

## MAYFIELD AND THE GREAT WAR - NO. 31 - OCTOBER 2016

Along the Western Front the 'Somme' offensive continued into October with continued optimism from the British of exploiting the gains made in capturing much of the German front line positions. Unfortunately the weather turned wet and conditions, considered by some to be worse than at Passchendaele in 1917, made progress difficult; further hampered by poor visibility which reduced artillery effectiveness. Nevertheless, a dry spell in the middle of the month allowed for renewed artillery barrages and a combined force of British and Canadians were able to make fresh gains and consolidate captured German strongpoints along what was known as the Regina and Stuff redoubt/trench network. The Regina trench (Staufen Riegel) was the longest German trench of WWI and linked into the strongpoint Staufen Feste Redoubt (known to the British Tommy as Stuff redoubt) and trench system.

On the night of the 3rd of October the German Zeppelin commanders flew their heaviest bomb raid when five German airships dropped a total of 189 bombs on London; they killed 71 civilians. Two days later Adolf Hitler was wounded in the left thigh by an exploding shell in the Battle of the Somme.

The 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment had another month of marching from place to place in the Somme region, carrying out their duties as a pioneer battalion. In the first half of the month their duties were focused on trench work: cleaning and repairing existing ones, adding sumps to some trenches and digging new trenches. In the latter part of the month their activities switched to working on the railway and the roads. Lt. Col. Langham notes in the battalion diaries that they marched into bivouac in Bazentin-le-Wood (the Somme) only to discover that half the bivouac had been cut through by the new railway! D Company (the company for local Mayfield men) were tasked with building the new road from Courcellette to Le Sars in the Somme .



The names of many wounded men featured in local newspapers and amongst those for Mayfield reported in the Kent & Sussex Courier were: *'Private James Bale wounded in the right shoulder by shrapnel at the beginning of the month. 'Private James Gaston of Old Mill farm, received wounds to the arm whilst n the firing line in France. Rifleman Leslie Charles only son of the Stationmaster, underwent an operation for appendicitis and is in hospital in Lincoln.*

*Private Henry Hall, son of Mrs Hall of West St is reported to have been wounded in the big advance. He was a member of the local Football Club prior to the War,. He has a younger brother Albert, in the RSR.*

*Private H Hall  
Photo 1, Kent & Sussex Courier, November 3rd 1916, p.3*

*Mrs P Cosham of Lake St Mayfield , writes to say that her brother Private W Holmes has been wounded. He enlisted when the war first broke out and has had several narrow escapes during his many months at the Front. He is aged 21.'*

*Private W Holmes  
Photo 2, Kent & Sussex Courier, 13th October 1916, p.3*



There are two names recorded on the War memorials in Mayfield and Five Ashes for October 1916:

**John Ellis** Private 13th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment. Service No SD/172. John was killed in action 21st October 1916 aged 21.



John was born in 1896 at Framfield to parents Horace and Naomi Ellis. Both of his parents were born, and lived, in the Mayfield area. In 1881 they were living at the Stockyard, Mayfield where Horace was an Ag Lab. By the early 1890s they had moved to Tickerage Road, Blackboys and by 1901 on to Tickerage Mill which may well have been the same address. By 1911 the family of ten surviving children had flown the nest, except for John, the youngest, at home with his parents at Etchingwood, Framfield. At this date John is recorded as being employed as an Ag lab but at some date between 1911 and the outbreak of war 1914 he had become a railway porter stationed at Uckfield. Sometime before John's death his parents appear to have moved to The Bungalow, Fletching St, Mayfield. Somewhat confusing -see SAE report below.

*Photo 3, Sussex Agricultural Express, 15th December 1916, p.3*

Given his low Service No. John was amongst the first volunteers to Kitchener's New Army and his service records reveal that he enlisted for the RSR at Eastbourne 4 September 1914; was 5'11" tall; 133 1/2lbs in weight; fresh complexion with hazel eyes and dark brown hair. His religion was noted as Baptist. He was posted to the 11 Battalion RSR and spent the next 18 months training with his Battalion. His service records note that he attained Class II at musketry in January 1916. By April 1916 he was in France with the 11th Battalion but on 11th April was diagnosed with a serious ear infection "Otitis Media" and quickly returned for treatment to England to the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth. It is unclear whether this problem was caused by infection or from damage from egg shell bursts. He was discharged on the 6th May and returned to Etaples, France where he was posted, not to his old Battalion, but to the 13th Battalion RSR.

This battalion was heavily involved in the Somme fighting between Sept and November 1916. The Battalion war records reveal that on 21st October the Battalion participated in a successful attack to capture 'Stuff Trench' (the British name for a heavily fortified German position the Stauffen Trench). During this attack John was severely wounded and it would appear he died somewhere in No Man's land for his body was never recovered. His Service records state that he was wounded, missing and assumed to have died on or since 21 October. His name is recorded as one of the missing on the Thiepval Memorial. The Battalion war diaries report casualties "as not unduly heavy. Officers: wounded x 3; OR Killed 25; Wounded 71; Missing 30.

There was obviously some uncertainty over his death and hesitation in informing the family for the Sussex Agricultural Express of the 15 December 1916 reports as follows. 'News was received at the end of last week of the death from wounds of Private John Ellis youngest of the ten children of Mr and Mrs H Ellis of Etchingwood, Buxted. He was 21 on Sept 22nd last.

*Official notice of his death has not yet been received, but his Officer wrote in reply to a brother's letter saying that a successful attack was made on a German Trench on October 21st but Private Ellis was so seriously wounded that he died shortly afterwards. He joined after the commencement of the War and will be remembered by travellers as a porter at Uckfield Station.'*

**John Henry Carter**, 7th Battalion, East Kent Regiment, Service No. G/15566. John was killed in action on The Somme 27th October 1916 aged 20.

John was born in 1896 in Rushett Common, Surrey, to parents William and Harriet Carter. His father, William, was a travelling scissor grinder and cutter, so it is no surprise that in 1901 they were living in Northiam, and had moved to Hailsham by 1911. John was one of four surviving children, although by 1911 only three were still living at home, and no profession is recorded for him at that time, despite being 15 years old and no longer of school age.

Little is known about John. He enlisted at Tonbridge and joined the 7th Battalion of the East Kent Regiment, which was a service battalion formed in September 1914. At the time of his enlistment he was recorded as living in Five Ashes. The 7th Battalion were heavily involved in the various battles of The Somme: The Battle

of Albert, The Battle of Bazentin Ridge, The Battle of Delville Wood, The Battle of Thiepval Ridge, The Battle of the Ancre Heights and The Battle of the Ancre.

John is recorded as having died of wounds and is buried in Puchevillers British Cemetery, the Somme region, France. For someone about whom so little is known it is interesting to note that he is commemorated on the Mayfield, Five Ashes and Hadlow Down war memorials. John's younger brother, Henry, also enlisted and was sadly killed in March 1918. John's parents are recorded as being living in Heathfield.

*Photo 1, Kent & Sussex Courier, November 3rd 1916, p.3*

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000483/19161103/009/0003>

*Photo 2, Kent & Sussex Courier, 13th October 1916, p.3*

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000483/19161013/003/0003>

*Photo 3, Sussex Agricultural Express, 15th December 1916, p.3*

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