

DECEMBER 1917

THE CHESHIRE'S ENTER JERUSALEM

At long last there was some good news for Lloyd George in the terrible year of 1917. General Edmund Allenby entered Jerusalem, not in triumph, but respectfully on foot on 11 December 1917. This ended 400 years of Ottoman rule. Allenby had been moving steadily north from Gaza and Beersheba over a month of fighting during the winter rains; his Egyptian Expeditionary Force included the 4th and 7th Cheshire's accompanied by the ANZAC cavalry. Additionally, they were supported by the Arab Revolt, which played havoc with the Turkish railways. This mobile unit was admirably led by Feisal Ibn Hussein and Thomas Edward Lawrence (1880-1935). This Welsh born archaeologist had been working on archaeological digs in the Middle East for years and his knowledge of the local language and people led to his appointment as an intelligence officer to Feisal's guerrilla force. Of course later, at the Paris Peace Conference, Lawrence felt that the Allies had ignored their promises of freedom to the Arab people - they placed much of the area under French and British mandate.



T E Lawrence



Feisal Ibn Hussein



The local Cheshire's suffered no fatalities in the desert this month but, as with the whole campaign, they had to cope with searing heat, impassable desert roads, lack of water in summer and a range of infectious diseases (Dysentery, Malaria, Yellow Fever and Typhoid). This Winter campaign was waged in a sea of mud and mist with terrible effects on transport, especially the mules and camels. There was no shelter, the driving rain beat down mercilessly. By the 26th however, the Turkish opposition had melted away - their losses had been immense. Both sides were ordered to spare Jerusalem from fighting and bombardment given the number of Christian, Jewish and Muslim holy sites there.



Allenby enters Jerusalem

Elsewhere was pretty quiet. Bad weather on the Western Front after Cambrai reduced all activity to the daily exchange of fire and consolidating defences. Armistice agreements on the Eastern Front were signed on the 15th at Brest-Litovsk. The 12th Battle of the Isonzo ended with the Italians just about hanging on.



Mercifully there were no local battlefield casualties this month, but 2 men died at home.

Private Thomas Henry Brocklehurst of the **Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) Mechanical Transport (M/097823)** died aged 23 on 1st December 1917. He is buried in St Bartholomew's Church graveyard and commemorated on the Alderley Edge War Memorial. He was the son of Sarah Ann, living in 1901 at 10 Duke Street, Alderley Edge with 2 brothers and 2 sisters. Before the war he was a telegraph messenger with the Post Office. He enlisted in May 1915, going to France in the October. His brother Private John William Clarke Brocklehurst of the East Surrey's had sadly died at Loos on 13 October 1915. The RASC were affectionately known as "Ally Sloper's Cavalry" and were the unsung heroes of the conflict; it was their job to provide frontline troops with food, ammunition and equipment, a prodigious task using horses, motor vehicles and improvised railways. Thomas was invalided out of the army in July with pulmonary TB and honourably discharged. He was given a Silver War Badge to prevent public harassment by women, who took it upon themselves to give white feathers to those who appeared to be able-bodied men, whom they thought were guilty of cowardice.

Private James Cleary died aged 44 on the 23rd. He was born in Abbeyleix, County Kilkenny, Ireland and was a veteran of the Boer War. In 1911 he was working as a hod-carrier and living with his wife and 4 children at 2 Raven Street, Pendleton, Salford. He re-enlisted in the **Lancashire Fusiliers (20028)** but was wounded and transferred to the **Royal Defence Corps Garrison (303rd Protection Co. 20103)** - soldiers who were too unfit for active duty, but who still wished to serve. They usually provided security on the Home Front. In late 1917 James was one of many guarding the perimeter of the Handforth PoW camp which held over 2,500 German prisoners. He was with a fellow soldier when he complained of dizziness. His friend left to report the matter, but when he returned he found James had been fatally shot. The Coroner recorded a verdict of Suicide. James is buried in Wilmslow Cemetery.





Grave of James Cleary

As the War entered its fourth Christmas season and as regimes and armies began to disintegrate, all belligerents must have wondered what 1918 would bring.

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