

JULY 1917

THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES

'THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND'

After the localized storming of the 2 great bastions at Vimy and Messines, the omens now looked good for Haig's grandiose plan. This was to break out of the murderous salient in Flanders along an 11 mile front to quell the submarine pens at Zeebrugge and proceed triumphantly towards open country and Germany. Preparations were made on a vast scale.

Meanwhile the weeks of artillery fire, when the enemy used mustard gas shells for the first time on the Western Front, raiding parties and air battles resulted in 4 local fatalities.

On the 15th July 1917 **Private Robert John Brandreth** of the **10th Cheshire's (39896)** was killed in action, aged 32. A bleach worker before the war, he was the husband of Edith of 6 Oak Cottages, Styal. His younger brother, Frank, was to die later in the PoW camp in Cologne. He is buried in Vlamertinghe New Military Cemetery and remembered at Dean Row in the chapel and on the family grave.

Canada Farm Cemetery, also west of Ypres, contains the grave of 29 year old **Gunner Ernest Wilfred Stubbs (188777)** of the **Royal Field Artillery** - he died on the 22nd July 1917. His family were from Upcast Lane. St John's Church marks his passing. Before the war Ernest was a nursery gardener lodging at 66 Stanford Park Road, Hale.



Our third fatality was something of a celebrity as he was 'a flying ace' responsible for downing many German aircraft. On the 28th July **Captain Laurence Minot** of the **57th Squadron RFC** and aged just 22 was killed in aerial combat near Menlebeke. Leading a group of 5 against 20 enemy he shot down 2 of their number before perishing. He was awarded a posthumous Military Cross. He was the only son of John (a linen buyer) and Ada of Beulah Hill Upper Norwood, London. An old boy of Dulwich College, he remembered at the school and on a private memorial at St Bartholomew's. He is buried in Dozinghem Military Cemetery near Poperinghe. The link with Wilmslow would seem to be his grandmother Ellen Wedd who lived in Station Road.



Captain Laurence Minot

The fourth young man to die was **Private Charles Bradbury**, aged 30, of the **2nd Battalion Manchester's (377556)** killed in action on the 30th. His family was based on Manchester Road where he was a finisher at a print works. He married Mary of 19 Prestage Street, Longsight before the war. Buried in Coxyde Military Cemetery, he is remembered in St Bartholomew's and on the town memorial.



At 3.50am on the 31st July 1917, the third battle of Ypres actually started. Whilst there were in fact 8 offensives, it is the last 2 attempts to take Passchendaele village by which this notorious struggle is remembered. The 5th commanded by the wildly optimistic Gough and the 2nd led by the more sanguine Plumer went over the top on the 11 mile front. At first it went well and then 3 persistent features emerged that were to haunt the men for weeks to come. The rain came down and rarely ceased and there was no shelter except for flooded shell holes. The enemy always counter-attacked and gains made in the morning were largely lost. We lost 3 men on that dreadful day alone. There were no known graves in this slime, but all are remembered on the Menin Gate in Ypres.



Menin Gate

Private John Sumner (268190) of the **6th Cheshire's** was killed in action, aged 31. He was the son of James and Mary of Morley Green and husband of Laura of 7 Oak Lane, Fulshaw and had worked as a cattleman at Birtles Farm, Mobberley. His brother Arthur was killed at sea in October 1918. St Bartholomew's and the town memorial mark John's passing.

Corporal Percival Ernest Woore (11973) is also commemorated in St Bartholomew's and on the town memorial and his name appears on a family grave in Wilmslow Cemetery. He was killed in action serving with 'D' company Lewis Gun Detachment of the **16th Manchester's**. His father and mother (Joseph and Tryphena) lived in the Grange Lodge area of Lacey Green. Before the conflict Percival worked in a draper's warehouse.



The community gained its second Military Cross this month. **Captain Jack Lee**, aged 26, of the **6th Cheshire's** had commanded numerous raiding parties 'wet through' but was killed in the attack on Pilckem Ridge - he died instantly. His battalion of about 800 suffered 196 killed and 281 wounded that day. His mother was Mrs I N Lee of Woodside and he had lived with his wife Agnes in Whitecroft Road, Timperley.

Elsewhere Maude's attempts to clear the area around the recently captured Baghdad and the Euphrates were continuing. Stern Turkish resistance and temperatures soaring as high as 50°C (123°F) cost 2 Wilmslow men dearly.

On 13th July 1917 **Sapper Cecil Heathcote Hamilton (165694)** of the **15th Division Signal Company** died aged 21. He was the son of John and Mary of Row of Trees and Carrs Lane and had worked as a wheelwright. He is remembered at Alderley Edge, St John's and Basra.

On 22nd July 1917 **Private Thomas Moore (45948)** whilst still serving with the **8th Cheshire's**. He was a resident of Farm Fold, in his home village of Styal where he was a domestic gardener. He died near Gaza, from the heat, and is buried at North Gate Cemetery, Baghdad, but his name also appears on the Styal memorial and in the Methodist Church.

The struggle (finally ending on 10th November) now continues interrupted only by rest for fresh preparation. However, events would prove that 'Purgatory was the Somme, but Hell was Passchendaele'.

Jon Armstrong and Alan Cooper
Wilmslow Historical Society

