

# MARCH 1918

## 19 OF OUR YOUNG MEN LOST IN THE LAST GREAT GERMAN OFFENSIVE OF THE WAR – THE KAISERSCHLACHT

Operation Michael', the first offensive of 5 of the 'Kaiserschlacht' or Kaiser's Battle, began without warning at 4.40am on the morning of 21<sup>st</sup> March 1918. There was a terrifying, orchestrated bombardment of over 6,000 guns on the British Front between Cambrai and St Quentin. This, the biggest artillery attack in history to date with over 1,000,000 shells, raked our trenches sideways, forwards and backwards for 5 hours. At 9.45am enemy infantry attacked through a heavy, concealing mist. We were outnumbered by 3 to 1 in many places.

In the north, 19 crack German divisions assaulted Byng's Third Army of 14 Divisions over a front of 28 miles - here we just about held on. However, in the south, Gough's Fifth Army of 12 Divisions strung unevenly along 42 miles of defences quickly succumbed to the 43 directed against it. Attacked by small groups of well trained and well-equipped 'storm troopers' many of our battalions were literally wiped out. Gough, seen by some as 'unlucky' and by others as inefficient, had a recently assembled force that was under strength, overstretched, outnumbered and badly deployed in recently acquired French trenches. Short of labour and reserves they had had no time to prepare sound defences.



Well-armed Storm Troopers attacking.



The German troops advanced this month, well over 40 miles in a few days - unheard of since summer 1914. 90,000 Allies surrendered. German losses were greater and tellingly, they suffered particularly high casualty rates amongst their irreplaceable elite assault units. They became victims of the rapidity of their success - scurrying far ahead of their artillery and rations. Amazed to find the 'relatively lavish' scale of food and drink enjoyed by their opponents, discipline began to break down; they took to looting and gorging. The offensive was finally halted on 5th April 1918, just 50 miles from Paris, near Amiens and Villers-Bretonneux where the British and Australians supported by the French held the line.



The French town of Albert fell on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

Nineteen lads from our community perished this month - 10 killed in just 2 days. They are, of course, commemorated in France, Belgium and locally in our many churches, memorials and family graves and are buried, if known, where we indicate. Of the 19, 4 were from South Oak Lane and, unless indicated otherwise, they were from Wilmslow.



1st - **Gunner Frederick PETERS**; 10 Lindow Terrace; Royal Marine Artillery; Alderley Edge Cemetery.

17th - **Lce Cpl E Cyril RICHARDS**; St John's Lindow area; 153 Field Co Royal Engineers; Huts Cemetery, Belgium.

17th - **Lt Stuart BOLTON**; St John's Lindow area; 1st/4th King's Own Royal Lancashire's; Gorre British and Indian Cemetery.

21st - **Capt Frank LINDSAY**; Wirral Hall, Hall Rd; 3rd King's Shropshire Light Infantry; Quentin Rd Cemetery, Arras.

21st - **Pte Samuel AUSTIN**; South Oak Lane; 2nd/5th Manchester's.

21st - **Pte James Matthew PUGH**; South Oak Lane; 2nd/6th North Staffs.

21st - **Gunner Percy Edward LEECH**; Altrincham Rd; Royal Field Artillery; Royle New British Cemetery.

21st - **Pte John WORSLEY**; West View Terrace, Lacey Green; 223 Machine Gun Co, Royal Marine Div; Abbeville Communal Cemetery Extension.

21st - **Pte Henry GIBSON**; 95 Alma Lane; 9th Cheshire's.

22nd - **Lt Charles Egerton ENTWISTLE**; "Riversdale" Hawthorn Grove; 2nd/8th Manchester's; British Cemetery Marchepot.

22nd - **Pte Arthur BAILEY**; formerly of Bollin Walk; 18th Manchester's.

22nd - **Pte Archie BRADLEY**; formerly of South Oak Lane; 17th Manchester's.

22nd - **Pte Francies James HEWITT**; Green Low Heath, Chelford; 9th Loyal North Lancashire's, Beaumetz-Les-Cambrai Military Cemetery.

24th - **Pte James Rowland MORGAN**; 2 Lacey Green Avenue, Lacey Green; 1st/28th London Regiment (Artists' Rifles).



27th - **Sapper Frederick FROST**; Row of Trees, Mobberley; Royal Engineers; Mont Huon Military Cemetery, Le Treport.

28th - **Pte Victor Stafford BROUGHTON**; 7 Chapel Lane; 1st/7th Manchester's.

28th - **Pte William PARKINSON**; 36 Park Road; 1st/4th Northumberland Fusiliers.

28th - **Sgt William George WAREHAM**; South Oak Lane; 2nd/7th Manchester's; Hangard Communal Cemetery Extension.

30th - **Guardisman Cyril AINSWORTH**; Hawthorn Walk; 2nd Scots Guards; Bucquoy Rd Cemetery.

As the dreadful March days moved into April things began to change. The reinforced Allies reorganized and stiffened their resolve. Meanwhile 'Operation Michael' was to be stopped and Ludendorff changed his tactics to move north to Flanders. Amiens was saved and the British and French were not irrevocably split. However, casualties on both sides continued to build up horrifically.

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