April 12th brought against Kohima yet another Japanese attack, this time against the Rajput company near the F.S.D. This onslaught was repulsed and twenty-eight enemy bodies later found.

Enemy mortaring, in particular from Jail Ridge, had by now made the casualty position critical. Stretchers were scarce, the stretcher-bearers and

doctors had suffered casualties, and in the small area of the advanced dressing station barely enough room remained for the lying cases. The wounded, tended with the utmost devotion and courage by the team of doctors, by the Indian orderlies of the Field Ambulance detachment and by the men of the West Kents' medical section, were pathetic. Sniped, shelled and mortared as they were in their all too shallow trenches, many were killed, or wounded a second time. Some lay in individual trenches, and some in pits that held half a dozen wounded soldiers. The small operating theatre, which was to receive two disastrous direct hits, lay in an open dugout, covered by a tarpaulin. Here John Young and his surgeons, whose numbers dwindled as the result of shelling, carved, chopped, hacked, stitched, and healed men. They gave of their best to cheer them and inspire them, even, when the days and nights seemed black beyond compare.

The position near the edge of Colonel Laverty's perimeter, on the slopes of Summerhouse Hill, was terribly exposed. The wounded could watch the Japanese loading shells into their mortars and they could hear the mortar shells landing close, beside them. They listened to the shelling and the screaming. They watched bombs dropping from hostile aircraft and parachutes swaying down with precious supplies. Many died of gangrene, and a few of despair. Burial of the dead was almost impossible, and the smell of rotting corpses became hideous towards the close of the siege.

In the words of Major Easten, who had commanded 'D' Company: "Many of the wounded I feel sure died in the last few days because they had given up hope. Yet they were incredibly cheerful, outwardly, up till the end. Those who were riot wounded were too busy to think much, except perhaps at night, just before the time due for the evening hate, when they wondered whether their turn would come tonight." From the moment when the enemy launched his first attack of each evening against some part of the thinly held perimeter, the night was rendered horrible, laden with noise and fear and blood. With nightfall the feeling of isolation increased. There was often neither telephone nor wireless by which to communicate with adjoining positions, and attention became concentrated upon the strip of ground before their own small sector. In nearly every case this took the form of a steep slope that ended in a pool of darkness.

In the early morning nerves became tensed again. The Japanese trick of lobbing grenades up to the trenches usually brought forth a fusillade of small-arms fire. Whole magazines of Bren ammunition went streaming off into the dark at no particular target. As soon as order had been restored, frenzied shrieks from another quarter told that an attack was coming in elsewhere, and the commotion would again increase. It was fortunate that the men were not short of ammunition.

Perhaps the most eventful period of an eventful and harassing twenty-four hours was this early morning. After a night of confusion and, possibly, a dawn assault, there were many tired and curious eyes peering out of trenches to observe any changes that had occurred during the night. Great boughs of trees felled by gunfire might alter the scene. Up on the hillock to the left, where earlier a fight had been seen by the light of a burning *basha,* a flow of British profanity now proclaimed to the general relief of all within earshot that they were still among friends. Though secure to the front, an air of uneasiness prevailed, until it became known how much ground, if any, had been yielded in the rear.

But, welcome though the daylight was, it was far more dangerous to move about by day than in darkness. As the trees gradually disintegrated under shell fire, so the troops became more and more exposed. The consequent development of crawl trenches seemed to leave scarcely one patch of ground that had not been dug up.

Major Shaw, who lay for days among the wounded, recalls with admiration the untiring efforts of Colonel Young and his assistants, whose work was beyond praise. Young was awarded a D.S.O. for his outstanding conduct. Food was brought to the wounded by night, and in daylight Shaw had in his little trench a tin of biscuits and another of tomato soup, which when empty he used for another purpose. The wounded were kept going by the heartening tales brought round by the padre and others who could spare time to visit them. The officers, from whom pistols had been removed when they were first carried in on stretchers, insisted on having their weapons back; some, at least, had decided in the long hours and days of anxiety and fear that, if badly wounded again, they would shoot and be finished with it all. All day and all night they lay and watched and waited. They could talk to those in neighbouring trenches, they could watch the guns firing from outside Kohima, and the tanks of 2nd Division some distance down the road. It often happened that those who carried food and drink round from trench to trench were sniped and killed.

As the perimeter shrank, so the position of the wounded became more precarious. On the last day of the siege a British private fell into Shaw's trench. He apologised when Shaw asked with magnificent patience and restraint what was the reason of this abrupt arrival The man had come to take up a firing position, so restricted had the outer line of the defence now become.

Water and medical stores were scanty. Indeed, it was only when Colonel Young led an unarmed carrying party through the enemy lines one night to reach some trucks abandoned in the open that sufficient blankets were

obtained for the wounded. Laverty was obliged to ask Brigadier Warren, with whom wireless communication remained good throughout the siege, to arrange an air supply of medical stores, water and certain types of ammunition, in particular grenades.

