

The Fallen of Embleton

Chapter 4 – 1917

*A tribute to the men of Embleton
who fell in the Great War*

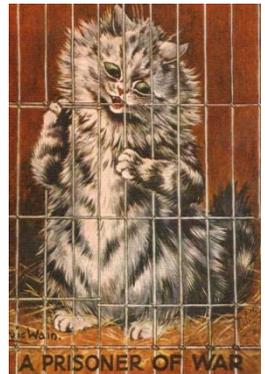
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Chapter 4

1917

Despite the results, or rather the lack of results, of the 1916 fighting the Allies decided to continue with their great offensives into 1917. The Russians would attack at both ends of their front whilst the Italians would continue to campaign on the Isonzo, the French would seize the Chemin des Dames and the British would push out from the Arras area. Meanwhile the Germans looked to strengthen their positions, but had no plans to attack the Russians. In France they undertook a withdrawal to their Hindenburg Line, giving up territory they had defended fiercely during the battle of the Somme and destroying everything useful in their wake. This was a strong defensive line running from Arras to Soisson (110 miles, 180 km) featuring a series of strongly fortified positions. It lay some 15 miles to their rear and was heavily protected by artillery.

In March the Russian revolution broke out, destroying any hope of a spring offensive on the eastern front. The British were now the first to attack as part of the Allied spring offensive. Their First Army was tasked with seizing Vimy Ridge to protect the flank of the Third Army, which was to break through the Hindenburg Line. Vimy Ridge was captured on April 9th, the attack being supported by a British offensive from Arras. The Third Army advanced for over a mile across its whole front but then stalled due to logistical problems. Fighting continued around Arras until mid-May and during this time the seventh 'Embleton' man was killed.



DAVID WILLIAM COWE

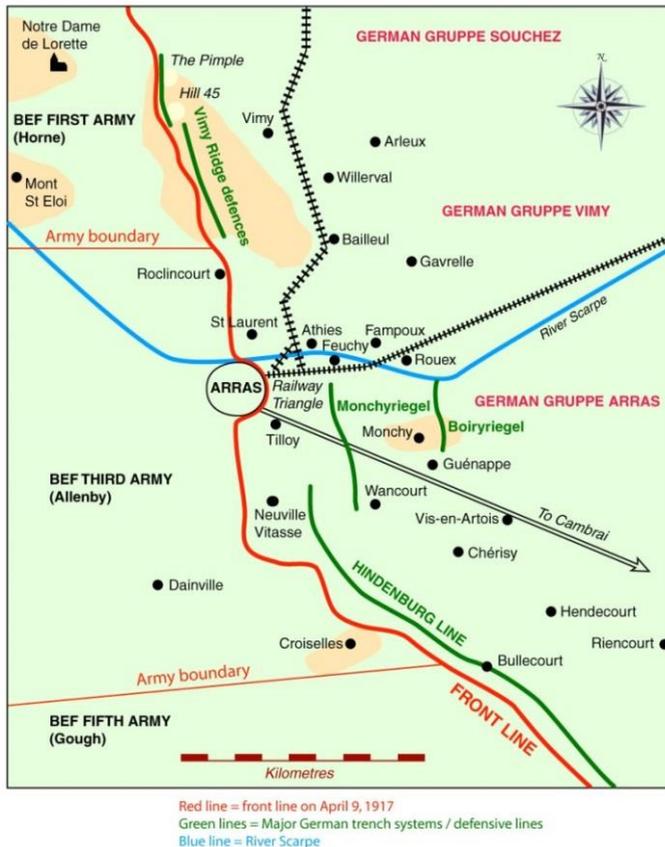


David Cowe was born in Christon Bank in June 1893 and christened in Embleton church on 27th March 1894. His father, William Turnbull Cowe, was born in Lowick and worked as a platelayer on the N. E. Railway. His mother Isabella (nee Athey) was born in 'Newham Buildings', Northumberland. David's parents married in Belford in the 2nd quarter of 1881 and he had three sisters, Eleanor (b 1884), Margaret (b 1887) and Jane (b 1890).

David attended the village school in Embleton where he received several canings including 2 'cuts' for 'running after the hounds late for school' and at another date 2 'cuts' for 'throwing stones'. The family lived in Christon Bank and in 1911 David was working as a farm labourer.

David enlisted in Alnwick on December 11th 1915 and joined the Durham Light infantry (No. 50654). At some time later he was transferred to the 25th battalion Northumberland Fusiliers (Tyneside Irish No. 27679).

