

APRIL 1918

SEVEN MORE LOCAL MEN LOSE THEIR LIVES AS THE KAISER'S SPRING OFFENSIVE CONTINUES

April 1918 was marked by a resumption of the German offensive and reorganization by the Allies. Faced with defeat they had hurriedly called for a crisis conference on 26th March. At the bidding of Lloyd George and General John Pershing, Haig finally agreed to bypass the pessimistic Pétain and serve under General Ferdinand Foch as 'Generalissimo'. (He was later given the title of Commander in Chief of Allied Forces.) Foch's appointment came just in time and French reserves were directed to help the British. Also, Pershing now agreed to help out - thousands of Americans were pouring into France every week, but he had been reluctant until now to let them fight, relatively untrained, in a piecemeal way with a non-unified Allied force.



General Ferdinand Foch



The German assault petered out as they approached Amiens over the wilderness of the old Somme battlefields. John Keegan writes "*the Somme may not have won the war for the British in 1916 but the obstacle zone it left helped in 1918 to ensure they did not lose it*". On 4th April a British/Australian counter-attack convinced Ludendorff 'Operation Michael' had run its course.

On 9th April Ludendorff now inaugurated a subordinate scheme, 'Operation George', against the British in the battle of Lys in Flanders. He was determined to take the supply lines and ridges near Ypres and push us back to the Channel ports just 60 miles away, thus taking us out of the war. Initially they were successful and advanced 10 miles - heartbreakingly we lost Passchendaele Ridge on the 16th. However, our front line here was the strongest on the Western Front. We knew every nook and cranny. By 29th April the offensive had petered out - German casualties were twice those of the Allies. Stout organized defence was our watchword, perhaps characterized best on the 12th by Haig's eloquent 'Backs to the Wall' order. It read "With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight to the end. Every position must be held to the last man. There must be no retirement."

The month was characterized by a number of other "firsts". Numerically we began to gain ascendancy in the air. On the 1st, the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service were disbanded and the RAF was formed. On the 24th at Viller Bretonneux the first tank versus tank battle took place - a resounding British victory.

One of the most noted events in April was the death in action on the 21st of the 'Red Baron', Manfred von Richthofen at Vaux-sur-Somme; leader of the Flying Circus and with 80 victories in aerial combat, the highest ranking Ace of the war, he was possibly hit by a bullet from the ground fired by an Australian machine gunner.





'The Red Baron'

As fatalities mounted on both sides, Wilmslow was to lose 7 young men this month.

On the 12th, **Private George Harold Cooper, 1st/8th Battalion Manchester's (302248)** died aged 20. He is buried at St Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen and commemorated in St Bartholomew's, on a family grave in the churchyard and also on the Civic Memorial. The son of George and Elizabeth Cooper, he had lived at Chancel Lane.

St Chad's and Handforth memorials mark the passing of **Private Joseph Beard**, aged 25, on the 17th. Serving with the **9th Cheshire's (50359)** he is interred at Mendinghem Military Cemetery, Poperinge, 10 miles north west of Ypres. He was a milk driver lodging at Outwood Farm, Handforth in 1911.

Lance Corporal George Greenall (1895-1918) of the **11th Cheshire's (16985)** won a Military Medal for his bravery at the battle of Lys, but died on the 20th. His step-parents, Herbert and Eliza Lamb, lived in Lady Field Terrace, but by 1915 George was married to Edith Annie and lived at 11 Elizabeth Street, West Gorton. He had been a shop assistant and is remembered on the memorials in Wilmslow and Tyne Cot (no known grave).



The Military Medal for bravery in battle also went to **Private Arthur Wrench** (1895-1918) on the 26th. Killed in action on the Lys he initially joined the Royal Horse Artillery but was transferred to the **10th Cheshire's (16026)**. Having no known grave his name appears at Tyne Cot, on the Civic Memorial and inside St Bartholomew's Church. He was the son of William and Harriet and, along with Ernest and Fred, he was one of 3 brothers to perish on the Western Front. He had been a farm labourer and was married to Charlotte, living near Crewe.

St John's Lindow and Wilmslow Memorial record the passing of **Private Frank Arnold Hardy** (1885-1918) on the 30th. He had lived with his wife, Beatrice, at 6 Lindow Terrace, Row of Trees and worked in the retail trade. Serving with the **9th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry**, he is buried at Rue-Petillon Military Cemetery, Fleurbaix.

The 30th also marked the death of **Sapper Daniel Edwards**, who died of his wounds aged 34. His grave can be found at St Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen near that of G H Cooper. The St Bartholomew's family grave and memorial and also the nearby Civic Memorial depict his name. His brother Rupert was to die on 30th September. A former member of the **Cheshire's** he transferred to the **Royal Engineers 256th Tunnelling Company**. His family lived in South Oak Lane where he had been a domestic gardener.

The third Wilmslow man to fall on the last day of the month was **Lt Roland Henry Brewerton** (1891-1918) of the **8th King's Liverpool regiment**. He was the son of Constance and William (a renowned organist and music teacher) from Albert Road and in 1911 Roland was a music teacher himself, living in Whitchurch, Shropshire. He appears on St Bartholomew's and the Civic Memorial, as well as at Tyne Cot (no known grave).

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