The superstition of date was justified, for April 13th became known to the garrison as "the black 13th." This title was due to three main misfortunes that befell the defenders of Kohima. They suffered more than usually heavy mortaring and sniping during daylight, and Young's medical dressing pit received two direct hits. The first supply dropping, apart from one sorely needed pannier of medical stores, was a failure. Despite frantic Very light signals from the West Kents, three entire plane-loads, including 3-inch mortar ammunition, were dropped on the enemy. The full consequences of this dismal sight—urgently needed supplies falling into enemy hands—were realized when the own troops were later bombarded with their own mortar ammunition.

And what of the third misfortune that day? After 'A' Company of the Rajputs had been reinforced at the F.S.D., an attack was put in by one platoon of the Assam Rifles. But when the men came under machine-gun fire from G.P.T. Ridge, they were forced to return before their objective was reached. As a result, the enemy was left with positions thirty-five yards from the crest of the hill, while his guns could still fire directly into the own trenches on the forward slopes.

(This was the day that Private Fall lost his life although the exact circumstances are not known).

The night that followed, far from being quiet, was rent with bitter fighting. When, at the F.S.D., the Rajputs were forced from their trenches by direct hits from 75 mm. guns opposite, Major Winstanley had to send forward one platoon from his 'A' Company at Kuki Picket to save the front positions. Their place at Kuki was taken by the platoon of Assam Rifles whose attack had been broken up during the day. On 'B' Company of the West Kents the Japanese made a heavy rush attack from the D.C. Bungalow. When one of the Bren guns jammed, enemy soldiers succeeded in penetrating into the shade of a small and important hillock. Lieutenant King, the forward platoon commander, restored the situation by driving them out with grenades, but not before the Bren gunner himself had picked up a shovel and with it attacked his Japanese assailants.

Throughout April 14th the enemy continued to fire his mortars and from time to time smoke bombs landed in the positions. 'B' Company, who near Pawsey's Bungalow had repulsed yet another attack early that morning, were

replaced by a company of the Assam Rifles, and took over a less active position north-west of the Hospital.

The war diary of the Royal West Kents comments here: "This was the fourth occasion on which, after statements by the relieving forces that they hoped to make contact on the morrow, hopes of relief, reinforcement, or evacuation of casualties were dashed."

As the days wore on, each one with its rumour of relief, it became a sort of grim joke that tomorrow they really would be relieved. But tomorrow never seemed to come. 161st Brigade had so far cleared the spur running forward from Jatsoma to Ms.41. 5th Brigade, led by the Cameron Highlanders, had driven back Japanese opposition at Ms. 8. Next day, the 15th, when both brigades made contact, the Jatsoma neighbourhood was found to be clear of enemy troops.

Meanwhile, in Kohima itself, the defenders had spent their first night without a large-scale attack. The enemy had spent the day shelling 'A' and 'C' Companies by the F.S.D., and the fresh casualties only 'served to increase the terrible congestion in the dressing station. That afternoon a patrol from the 4/7th Rajputs managed to sneak into Kohima and gain touch with Laverty's headquarters. No Japanese had been seen on the way, and although the main road was still blocked, this patrol was able to return before dark.

A quiet night followed, apart from several local probing attacks and intermittent harassing fire. April 16th saw the occupation by the 1/1st Punjab of unoccupied Japanese positions on what were known as Punjab Ridge and Picket Hill. At the same time, 5th Brigade relieved the 1/1st Punjab in the Jatsoma box. And by the following day the 4/7th Rajputs had also been relieved by the incoming British division. Now Brigadier Warren had both his Indian battalions free to open the two miles of road between Jatsoma and Kohima.

Meanwhile, the weary defenders had been making overoptimistic preparations for evacuating the wounded. This was due both to messages received and to observation that the troops were fighting on the main road north-west of the town. The supply drop of water, rum, grenades and ammunition was successful, though a very difficult operation, for the pilots had now to drop the stores into an area that was only some eight hundred yards long and three hundred yards wide.

It was estimated that the Royal West Kents had so far suffered two hundred casualties, of which number forty-five had been killed. Many who were not

listed as casualties had in fact received slight wounds and heavy shocks from the shelling. And a number of the less seriously wounded had returned to their companies, because the A.D.S. was already overflowing with stretcher cases.

That night, April 16th/17th, was particularly dark, foggy, and wet. The Japanese took advantage of the weather and attacked from Pawsey's Bungalow. At first their efforts were in vain but, towards morning, heavy pressure brought the enemy troops towards the top of F.S.D. Hill, thus gaining some ground that the defenders could ill spare. Having had no water with which to wash or shave since April 5th and an almost negligible amount of sleep or rest, they were extremely weary. But 'A' and 'C' Companies at the F.S.D. were, on the 17th, relieved by the Assam Rifles, who were able to retake a few trenches both in this area and near the Bungalow. 'A' Company returned to its original positions just south of Summerhouse Hill, which by now could scarcely be called a rest area. Although not subject to direct enemy pressure, it had for some days past been under as heavy fire as anywhere else in Kohima.