In April 1917 his battalion was stationed in the Pas de Calais region of France and took part in the second battle of Scarpe. They were charged with attacking the fortified village of Roeux (east of Arras), which formed part of the German defences behind their front line. The ground before Roeux posed many difficulties for the British, two of which were: the Arras - Douai railway line, which ran north-east to south-west in a cutting and on an embankment; and the River Scarpe with its surrounding marshland. The British commanders were using this attack simply trying to draw German troops away from the failing French attack on the Aisne river.



The abridged War Diary of the 25th battalion Northumberland Fusiliers for April 1917 reports:-

Fampoux (4 miles east of Arras)

27th *The battalion was ordered to move forward to the front line to attack at 4.25 tomorrow morning. Moved forward at 10 p.m., relieving 27th battalion Northumberland Fusiliers. The positions were as follows: two companies in the front line and two companies immediately behind the road.*

28th *The attack commenced at 4.25 a.m. Heavy machine gun and rifle fire was immediately encountered from an unregistered enemy trench 200 yds to the east of our line, and also from the Chemical Works and other buildings, holding up the 24th battalion Northumberland Fusiliers on our right, 150 yds from our front line. The 24th battalion suffered very heavily from this fire.*

28th *The battalion reached its objective on the left flank and commenced to dig in, but the fire from the enemy trench made this work very difficult.*

A German counter-attack was made on the Brigade on our right at 11 a.m., south of the railway, by about 600 men who succeeded in passing our front line. They were however practically annihilated by machine gun and artillery fire near Mount Pleasant Wood. After dark the battalion returned to the front line as it was in danger of being cut off by parties of the enemy who were working round the flanks.

Our total killed was 5 officers and 72 other ranks.

David was killed in action during this battle. He has no known grave but is commemorated on Bays 2 and 3 of the Arras Memorial.

By the summer, the failure of the French offensive, the poor performance of the Russian army and the lack of success by the Italians meant that the full weight of Allied offensives fell on the British. The result was the Third Battle of Ypres. Before the actual attack at Ypres could commence the British Command felt it necessary to take the Messines ridge because it overlooked the British lines, and from there the Germans could observe preparations for the principal offensive. The attack started on June 7th and lasted a week, by which time the objective had been taken and secured. Whilst this was good news, the bad news was that any element of surprise the main offensive might have had was now lost. Even more disastrous was the decision to delay the start of the attack until the end of July by which time the Germans had strengthened their defences. By the time the attack began the battleground had been blown up by some 4 million shells intended to destroy the enemy wire and their trenches. To make matters worse, that summer Belgium suffered torrential rains which turned the churned up ground into a quagmire. The initial objectives were a series of ridges which gave the Germans defensive advantage. During the attack on Pilckem Ridge the eighth 'Embleton' man was killed.

JOHN JEFFREY

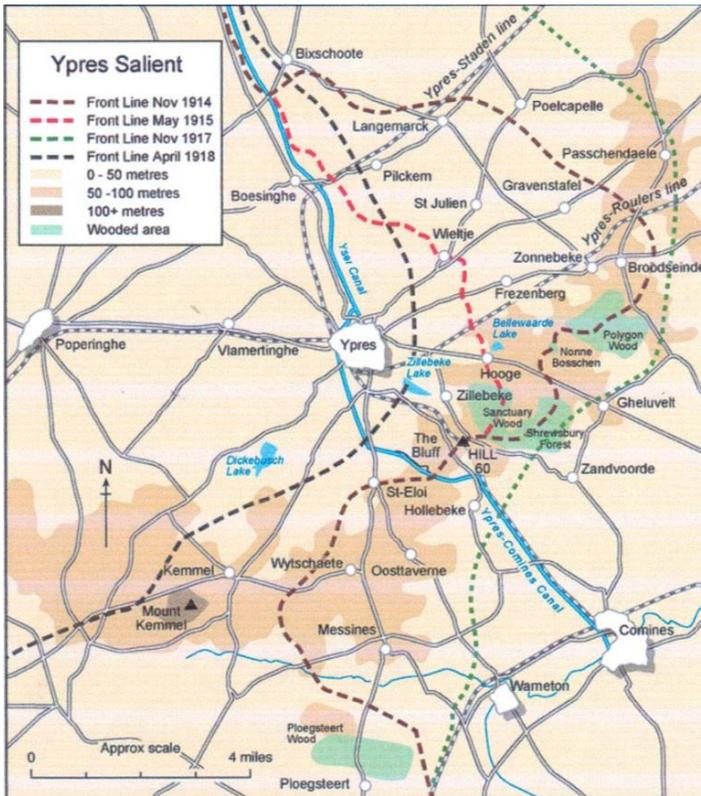


John Jeffrey was born in Embleton and christened in the village church on the 27th September 1891. His father, George Arthur Jeffrey, who was born in Chatton, worked as a builder's stone mason. His mother Elizabeth Alexander was born in Newbiggin. They married in 1881 in the Alnwick District. The family was large; apart from John there were Robert (b 1883 stone mason), James (b 1884 quarryman), George Arthur (b 1884 quarryman), William Alexander (b 1890 quarryman), Thomas Edward (b 1896 mason), Ann (b 1886), Elizabeth (b 1894) and Mary Isabella (b 1897).

