

SEPTEMBER 1916

TANKS TRY TO END STALEMATE

September 1916 saw many persistent British attacks and enemy counterattacks around individual German strongholds (sometimes for the second or third time) - Delville Wood, Pozieres, Mouquet Farm, Guillemont, Ginchy, Morval, Thiepval and Flers-Courcelette. Each site became a charnel house choked with dead from both sides, men were stretched to the limit of their physical and mental endurance.

On 15th September, at Flers, tanks were first used in battle. Few in number (49), mechanically unreliable and with no proven tactical plan for their best use, they did have a devastating effect - 4,000 yards were captured in one day. Haig and his Generals did not know how close they were to a breakthrough, so they kept the Cavalry in reserve. Of the 27 tanks that reached the front line only 3 were serviceable the next day. Conditions inside were appalling. Many succumbed to artillery fire, mechanical breakdown and uneven ground. Nevertheless, Haig ordered 1,000 more for future battles, he was grimly determined to keep pressure on his tenacious foe.



The Battle of the Somme cost at least 128,000 British and Empire lives - an average of 900 a day. The community of Wilmslow alone was to lose 7 this month.

Private Harold Austin of the **20th Battalion Manchester's (17286)** died on 3rd September 1916, aged 18. He had lived with his father Joseph (a salesman for a cotton manufacturer), mother Amelia and 2 brothers at Rydal Mount near Lindow Cricket Club and is commemorated at Thiepval, St John's, St Bartholomew's and on the civic memorial.

The 13th September saw the death of **Rifleman Charles Coops** aged 23 of the **12th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps (R/16552)**. He too is remembered in St John's and at Thiepval as well as at Alderley Edge. He was a domestic gardener who lived at 43 Brook Lane with his father Thomas, mother Mary and 3 brothers.

St John's, Alderley and Thiepval also carry the name of **Private Joseph Consterdine** who was killed on the 16th September. He joined the **4th Battalion Grenadier Guards (21831)**, which along with other fine Guards regiments was fighting at Flers-Courcelette. Joseph was born in Manchester and lived first with his grandfather before moving to Knutsford Road Grocery near Foden Lane where he was a lodger and grocer's assistant to William and Emily Burgess.

Ernest Thornley was born in Belmont, Bolton in 1892. By 1911 he was a motor cleaner living with his father John and mother Mary, a brother and sister in Wilmslow Road, Handforth. He was a Private in **B Company, 20th Manchester's (17506)** and died at home of wounds on the 23rd September. Buried in St Chad's churchyard, he is remembered in the Church and on Handforth Memorial.



The 25th September saw 2 more local fatalities. **Rifleman Arthur Jenkins** is buried in Berles-au-Bois Churchyard extension in an old orchard at the back of the churchyard. His regiment was the **1st Battalion Monmouth's (4941)** and he was the son of John and Harriet of Lacey Green. He is remembered on Styal and Wilmslow war memorials, in Styal Methodist Church and at St Bart's.

The other fatality on the 25th September was **Alfred Wood** of Oak Cottages, Styal, who as a Private in the **1st Battalion of the Cheshire's (17117)**, died at Morval. He was the youngest child (3 sisters, 1 brother) of James and Precilla and had been a cotton weaver. He has no known grave and is commemorated at Thiepval, Styal and in his local Methodist Church.

Finally on the 26th September, **Lance Corporal John Glennon** fell, killed in action, he was part of **B Company 11th Manchester's (15504)**. He was the son of Elizabeth and the late Joseph Glennon. His wife Annie lived in Greenheys, Manchester. He left a daughter, Elizabeth Anne. He is remembered at Thiepval and on Wilmslow Memorial.

The character of the battle was now to change starkly as the fine weather of summer gave way to heavy rainfall causing men to fight in chalky, glutinous mud.

Jon Armstrong and Alan Cooper
Wilmslow Historical Society