The thirteenth night of the siege brought further disasters upon the garrison. The enemy put down a concentrated barrage on F.S.D. Hill. The exhausted troops holding this feature drew back. The Japanese were not slow to exploit this withdrawal, though only in small numbers. The troops could not be rallied to make a counter-attack, and 'D' Company of the West Kents , at Kuki Picket near by, peering into the darkness, began to be affected by the confusion of their neighbours. The Company Commander was wounded, and C.S.M. Staines, M.M., who had already been blinded in the fighting but had refused to go back for treatment, was killed. As a result, 'D' Company was forced under pressure to draw back. And many good men were lost in this onslaught. One could hear the yelling Japanese, the screams of the wounded and dying. The wounded men lying in darkness on Summerhouse Hill must have wondered whether the enemy, successful at last, would try to carry the main hill that night. It was fortunate that this time the enemy, though less than one hundred yards from Summerhouse Hill and Laverty's command post, failed to exploit his success. Doubtless the stout resistance by the remnants of 'C' and 'D' Companies and the defensive fire brought down on the abandoned positions by 24 Mountain Regiment had inflicted severe casualties.

April 18th was the last day of the siege of Kohima. The 1/1st Punjab, supported by tanks, cleared the road up to 53 Indian General Hospital, and joined the garrison.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning that Major Ware's company filed up from the road, picking its way through the dead of three nations. "We must," records Easten, "have presented a strange spectacle. Bearded, filthy men with glazed eyes, who had not slept for fourteen days - we all slept a little I suppose, but mainly standing up.. Wounded, with filthy bandages and pale, grey faces, and weak but cheerful grins. The entire hillside was pockmarked with trenches, the trees shattered by shell fire and festooned with parachutes."

But however strange, the siege was over, the isolation relieved, new strength added to the dwindling, weary garrison. And the old comradeship between British and Indian soldier was heartening; the battered hillside rang with shouts of "Shahbash, Royal West Kents!" from the Punjabis, and "Good old Johnnie, everything teak hi now, eh!" from the British.

Over three hundred wounded and some two thousand noncombatant troops were evacuated. Enemy snipers were active throughout the day; and during the evacuation of the wounded still further casualties were caused by enemy mortar and shell fire directed at the ambulances. Colonels Laverty and Grimshaw made readjustments in the shrunken, overcrowded perimeter, and the 1/1st took up positions on Hospital Ridge.

More non-combatants, and the Shere Regiment, were evacuated next day. The supply dropping on a now tiny plot of scarred ground continued to be accurate, though several men were struck when certain packages dropped either without a parachute or with an unopened one.'

During the night of April 19th two enemy attacks from near the Bungalow, supported by grenade-discharger fire, had to be repulsed. Then, on April 20th, the 4th Royal West Kents and attached troops, still in good heart though utterly battle-weary, were relieved by the 1st Royal Berkshire Regiment and driven back to Dimapur. Since April 5th they had successfully resisted no less than twenty-five major Japanese attacks, during which more than 250 enemy soldiers were seen to be killed. Sixty-one members of the battalion had been killed in action, thirteen were missing (presumably including Private Fall) and 125 had been wounded.

Well might Donald Easten write this passage years afterwards, when the memories had begun to fade and the scene to grow blurred: "But the greatest honours are due to Tommy Atkins. He had fought for six months in Arakan, they had flown him to Dimapur, marched him up to Kohima, marched him back again. Then back once more to Kohima, where he was shot at as he got out of his trucks. He fought hand-to-hand battles practically every night, and his pals were shot down all round him. If he was

wounded, he had no hope of evacuation. Day after day he was promised relief which never came; and his platoon, or section, or just 'gang' got smaller and smaller. My own company finished up twenty-five strong; one platoon consisted of a single grinning private, who asked if he could put a pip up. And Tommy Atkins did all that on half a mug of liquid every twenty-four hours."

I have included this article in full, including events that took place after Private Fall was killed, as a tribute to all who took part in this engagement about which so little, if anything, is known. Private Fall earned his Burma Star which would have been presented to him posthumously.



1118073 Gunner Bertie DRAYTON
72nd Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

Died between 30th May and 4th June 1942

Aged 35

Buried in Knightsbridge War Cemetery, Acroma, Libya

Knightsbridge War Cemetery is about 25 kilometres west of Tobruk.

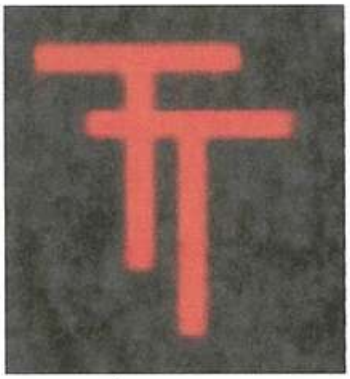


Knightsbridge War Cemetery, Acroma

The defence against Rommel's drive towards Suez was a number of strong points or 'boxes' linked by deep minefields. The chief 'box', known as Knightsbridge, was about 20 kilometres west of Tobruk and 16 kilometres south of Acroma. The graves of many of those who died in Libya were later gathered into Knightsbridge War Cemetery from the battlefield burial grounds and from scattered desert sites. There are now 3,651 servicemen buried or commemorated in Knightsbridge War Cemetery.