John attended the village school in Embleton and was generally well behaved, although he was one of the boys caned for going off to a ship wreck without permission in 1903. He left school aged 14 and became a builder's stone mason like his father. The family lived in Blue Row (now Sunny Brae) in 1901, but the 1911 census gives their address as Embleton Christon Bank S O. As they now had four rooms, it is assumed that they had moved to a larger property between the censuses.

John enlisted on the 18th December 1915 in Morpeth. His five digit regimental number (42492) in the Prince of Wales' Own (West Yorkshire) Regiment suggests he was trained in the U.K. and then sent to France as part of a draft of reinforcements in 1916 or 1917. John probably trained with either the 3rd or 4th Reserve Battalion of the Prince of Wales' Own at Whitley Bay (3rd battalion) or Redcar and West Hartlepool (4th battalion).

He was recorded as 'presumed dead' on August 1st 1917 serving with the 2nd Battalion of the Prince of Wales' Own, which was serving with the 23rd Infantry Brigade in the 8th Division. On the date he was killed the brigade was fighting in the Battle of Pilckem Ridge. This battle, which took place from the 31st July until the 2nd August, was part of the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). The opening of the battle was preceded by weeks of tremendous and barely concealed preparations. The artillery bombardment of unprecedented scale, culminated in a stunning crescendo at the moment of assault.



The British attack began at 3.50 a.m. on 31st July. The attack was meant to commence at dawn but low cloud meant it was still dark as the infantry advanced behind a precise and deafening 'creeping barrage' across the battlefield.

Widespread early progress was made across the shattered German outpost lines. In the north they got across the Pilckem Ridge and in the centre St. Julien was taken. But in the south the advance was halted by

difficult ground, unbroken wire, unsuppressed pillboxes and heavy German shelling. In increasingly heavy rain German counter-attacks forced a British withdrawal with 70% losses, but eventually this counter-attack was stopped by mud and artillery fire. During the following two days the newly advanced British positions were held in appalling conditions by desperate fighting in the face of ferocious German attacks.

On 30th July by 10 p.m. the 2nd Battalion, including John, was settled in the assembly position ready for the advance next day. At 3.50 a.m. the assault on the German system of trenches commenced and the 2nd Battalion captured the whole front line system on this frontage without difficulty. Whilst 'B' and 'D' companies consolidated their positions, 'A' company moved up to reinforce the two foremost companies and 'C' company remained in reserve. On August 1st the operation was suspended due to very bad weather. During this assault 1 officer and 24 other ranks were killed, 4 officers and 190 other ranks were wounded and 35 other ranks remained missing. John was amongst those

killed, although it is not known exactly where he died and he has no known grave. He is commemorated on Panel 21 of the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial.



Pilckem Ridge 1st August 1917
Stretcher Bearers
knee-deep in mud on the battlefield

So little ground was taken in these attacks that the British replaced the commander for the offensive, General Gough, with General Plumer who launched a series of attacks on more limited fronts. In one of these the ninth 'Embleton' man was killed.

GEORGE EWART WADE



George Wade's birth was registered in the 2nd quarter of 1896. He was born in Embleton, but there is no known christening date for him. His father was Frank Wade who was born in 1853 in Wath Upon Dearne, West Yorkshire and his mother was Annie Ewart, born on 17th December 1856 in Eyemouth, Berwickshire. Frank and Ann were married on 12th February 1877 in Eyemouth, at which time Frank's address was given as Durham and he was a schoolmaster. Ann was a schoolmistress whose occupation was given as teacher's wife in 1881. Their first child, Edwin, was born in Embleton in 1878 and they went on to have 9 more children between 1880 and 1899. The 1911 census shows that one child

died, although it has not been possible for us to establish which or when.

