

JULY 1916

THE START OF 141 DAYS OF HORROR - THE SOMME

At 7.30am on 1st July 1916, a blisteringly hot day, 120,000 men of the British Empire (13 divisions) went over the top. They walked calmly uphill towards the German lines on a 15 mile front alongside the River Somme in Picardy. The soldiers, many of Kitchener's New Army, were assured that our previous 7 day bombardment would have destroyed the German defences and barbed wire; we would achieve a breakthrough and so relieve the hard pressed French at Verdun. It proved to be a murderous disaster of epic proportions. On this day alone, the British suffered 57,470 casualties of which 19,240 died.



1st July 1916



The 4th Army south of the Albert-Bapaume road fared relatively well. Fighting alongside the 5 battle-hardened French divisions we used the 'creeping barrage' technique. But the 3rd Army to the north left too much time between the end of bombardment and the infantry attack. There were too few guns and high explosive shells. Wire entanglements were left untouched apart from a few gaps. The German concrete bunkers and dominant redoubts remained largely intact. The enemy had time to emerge and use machine guns to devastating effect. The tragedy was multiplied by the uniquely local nature of the volunteer battalions - such as the Accrington Pals at Serre. This East Lancashire Battalion of men from Accrington, Burnley and Chorley suffered 585 casualties (235 killed, 350 wounded) out of 700 in less than half an hour. As Private A V Pearson of the Leeds Pals, destroyed on the same day, said "We were 2 years in the making and 10 minutes in the destroying."



Going over the top



Seven Wilmslow men (including one from Handforth) were lost on that first dreadful day, 4 of them fighting and dying side-by-side in the southern sector:

Lce Corp Arthur R COX

Church St; 20th Manchester's; Dantzig Alley Cemetery

Corp Raymond Hayes GRIMSHAW

Bull's Head; 19th Manchester's; Thiepval Memorial

Lieut Alan HODGKINSON

The Grange; 2nd Royal Warwick's; Dantzig Alley Cemetery

Pte James KNOWLES

Freemason's Arms, Handforth; 16th Manchester's; Thiepval Memorial

Pte Arthur SWINDELLS

Mill Rd; 2nd Royal Fusiliers; Thiepval Alley Cemetery

Sgt Frederick Arthur WILKINSON;

'Waltham'; 17th Manchester's; Dantzig Alley Cemetery

Pte Edgar Maurice WILLIAMS

The Knoll, Chapel Lane; 22nd Manchester's; Dantzig Alley Cemetery

The fighting continued at an exceptionally high intensity throughout the month and casualties on both sides continued to mount. Our community lost 8 more in July:

Lce Corp John SHAW;

3rd July; 347 Outwood View, Handforth; 8th Lanc's; Thiepval Memorial.

Pte Frank Bourne OUSEY;

14th July; Homebush, Grove Avenue, Wilmslow; 10th Cheshire's; Thiepval Memorial.

Sgt Frank Nevel COOPS;

17th July; Hawthorn View, Wilmslow; 10th Cheshire's;
Puchenvilliers Military Cemetery.

Pte Thomas Edwin TUSON;

20th July; 97 Hillkirk St, Ardwick (formerly of Wilmslow);
Machine Gun Corps; Corbic Communal Cemetery Extension.



Pte Harold McCLUNAN;
24th July; Moor Lane, Wilmslow;
20th Central Ontario Infantry; Ridgewood Military Cemetery.

Sgt Christopher PROUDMAN;
27th July; Alma St, Wilmslow; 1st Cheshire's;
Thiepval Memorial.

Pte Charles BOWYER;
30th July; Oak Cottages, Styal; 13th Cheshire's;
Thiepval Memorial.

Pte Arthur ADSHEAD;
31st July; Old Road, Wilmslow; 13th Cheshire's;
Knightsbridge Cemetery.

Whilst all the men are either buried or commemorated in France, they are also remembered locally in churches, on memorials or in graveyards - often in more than one place.

The battle was to end with the onset of heavy rain on 18th November after much bungling and butchery on both sides. Our tactics improved in a hit and miss fashion, but we often attacked without adequate preparation and cooperation. The Germans were equally profligate with the lives of men by insisting on automatic counter attacks to make up lost ground. At the end we had gained *7 miles*. Casualties were appalling, perhaps 630,000 Allies and 660,000 Germans - the long war of attrition had decidedly taken hold on the Western Front.

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