No. 72 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

No. 72 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery was part of the 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division



The Flash of the 50th (Northumbrian) Division

This was a first line Territorial Army division which in June 1940 was reorganized as an Infantry Division.

The 72nd (Northumbrian) Field Regiment Royal Artillery (Territorial Army) was formed on 3rd September 1939. It consisted of two batteries 285 (1st Northumberland), 286 (2nd Northumberland). It was moved to North Africa from Cyprus in February 1942 as part of the 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division. In North Africa the Division became part of 13 Corps at Gazala in Lybia. It consisted of three Brigades:

150th Infantry Brigade
151st Infantry Brigade
69th Infantry Brigade

We do not know in which Battery and in support of which Brigade Gunner Drayton served.

The action in which Gunner Drayton lost his life

Introduction

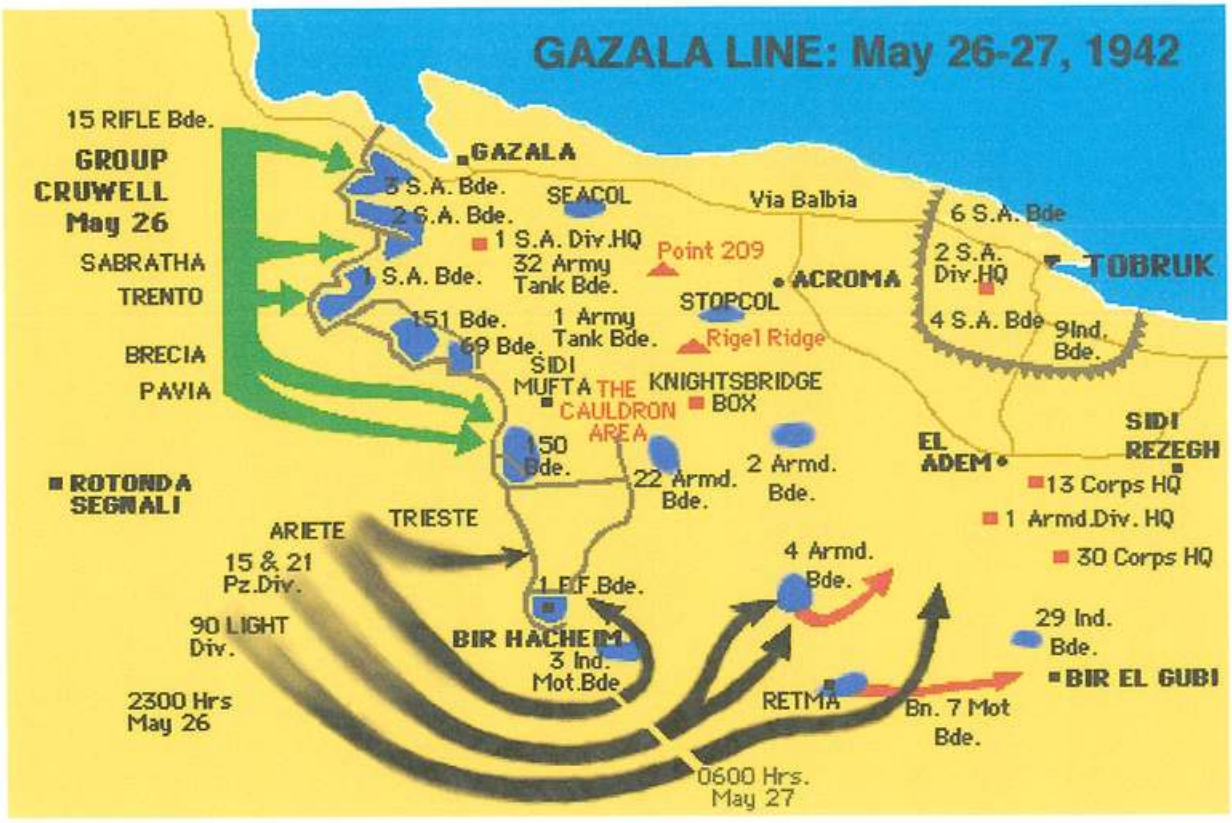
Up until the beginning of 1942, the North African campaign had been characterised by swift advances by both sides, followed by equally swift withdrawals. Between late January and May, the British had been busy creating what was to be called the "Gazala Line". This was a series of defended "Boxes" running from Gazala on the eastern side of Jebel south into the desert (see map below). A full brigade, behind belts of barbed wire and mines manned each; they were too widely separated to provide mutual support. Each box was a self-contained fortress with enough supplies for one week of action, surrounded by dense minefields and connected to the others by a "mine marsh". The desert between them was patrolled and hopefully controlled by roving armoured units.