Frank Wade became headmaster of the Vincent Edwards school in 1877 replacing Mr T. F. Clark who, in the school log book for March 1877, wrote 'The Rev. Mr. Creighton called to give me three months' notice to leave - reason because the people of the village did not like me'. Mr. Wade's salary was £22 per annum plus the 'school pence', which was probably the money collected from pupils for their education (between 1d and 3d per child per week, depending on age, for the first three children in a family and then free for any others).

The family lived in the School Master's House free of charge. Frank served as headmaster until 1890 when once again the Church intervened. The Rev. Mr. Creighton was succeeded by the Rev. Mr. Osborn in 1884 and it appears that the new vicar and Mr Wade 'did not get on'. An entry in the school log book for August 1890 reads 'Vicar wished to take registers and Log Book out of school. Teacher objected. Result - kept in school'. It would appear that this was 'the final straw' and the vicar wished to exercise his 'right' to dismiss the schoolmaster but the remainder of the school committee would not agree, being firmly on the side of Mr. Wade. After consultation between the vicar and his solicitor, which suggested the vicar's 'right' was in doubt, Mr. Wade was dismissed by the vicar by means which, today, would warrant an appeal on the grounds of unfair dismissal. This affair was widely reported in the press and divided the village. Mr. Wade then opened the 'Private Adventure School' and some pupils transferred to this whilst others moved to Newton school. This private school didn't last long however, probably no more than two years, and in the 1901 census Mr. Wade is shown as a Grocer Shopkeeper, his address then being The Pavement, Embleton. In 1911 the family was living at Bee Hive Stores, Embleton where they occupied seven rooms and Frank was then also an Assistant Overseer and Rate Collector for the Parish Council, whilst the eldest son at home, Charles, was a Grocer assisting in the family business. George, who was then 14, was still at Vincent Edwards Church School. It is not known what work George did when he left school but he grew up as part of a famous (or infamous) local family who had a lot of support from villagers.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 he would have been 18 although he appears not to have gone abroad until 1917. An Army medal rolls index card recorded he served as a gunner, No. 123022, in the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). His six-digit number beginning 123 appears to be a wartime "general service" number typical of those allotted to men who had been in neither the pre-war RGA nor the Territorials. The numbers beginning 123 appear to have been allotted late in 1916

to both conscripts and to men who had earlier attested under the Derby Scheme for deferred enlistment.

George served with 351 Siege Battery RGA but different sources give different dates for when the Battery arrived in France: January or April 1917. It was equipped with four six-inch howitzers which fired shells weighing over 60lbs (27kg) and themselves weighed nearly five tons. Originally pulled by a team of eight horses, they were later moved by caterpillar tractors. On May 5th 1917 the Battery became part of 88 Heavy Artillery Group.

On 17th August 1917 it was strengthened by the addition of two extra guns and men from 407 Siege Battery. 351 Battery then joined 48 Artillery Brigade, RGA, on 9th September 1917.

Given that Gunner Wade had reached a Casualty Clearing Station by October 11th 1917 it is most likely he was wounded at the Battle of Poelcappelle, 9th October 1917 or possibly the Battle of Broodseinde, 4th October 1917 as part of the Campaign for the Third Battle of Ypres (31st July - 10th November 1917). When he died he had been serving with 351 Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery but it is not known if he served with any other battery beforehand.

It is recorded that George Ewart Wade "died of wounds" on October 11th 1917 and that he was buried in a named grave in plot II, row L, grave 13, at Brandhoek Military Cemetery No 3.

Throughout October the rain continued to fall, severely restricting movement and grounding aircraft which would normally have provided the artillery with target information. Despite these setbacks the battle continued with a major offensive intended to take the Passchendaele village and ridge from which the enemy could observe Ypres and the whole salient created by the offensive. In horrific conditions the British (and Canadians) gradually gained ground, but casualties were heavy and the tenth and eleventh 'Embleton' men died.

WILLIAM JAMES McLAREN HUMBLE



William Humble was born in Embleton and christened there on the 20th October 1895. His father William Humble and his mother Mary Ann (nee McLaren) were also born in Embleton and his father worked as a road contractor. They were married in Embleton in 1885 and had six children, John (b 1888), Elizabeth (b 1890), Grace (b 1892), William (b 1895), Andrew (b 1900) and Mary (b 1903).

