

# NOVEMBER 1917

## PASSCHENDAELE - AT LAST!

The name Passchendaele is perhaps unique in British folk memory. On 6th November 1917 Currie's 2nd Canadian Division from the prairies cleared the eastern fringe of the ridge and after bitter hand-to-hand fighting took the ruin that was once Passchendaele village. Casualties at that time for the British, Anzacs and Canadians made grim reading. The meticulous Currie, housed in a two-roomed shack (not a chateau), had as always studied the ground carefully and estimated a loss of 16,000 overall. Aiming for steady gains of just a few hundred metres a day, under continuous rain and shellfire, his troops moved remorselessly forward. They won a few kilometres in this mud-soaked horror - 15,600 were killed and wounded or lost overall. Third Ypres ended, after futile enemy counterattacks, on 10th November 1917, by which time we had lost 270,000 casualties and the Germans nearly as many. Since 31 July 1917 we had taken 5 miles of ground to make the bump of the Salient just slightly larger.



Beyond Passchendaele, Europe had changed dramatically during the 16 or so weeks of the Third Ypres. On the day after the village finally fell, Lenin's Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd. Once Kerensky was deposed they began peace negotiations with the Central Powers. In Italy the pretty scenic town of Caporetto was now in German hands. To Haig's dismay he was ordered to send Plumer, perhaps the soundest of his generals, to bolster the defences of the Italians for the next 4 months. On the 20th November at Cambrai 374 tanks led almost a quarter of a million British and Canadians to break through a 6 mile weakly held part of the Hindenburg Line. More ground was won here in 6 hours than around Ypres in 6 months. Bells rang throughout the UK to herald 'a victory'. Hesitancy and lack of preparation for the future advance cost nearly all the land gained however and another 45,000 were added to casualty lists.



Tank on its way to Cambrai



Our community lost 5 young men in this horrendous month. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, in Egypt, **Private Stanley Thirwall** died aged 24. The son of Frederick and Agnes of 'The Hough' on Macclesfield Road, before the War he was apprenticed to a local chemist. Originally joining the Cheshire's, he was transferred to the **1st/7th Royal Welsh Fusiliers (70647)** and is buried at Beersheba War Cemetery. He is remembered on the civic memorial, in St Bartholomew's and on the family grave there. His brother Albert had been killed in May 1916 at Loos.

**Private John William Worthington (49291)** of the **15th Cheshire's** (a bantam regiment for men under 5'3") died of wounds aged 20 on the 13th. He is buried at Abbeville Communal Cemetery Extension and commemorated in his home village of Styal on its memorial and in its Methodist Church. Before hostilities began he had been an errand boy.

Ribecourt British Cemetery contains the grave of **Private Harry Bailey** of the **1st Battalion King's Shropshire Light Infantry (27034)**. He died on the 20th, aged 31. Wilmslow War Memorial and that of St Bartolomew's mark his passing. Born in Stockport, his family lived in the Carter's Arms and, like his sibilings, he worked in a local cotton mill.

On the 23rd, **Private William Bowers** of the **13th Battalion Cheshire's (243739)**, was killed in action aged 36. He was at Cambrai, where he is interred in the town's military cemetery. He had been a postman living in Alma Lane with his wife and 2 children. The civic memorial and parish church record his passing.

Our final fatality this month was **2nd Lieutenant Percy Brookes** of the **6th Cheshire's**. He was the husband of 'E.M.' of "Sunnyside" Hall Road and had worked for an auctioneer before the war. St Chad's and Alderley Edge memorial mark his passing. Hooge Cemetery contains his grave.



By the 10th of the month, once the 26th Winnipeg Regiment had taken Passchendaele, the battle ground to a halt. Our community was left to count the cost. Wilmslow and its environs had lost 30 young men of whom 20 had fought with local county regiments (the Cheshire's, Manchester's and Lancashire's). Of the dead 10 were never found; 3 are buried locally and 17 are in Flanders.

Hostilities between Russian and German forces ceased as peace discussions began in the Polish town of Brest Litovsk. This harsh, punitive treaty would allow the Germans to transfer 45 divisions to the Western Front. What was 1918 to bring for the beleaguered, outnumbered Allies? Would the Americans arrive 'en-masse' in time in the New Year?

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