The dispositions of the Eighth Army on May 25th 1942 were as follows: the 1st South African Division held the front from the coast west of Gazala to El Hamza. Eastward from this point stretched two brigades of the 50th British Division (Gunner Drayton's Division), while its third, 150th Brigade, had established a detached strong-point at Sidi Muftah. The Tobruk defence perimeter was divided between the 2nd South African Division and Nine Brigade. The 1st Free French Brigade held another detached position far to the south at Bir Hakeim. The 1st Armoured Division was centred round Knightsbridge, while the 7th Armoured Division was a little further south.

Most British senior commanders thought the enemy thrust would come through the centre, trying to break the minefields. Intelligence reports also gave this impression. Some senior officers however believed that Rommel planned to try the southern route. Because of this difference in view, the tanks were dispersed, ready to meet either or both contingency.

General Auchinleck felt that the Eighth Army had sufficient infantry to cope with any eventuality, but there was no reserve of field artillery. Though having numerical superiority in tanks, they were inferior in gun power and reliability to those of the enemy. The armies in the middle of May had about 100,000 a side. The British had 100,000 men and the enemy 90,000, of whom 50,000 were Germans.

BATTLE OF GAZALA AND THE CAULDRON (May-June 1942)



Rommel's plan, code name Operation Venezia (and also referred to as "Theseus") was bold and relatively simple. Group Cruewell opened the offensive with a heavy bombardment and a feint assault frontally at 2 p.m. on the 26th May against the positions of 1st South African division and 50th British division. Group Cruewell was made up of the German 15th Rifle Brigade and Italian 10th and 21st Corps, commanded by Gen. Cruewell. The main striking was to make a rapid night march to the area south of Bir Hacheim, advance the next day (27th May) east of the Gazala Line toward Acroma area and then attack the British forces from the rear. This force, led by Rommel would consist of Afrika Korps, the Italian 20th Corps (Ariete & Trieste), and the 90th Light Division. Moving rapidly by night, this force would advance beyond the minefields, move south of Bir Hacheim, and sweep north towards Acroma, hopefully causing chaos in the British rear.

The Afrika Korps, on 27th May, having pushed round the British defences, moved northeast. They were engaged by elements of the British 1st and 7th Armoured Divisions. Many tank losses were taken by both sides, although as the battle went on the British armour became increasingly scattered. The Italian Ariete Armoured Division continued to meet stiff resistance from the Free French at Bir Hacheim, while the Italian Trieste Motorised Division,

further north, found itself grinding through minefields under heavy fire as a result of a navigation error.

Heavy fighting continued on 28th May at the southern end of the Gazala line, although by now Rommel's forces were beginning to run out of fuel and his tanks were becoming scattered. In order to shorten his supply lines he decided to punch a hole through the Gazala line. On 30th May the Afrika Korps take up defensive positions in the 'Cauldron' in readiness for their attempt to punch through the Gazala line.

The battle of the 'Cauldron' began on the 31st May as Rommel attacked the fortified box in the Gazala line that was held by the 150th Brigade of the British 50th Division. The Italians attacked from the west as elements of the Afrika Korps attacked from the east. Meanwhile Rommel's anti-tank gunners repulsed a number of British armoured counter-attacks against his position in the 'Cauldron'. However, Lieutenant General Ritchie was hampered by his inability to concentrate his armour and so was unable to relieve the 150th Brigade. Rommel took the fortified 'box' that was held by them on the 1st June and secured the 'Cauldron'. This enabled him to get much needed supplies flowing. Rommel now turned the German 90th Light Division and the Italian Ariete Armoured Division against Bir Hacheim in an attempt to wipe out the Free French garrison which still held out. He also distracted the British by sending the 21st Panzer Division northeast to operate nearer to Tobruk.

The Eighth Army launched a counter-attack on the 5th June against the Afrika Korps forces that were inside the 'Cauldron. This was codenamed 'Aberdeen', but went disastrously wrong from the start. At this point in the battle, the British forces in the northern part of the Gazala line (1st South African and the remainder of the British 50th Division), were still in a strong position and so General Auchinleck and Lieutenant General Ritchie decided to hold the line facing south from the Knightsbridge defensive box to El Adem with the remainder of their infantry and tank forces and wait for Rommel's next move. But by this time Gunner Drayton was dead.

The following is an extract from the Battery Diary and memoirs of Ted Stonard who also served in 72nd Field Regt, 286th Battery, E Troop, of 50th Infantry Division, relating his experience of the climax of the battle.

'The final day commenced with the usual 'stand-to' at 5.30 a.m., an ominous stillness greeted the detachment as they stood or knelt around their guns wondering what the day would bring, food was no longer of any importance as most were suffering from thirst, and many had blistered lips and parched throats....