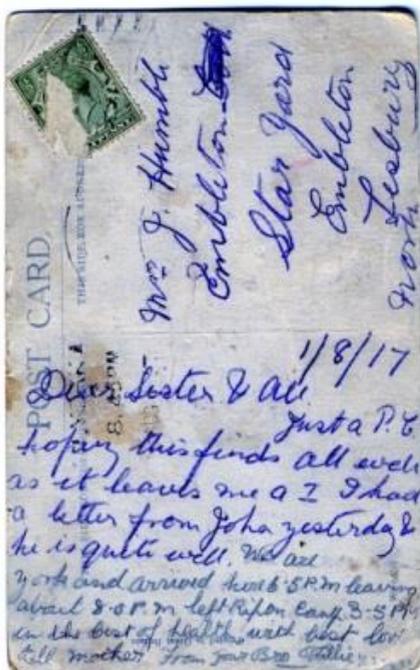
William attended Embleton school where he was obviously quite an unruly pupil, his name regularly appearing in the punishment book. At various times he was 'cut' for disobedience to his teacher, insubordination, carelessness, talking during a lesson, untidiness and interfering with Miss Welsh's hedge! He left school at 14, the normal age, and became a butcher's apprentice in Embleton. In 1901 the family were living in Pitts Yard, Embleton (this is now incorporated into the garden of Jubilee House). At some time after this the family moved into Embleton Cottage next to the Blue Bell Inn.

William enlisted in Alnwick, together with his brother John and friend William Pitt, on December 11th 1915. He was initially posted to the Northumberland Fusiliers (No. 29348) but eventually became a member of the 21st battalion Manchester Regiment (No. 51512).

It is difficult to establish when or how William died. He is officially declared as dying on October 24th 1917 but in the Berwick Advertiser it is reported that 'he has been missing since October 24th'. Evidence would suggest he actually died on October 26th 1917 as the war diary (see below) suggests there were only two slight casualties on 24th October, with the main 'push' and losses on the 26th October.

The 21st battalion Manchester Regiment took part in the 2nd battle of Passchendaele in October 1917. The official history of the 21st battalion states 'The battalion remained at Ronkloshille training until October 22nd. The next day it was at 'Little Kemmel Camp'. On the 24th it was at La Clytte and later that day at 'Lock 8'. The battalion took up assembly positions at night, preparatory to going into the line for the intended attack on 26th October. Heavy rain fell

during the night of 25/26th October, especially during the forming up, which rendered the ground exceedingly muddy and made movement a matter of great difficulty.



The abridged War Diary for the 21st battalion records:-

Narrative of Operations on 24 - 27th October 1917.

For the purpose of these operations the following personnel were attached to the battalion:- Two Guns from 91st Machine Gun Company, two Mortars from 91st Trench Mortar battery. The battalion battle strength going up on 24th October was 18 Officers, 1 Medical Officer and 512 Other Ranks.

24th The battalion as above moved from Little Kemmel Camp at 12.40 p.m. and marched as far as La Clytte where the battalion embossed and was conveyed as far as Lock 8 where teas were issued. The battalion left the vicinity of Lock 8 at 5.15 p.m. and proceeded to the line to take up positions of assembly.

On proceeding, the following relief took place:-

'A' company relieved 'B' company K.R.R. and 'C' company relieved 'D' company 17th Sherwood Foresters.

'B' and 'D' companies relieved no-one and dug in on the high ground.

Relief passed off quietly and was completed by 11.00 p.m. There were two slight casualties.

Situation on relief was normal - though there was some shelling.

25th *The day passed quietly - situation being normal throughout with desultory shelling on our forward areas - casualties.*

26th *At zero hour, 5.40 a.m., the barrage opened according to programme and the battalion moved forward to get as close to it as possible. The advance continued with accuracy and precision and without remarkable incident till zero plus 22.*

At zero plus 22, 'A' company on left came under exceedingly heavy enfilading machine gun fire and were practically decimated. The left flank of 'C' company was entirely unsupported.

At zero plus 25, 'A' company dug in and established a post.

At zero plus 25, 'B' company on right came under exceedingly heavy machine gun fire.

At zero plus 30, 'B' company on right dug in, having suffered exceedingly heavy casualties from enemy machine guns and having been completely disorganised by the flow of 70 to 80 Gordon Highlanders, who had lost their direction, through their lines.

There is every reason to believe that officers and men of 'A' and 'B' companies were able by chance to continue the advance after zero plus 22 and zero plus 30 although the barrage was lost - nothing is known of their fate and no trace could subsequently be found of them although they are reported to have gone on.

'C' company moved off at zero and continued until zero plus 35, when they came under a very severe machine gun fire.

This force was now reduced to 4 men and a post was established. Later the company withdrew and met elements of 'A' company.

At zero plus 150, all available men from 21st Manchesters, 2nd Queens, 1st South Staffordshire, 2nd Border Regiments and the Gordon Highlanders were organised under Lieutenant Buckley and established in our old line.

27th *Relief was completed by 2.15 a.m. with the battalion marching out with 8 Officers and 190 Other Ranks."*

The Berwick Advertiser carried the following on December 21st 1917: 'Mrs Humble Embleton has received word that her second son Pt. W. J. Humble Manchester Regiment is reported missing since October 24th. Previous to joining the army Pt. Humble was employed by Messrs. Pitt & Co. Butchers Embleton. It is hoped that better news may come to hand respecting Pt. Humble'.

William has no known grave and was officially declared as having died on October 24th 1917 just after his 22nd birthday. He is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial Panel 120 to 124 and 162 to 162A and 163A.

PETER WILLIAM McDOUGAL



Peter was born in Blue Row, (now Sunny Brae) Embleton in the first quarter of 1894. He was christened in the village church on the 27th of March 1894. His father was John Anderson McDougal who was born in North Sunderland and worked as a joiner/carpenter. His mother, Mary (nee Mather) was born in Embleton. The couple married in the second quarter of 1891 probably in Embleton. Peter had one brother, John Anderson (b 1891) and one sister, Effie May (b 1897). John also died during the war (see page 8). In 1911 the family were living in two rooms at Embleton South Farm, but by 1914 they were back in

Blue Row. Peter attended the village school in Embleton and after leaving became a stone breaker working in Embleton quarry.

Peter enlisted in the Northumberland Fusiliers on December 4th 1915 in Alnwick. He was sent to the 1/6th battalion (Territorial) and given a service number of 267211 (he appears to have had two previous numbers, 7369 and 7747).

On the 4th August 1914 the 1/6th was stationed at Northumberland Road, Newcastle-on-Tyne, part of the Northumberland Brigade of the Northumbrian Division, on Tyne Defences. In April 1915 it mobilised for war and landed in France where they became part of the 149th Brigade of the 50th Division and engaged in various actions on the Western Front, including in 1915 The Battle of St Julien, The Battle of Frezenburg Ridge and The Battle of Bellewaarde Ridge; in 1916 The Battle of Flers-Courcelette, The Battle of Morval and The Battle of the Transloy Ridges; in 1917 The First Battle of the Scarpe, The Capture of

Wancourt Ridge, The Second Battle of the Scarpe and The Second Battle of Passchendaele.

Westvleteren was outside the front held by Commonwealth forces in Belgium during the First World War, but in July 1917, in readiness for the forthcoming offensive, groups of casualty clearing stations were placed at three positions called, jokingly, by the troops Mendinghem, Dozinghem and Bandaghem. The 4th, 47th and 61st Casualty Clearing Stations were posted at Dozinghem and the military cemetery was used by them until early in 1918. Its 3,174 Commonwealth burials of the First World War include 71 from the Northumberland Fusiliers.



Casualties were given first aid and assessed in the front line and were then sent back to the Casualty Clearing Station. This was a mobile field hospital situated 1 mile behind the front line where surgeons worked on emergencies. From here casualties would be moved back to base hospitals and then, in many cases, back home.

Peter died of wounds on the 29th October 1917 and was buried in Dozinghem Military Cemetery, a very peaceful place set in a forest, near Ypres in grave X.A.4. Since he died in a Casualty Clearing Station at Dozinghem it is likely that he was wounded in the days just prior to this, otherwise he would have been transferred to a base hospital. If this was the case then it is likely he was wounded from say the 26th October 1917 onwards.

On 26th October the 2nd Passchendaele battle commenced. The weather was fiendish with heavy rain all the night before and all day. Misery was the *mot juste* for the 50th (Northumbrian) and 57th (West Lancashire) Divisions (Fifth Army) on this day and indicative of what was to come. They were to attempt to force a passage into the Houthulst Forest and up the Goudberg Spur. At 5.40 a.m. their advance towards Westroosebeke began with a Brigade from each Division attacking across fields north of Poelcappelle. They were faced with possibly the worst conditions of the battles to date - the ground was almost impossible to traverse. The British barrage, although far from inadequate, again drifted into the distance ahead of the troops, and the attacks gained literally a

matter of metres before the exhausted troops sank into shell holes for cover. Even a metre per minute was more than they could manage. In pillboxes and shattered woods the enemy were practically invisible. Those able to find cover or pull back were fortunate; hundreds of men stuck fast in the mud and in the open fell prey to shrapnel and snipers. Peter could have been one of these. By the evening of this day all the attacking battalions were back behind their jumping off lines!

Fighting went on into November with both sides using their artillery to wear down and disrupt their opponents. During one of these exchanges the twelfth 'Embleton' man was killed.