It was not long before the Troop began to have casualties, E Sub. (Bombardier Stonard) having the first, a shell burst near the gun and Gunner Lavendar (his nose already bandaged from a splinter several days previously), while laying in his shallow slit trench was hit by a large piece of shell, it sliced through the fleshy part of his upper thigh, splintering the bone.

On hearing his scream, the Bombardier and Gunner Bristow went to his aid, he was conscious but in a state of shock. Stuffing a cigarette into his mouth the Bombardier put a large shell dressing on the gaping wound, the leg was almost severed and the splintered bone showed through...

The Troop position came under continual shell-fire, vehicles and Gun Quads being hit, a 3 ton lorry some hundred yards to the left flank burst into flames from a direct hit, this gave the Germans a visual target, unfortunately an acute shortage of ammunition prevented the Troop from returning the fire, detachments were only too pleased to seek the protection of a slit trench no matter how shallow...

No 1 Gun (Bombardier Stonard) was out of action, one man (Gunner Rickett) being killed and two wounded, the Bombardier was blown forward into a slit trench, Gunnners Canfield and Odell managed to escape injury and took shelter in their slit trenches.

After the dust had settled a voice was heard calling out for help, this was Gunner Ginger Lee who had been blown several yards in the rear and was laying stretched out on the sand. ...With disregard for his own safety, Gunner Canfield dashed across and dragged Lee into the slit trench alongside Bombardier Stonard, the wounded man was in a bad state, his shirt was scorched and burning but the worst injury was to his eyes, one socket was empty and the other eye was hanging out on his cheek, the shell had hit the cartridge case he was holding and the explosion had ignited the cordite. He was quite calm, probably in shock, the Bombardier bandaged his eyes and gave him the only comfort he could - a cigarette and laid him in the slit trench...

After about half an hour the firing ceased, tracked vehicles were heard approaching, German Infantry appeared and indicated to them to go back to their rear - the Troop had fired its last shot!

Transcript of pages from diary of Ted Stonard:
Slept in Gun-pit during night. Apps came as well.
Thursday 28th May 1942 Rotunda.
Rev 6 Firing in all directions all day, during late afternoon. Regimental Target upon convoy of enemy vehicles. Destroyed most. Tank battles in rear of Box around Bir El Harment. Heavy shellfire by enemy. Sound ranging in, and around Battery Position, being shelled by all sides.
Went to bed about 10, aroused half an hour later. Order to move, packed Quad with stores, equipment and ammo, also some rations, moved off about 2 next morning.

Friday 29th May 1942
Covered rest of Brigade while they were withdrawing. Moved into 151 Brigade area early during the morning (5am). Very heavy shelling by enemy while moving into new position. Platform dropped from beneath Gun, smashed it. Half hour coming into action, position as No 4 gun on crest of hill under heavy shellfire, dug slit trenches. Quad hit in radiator, repaired later. Firing during day. Scotty came round with rations. Early during evening withdrew back about 700 yds to foot of hill.

Saturday 30th May 1942
Rose early. Tanks (Valentines and Matildas 4RTR) around us. Limited ammo. RAF bombing Germans. Sgt Compton's Quad blown up. Very heavy shellfire.

7905315 Trooper Edwin George NORTHAM
48th Royal Tank Regiment

Son of William Thomas and Louisa Northam

Died 7th September 1945

Aged 28

Buried in Ancona War Cemetery, Ancona, Italy

The cemetery is about 3 kilometres south of Ancona



Ancona War Cemetery

48th Royal Tank Regiment



Royal Tank Regiment

According to his brother, Charles Northam of 34 Yeovil Road, Montacute, Edwin Northam had served with 48th Royal Tank regiment in North Africa and Italy.

If that is so he would have been home on embarkation leave in January 1943 and sailed in convoy at 5.00 a.m. on 15th March 1943 from Gourock Bay on the Clyde near Glasgow for North Africa.

It was a rough journey and most of the troops were sea-sick. On 23rd March at 3.30a.m. the convoy was attacked in the Mediterranean Sea by Italian torpedo-carrying aircraft and one ship was hit. The convoy arrived at its destination, Bone, at about 6.00 p.m. on 25th March 1943 and disembarked that night. They then marched 8 miles to No. 4 Transit Camp.



Map 2 Battalion moves in French North Africa

The 48th Royal Tank Regiment consisted of three squadrons, A, B and C, and Trooper Northam, in early 1944, formed part of the echelon or support group for C Squadron. He was the driver of a 3 ton lorry which carried the

cooks' supplies; there were two other privates with him on the lorry, presumably members of the Army Catering Corps. There is no reason to suppose that Trooper Northam was fulfilling a different role when the battalion landed in Tunisia. The Battalion formed part of the 21st Tank Brigade of the British First Army.

It is almost certain that he was driving a Bedford 3 ton QL General Service Lorry which was the workhorse of the British Army at that time. It could possibly have been an OY, the earlier version but similar in appearance. It was popular with its drivers for its excellent visibility, good ground clearance and its four wheel drive ability.