DAVID ALEXANDER WOODCOCK

David is recorded as being born in the second quarter of 1898 at Craster and his school records confirm his birth date as 27th April 1898. He was baptised at Embleton on 22nd May 1898.



His father was also David and his mother was Margaret, nee Thorborn. The 1911 census shows that there were seven children born to the family with four surviving, David being the eldest with Thomas b. 1900, John b. 1905 and Lily Louisa b. 1907 being his siblings. The family of six, plus David's paternal grandfather, lived in a 2 room cottage at Embleton South Farm where David senior worked as a farm labourer / spademan. David and his brother Thomas were admitted to Embleton Vincent Edwards Church School on 13th May 1907, having previously attended school at Newton-by-Sea. They appear to have been well-behaved children as their names do not appear in the school Punishment Book. David's education ended on 3rd May 1912 at age 14

when he left school to start work on the farm.

David was 16 at the outbreak of the war and is recorded as having enlisted in the Army in 1916 at Alnwick. His regimental number, 39112, was a wartime service number and not a Territorial number, indicating that he would have trained in one of the training battalions before being posted to the 3rd/5th Lancashire Fusiliers, either in the UK or at a base camp on arrival in France as part of a draft of reinforcements. The 3rd/5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers was

a wartime training and reserve battalion of the Territorial Force which had been raised at Bury in October 1914.

If David had been conscripted on his 18th birthday (plus one month) he would have been called up in May 1916. At that time the 3rd/5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers was centred on Colchester Essex, with units responsible for defence of the Suffolk coast. In 1917 the Division was sent to France.

By March 1917 all units had arrived via Le Havre to combine under XI Corps. From June to September they were involved in the operations on the Flanders coast called "Operation Hush" which was a failed attempt to land on the Belgian coast. The Division then fought at the Battle of Poelcappelle 1917, a phase of the third battle of Ypres between 6th and 10th October 1917. The 3rd/5th Lancashire Fusiliers fought with the 197th Infantry Brigade in 66 Division. This Brigade was on the right of the Second Army with the II Anzac Corps conducting the main attack. On the 9th October the Brigade advanced quickly on sandy going, but the Division ended up in the area of the Ravebeek Valley which became notorious for flooded shell holes and mud.

The attack on Passchendaele was not a success and the 66th Division was next placed at the disposal of the Canadian Corps commanded by Lieut. Gen. A. W. Currie. As it would not be possible to attempt another coastal landing until the spring of 1918 it was decided to continue the attempted advance in Flanders. The commander of the Canadian Royal Engineers, Maj. Gen. W. B. Lindsay, insisted the roads and railways were rebuilt before an advance could be made and 66 Division was put at his disposal. Currie ordered that advances should be limited to 500 yards at a time with rests in between. The assaults went in on 26th October and lasted through to the 10th November 1917. Private David Woodcock was killed in the front line on 15th November 1917, aged 19, having just relieved the 2/7th battalion a few hours earlier. He was the only member of his battalion listed as killed on that date. The War Diary for David's battalion for the previous day states '*Sentence of death passed by F.G.C.M. on Private Smith for desertion from Frezenberg Ridge on 8th October carried out by firing party under 2/lieut Dun this morning*'. David probably knew this man.

A report in the Alnwick & County Gazette of 8th December 1917 states that "Mr & Mrs Woodstock (sic) of South Farm Embleton on the 18th November 1917 Mrs Woodstock (sic) of South Farm Embleton on the 28th November 1917 received information that their eldest son, David A Woodstock (sic), had been killed in action in France. His officer explained that he was struck and killed



instantly by a shell. The deceased, along with his parents, was employed by Mr George Robertson on the farm."

David has no known grave but is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial (left), Panels 54 - 60 and 163A.

The battle officially closed in November and was considered successful

but the very dangerous Menin Road running south east from Ypres towards the front line continued to be used by the artillery throughout December and this brought about the death of the thirteenth 'Embleton' man.

JAMES PRATT ROXBY



James' birth was registered at the beginning of 1895. He was the son of Jonathan James Roxby, known as James, and his wife Elizabeth (nee Pratt) who had both worked in domestic service. Elizabeth and James had married in Alnwick district in 1893.

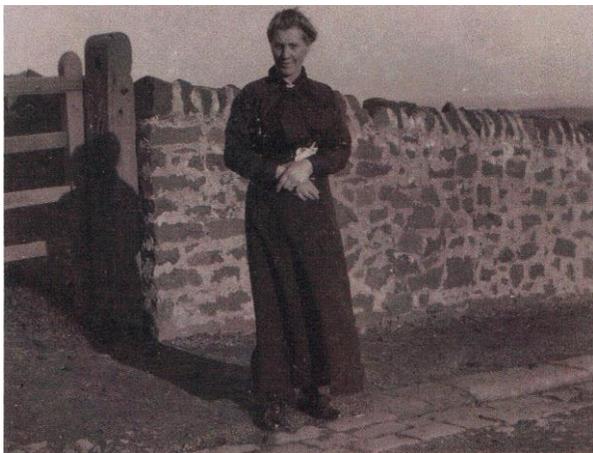
In the 1901 census James, then 6, is shown as living at Callaly Castle with his mother who was the Housekeeper in charge. His father was a valet in the service of Alexander Browne of Whalton House, Whalton. In 1904, James' father applied for the post as manager of the Anglers Hotel in Weldon Bridge. In the 1911 census the 16 year old James was recorded living with his mother as her only surviving child, another child having died in infancy. Their address at the time was 3 Dunstanboro' Terrace, Christon Bank, Embleton but by 1919 Elizabeth Roxby had moved to Pitt's House. His father was recorded as being a butler, still

for Alexander Brown, at Lorbottle Hall, Whittingham, although still married to Elizabeth.

Mrs Roxby (James' mother) in 1918

James attended the Vincent Edwards School in Embleton where he appears to have been a fairly well behaved pupil, having only two reported misdemeanours during his time there.

James Roxby enlisted in Alnwick on 11th December 1915 but would be 'called up' later under the Derby Scheme. Men were placed in groups according to their year of birth and James would have been in Group 3, which was mobilised on 20th January



1916. As there is no surviving service record for James it is not possible to state where he trained or whether he was transferred between units. It is known however that he served with 213 Siege Battery Royal Garrison Artillery as Gunner No. 344251. This number was within a series of numbers allocated to the Forth (City of Edinburgh) Fortress Royal Garrison Artillery early in 1917. The battery was part of the pre-war Scottish coastal defences manned by the Territorial Army. 213 Siege Battery went to France in late 1916 or early 1917 and was originally equipped with 4 x 8inch (20cm) howitzers, but later this was increased to six. It is known from his obituary that James joined the battery in France in June 1917.

The medal index card was supposed to record a man's details as they were when he first went abroad. James' card recorded only a six digit number,

indicating he first served overseas after that number had been allocated, early in 1917.

213 Siege Battery RGA was allocated to the Fifth Army in the Ypres sector in 1917. The British Fifth Army was designated as such in October 1916 under the command of Sir Hubert Gough. In 1917 it fought in The Battle of Arras and the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). By December the fighting had been reduced to the routine of winter trench warfare, with frequent exchanges of artillery fire along the Menin Road, which was a notorious part of the sector.

James Pratt Roxby was killed in action on 19th December 1917. He was 22 years old. The War Diary for the 213 Siege Battery on December 19th states:- *'In evening a premature ... occurred in gun No. 432 destroying the gun and causing the following casualties:- Killed No. 34425 Gnr. Roxby J.P. Wounded Gnr. Bridle A.F., Gnr. Riler R., Gnr. Matteson A. and Gnr Thorpe J.J.'* On the 20th December the Diary records:- *No. 344251 Gnr. Roxby J.P. buried at Military Cemetery at I.qd 1.4.'*



The Alnwick and County Gazette for January 1918 included the following:- "Gunner James Roxby R.G.A., only son of Mrs E. and the late Mr. J. Roxby, Dunstanborough Terrace, Embleton, has been killed in action. The deceased was formerly employed as clerk in the office of Mr. J. H. Sanderson and at the time of joining up was a clerk in the office of the Alnwick Gas Company. He was a most popular young man and his death is deeply regretted by a wide circle of friends in Alnwick. He left for France last June."

James is buried in a marked grave in plot 3, row O, grave 2 at Menin Road South Military Cemetery in the centre of Ypres. The cemetery was used by field ambulances until the summer of 1918 and was increased after the Armistice, when burials were moved from isolated positions on the battlefields to the east and another Menin Road cemetery which had been on the opposite side of the road.

James is also commemorated on the Forth RGA war memorial at St. Giles High Kirk (cathedral), Edinburgh.

The Third battle of Ypres cost each side some 250,000 casualties and created a 5 mile salient that was subsequently lost in just three days fighting during the German offensive in 1918.



Translation:
“They vowed to the Kaiser victory and courage.
And kept the oath with their blood.”