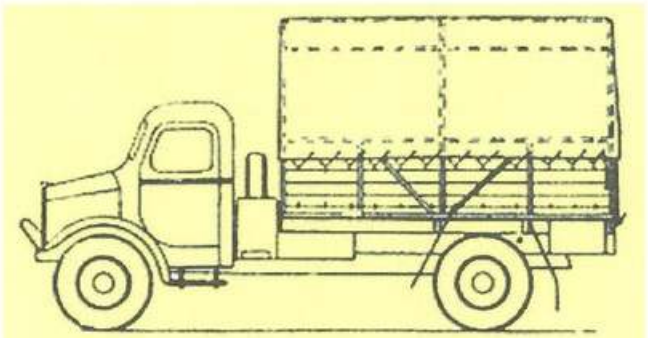


DESCRIPTION OF BEDFORD QL 3 TON TRUCK

British vehicle manufacturers Bedford first had an interest in this type of vehicle back in December of 1938 when engineers working at Vauxhall (Bedford's parent company) suggested producing a four wheel drive Bedford Truck with off road ability.

The advantages of an all-wheel drive General Service (GS) lorry for the military were obvious and the War Office were approached for permission to continue with the design. The details were approved just one month after the outbreak of war in 1939 and the first prototype was being tested on 1st

February, 1940. It proved a great success, and with the loss of vehicles abandoned by the BEF at Dunkirk mass production was ordered from February 1941. The Bedford QL could be found on every battlefield in all campaigns during WW2 and was produced throughout the rest of the war years. The total production figure of 52,245 QL's made exceeded individual figures for any other British vehicle in WW2.



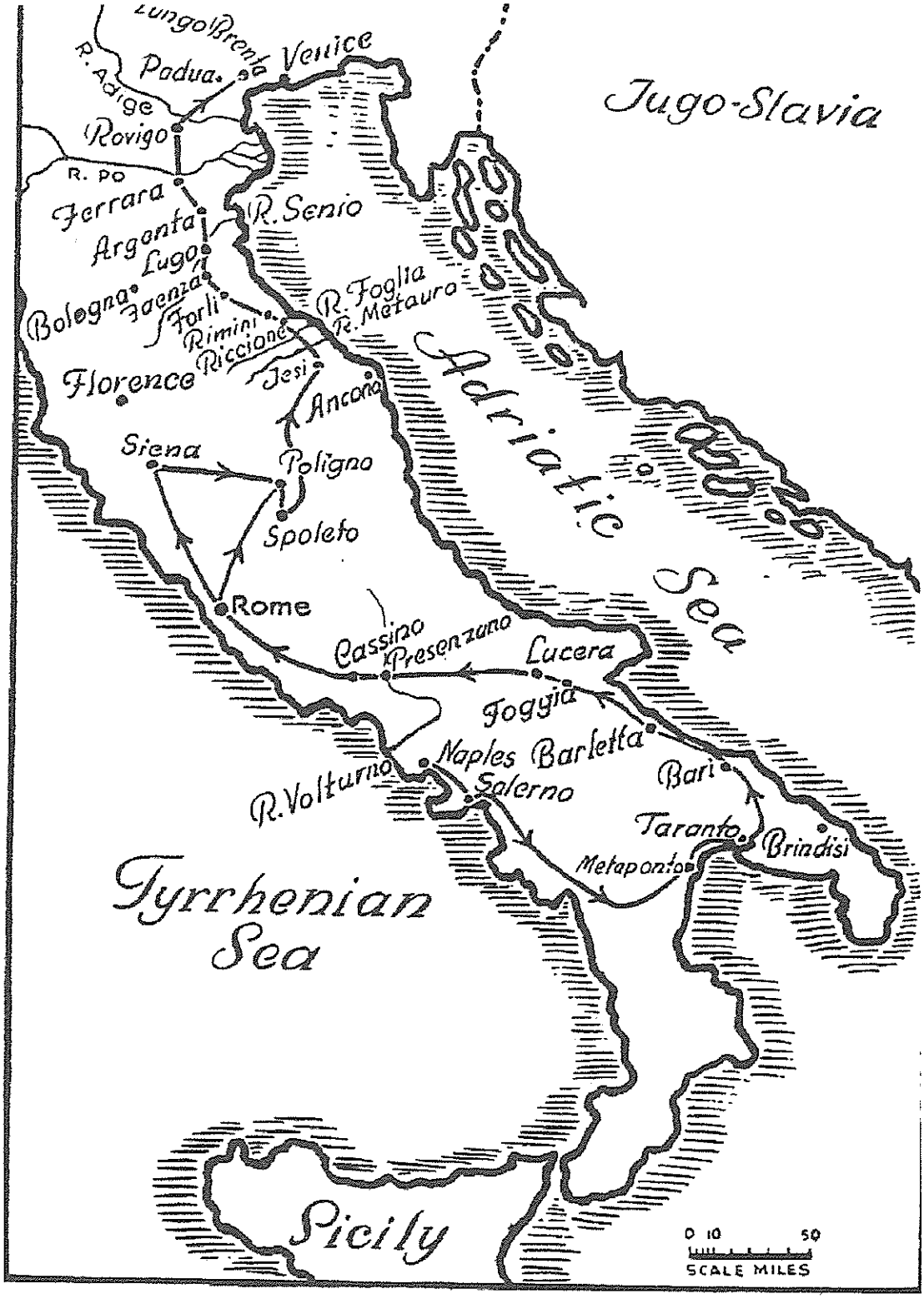
The Bedford QL 4x4 GS Lorry was fitted with a 6-Cylinder petrol engine, which produced 72HP. Dimensions were:

Length 19ft 8ins,
Width 7ft 6ins and
Height 9ft 10inches.

C Squadron first went into action at 3.30 a.m. on 6th May in support of an infantry attack that was successful. By 11th May the fighting in Tunisia was over and the Battalion was withdrawn to the area around Bone, where they were to stay for almost a year. There are a number of theories why the 21st Tank Brigade was not employed in the invasions of Sicily and Italy. Montgomery is said to have had a disliking not only for the Churchill tank with which the 48th Royal Tank Regiment was equipped but the 1st Army as a whole. It has also been suggested that the weight of the Churchill made it unsuitable for the bridges in Sicily.



Churchill Tank



Map 5 Battalion moves in Italy

On 30th April 1944 the Battalion embarked for Italy and they arrived at Naples on 6th May. Tanks and lorries had landed at Taranto and a party was sent to collect them, presumably including Trooper Northam as a truck driver. The 21st Tank Brigade also acquired a new arm flash as follows:



Arm flash of the 21st Tank Brigade

The Battalion spent until August 1944 regrouping and training on the new terrain. It became involved in four phases of the Italian Campaign – August/September 1944, the breaking of the Gothic line, a defence line north of Rome along the backbone of the northern Apennine Mountains, which the British attacked along the east coast, and the capture of Rimini, secondly (October 1944 – January 1945) the advance up the River Po and the capture of Ravenna, thirdly (January – April 1945) holding a winter line around Lake Comacchio and lastly (April 1945) the crossing of the Rivers Po and Adige.

In August 1944 the Battalion was placed under the command of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division and C Squadron first went into action on 1st September. The official Canadian account says that September 1944 saw the fiercest fighting of the Italian Campaign and they suffered their heaviest casualties.

On the 13th December the Battalion was with the 2nd New Zealand Division and C Squadron was supporting the 43rd Gurkha Brigade in the capture of Faenza. The following picture shows the Battalion spending Christmas 1944 at Faenza and one of the lorries featured could well be that of Trooper Northam.



Plate 93 Churchills of the 48th Bn RTR parked up in the Piazza del Popolo, Faenza, over Christmas 1944 (Deric Skey)

For the final offensive in Italy in April 1945 the Battalion was placed under the command of the 8th Indian Infantry Division. The campaign culminated in the capture of Venice on 30th April. The Germans in Italy surrendered on 2nd May. The Battalion moved on the 15th May back to Rimini and was billeted in seaside hotels living as the Battalion history says' 'an almost idyllic holiday life in this Adriatic resort'. It goes on to say 'those entitled were able to take UK leave' and this was to happen to Trooper Northam in September 1945 when he would be able to see his new baby for the first time.

Then tragedy struck and he was killed in a road accident on 7th September 1945. He is buried in the Ancona War Cemetery, south of Rimini. As well as the memorial in St. Catherine's Church Montacute, Trooper Northma's name also appears on the memorial to men of the 48th Royal Tank Regiment which is in the Bovington Tank Museum in Dorset. Unfortunately the following photograph is not of good quality but the name of Trooper Northam can be made out.



Plate 111 The 48th Bn RTR Roll of Honour, photographed at the Tank Museum, Bovington, beside a Churchill tank on 14 May 1992 on the occasion of its re-dedication (John Walker)

EPILOGUE

These have been the stories of 18 very ordinary men with ages ranging from 19 to 35. They were not members of any elite officer class, they did not perform individual acts of heroism which were recognised with gallantry medals; they were ordinary men who, together with their colleagues, were asked to do extraordinary things for their country and for us.

Theirs have not been stories of individual achievements but of collective gallantry and devotion to duty in sometimes appalling conditions whether it be the mud of Flanders, the heat of the Middle East or the humidity of the jungle. They were asked at times to face overwhelming odds as in Burma or an unseen enemy as in the Mediterranean, all of this in defence of their country – our country - and for which they paid the supreme sacrifice – their life.

Memories grow dim with the passing of the years – the majority of people living in our village have not experienced the horror of either World War. That is no excuse for not remembering those who did and in particular those who did not come home again to tell their story.

We will remember them