

## MAYFIELD AND THE GREAT WAR - NO. 41 - AUGUST 2017

There was a considerable delay following the Battle of Messines in early June to the large scale British offensive known as the 3rd Battle of Ypres. The extensive preparation for this attack was witnessed by the Germans and if they had any doubts of an impending attack the fierce artillery bombardments over the course of July was a clear signal. The Germans capitalised on the breathing space offered by the delay and strengthened their already formidable defences of banks of wire and concrete pill boxes built into the trenches and ruined farm buildings. In the event, the offensive was suspended within days of its launch on the 31st July. The offensive in Flanders, long favoured and anticipated by British CIG Field Marshal Haig, was planned for a rapid breakthrough of the German front and provide an opportunity to recover the Belgian channel ports being used as bases by U Boats; the latter being a serious threat to the shipping convoys, particularly the transatlantic routes. The attack over the low lying landscape, surrounding Ypres, with a high water table, coincided with exceptional rainfall which transformed the ground and drainage systems, already churned and pulverised by shellfire, into a sea of mud. It was not until mid August that the ground had dried out sufficiently to resume the attacks. Throughout August the weather constantly interrupted the British efforts to develop the attacks as planned and progress remained slow. It was not until September that the British gained some initiative and succeeded in taking some of the high ground and resisting German counter attacks. The alternative name for this offensive, 'Passchendaele', has become synonymous with memories/stories of dreadful ground conditions which severely hampered and encumbered the British infantry/artillery and supply lines in equal measure.

The Italians launched what became known as the Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo. At considerable cost in casualties (the Italians suffered approx 170,000 men killed, wounded or taken prisoner, as against approx 90,000 Austro-Hungarians) the attacks made progress. The Austro-Hungarian senior commanders became alarmed at the possible collapse of their Army and lack of replacements. This led to requests to the German High Command for assistance, which at this critical time were only available from the Western Front. Good news at last for the Allies!

The 5th (Cinque Ports Battalion) of the Royal Sussex Regiment continued their work in the forward positions at Passchendaele. Between the 1st and 6th of August they were busy repairing roads, and then there is a pause in the records until the 16th August, when the battalion renewed their attack on enemy positions. On this day two officers are recorded as killed. The battalion stayed in front line positions until the end of the month, when they were then relieved by the 16th R.I. Rifles. During the month they again suffered a number of casualties from gas attacks and reinforcements were desperately needed as effective working strength had fallen very low.

Nationally, a report containing proposals to improve Britain's defences against air attack recommended the formation of an air force independent of the existing Royal Army Corps and Royal Naval Air Service. Here was the birth of the Royal Air Force and the subsequent appointment of Hugh Trenchard as CIG.

In Mayfield, residents must have wearily accepted the latest rationing conditions. In order to prevent panic buying, rather than because of food shortages per se, rationing of sugar would be introduced with effect from the 30 December 1917, and would limit the sugar allowance for each individual, organisation, retailer and distributor. October 6th would be the last day for receipt of applications for sugar cards by the public.

Special Services of Intercession at the Parish Church were held in early August to commemorate the Nation's entry upon the 4th year of the war.

By the beginning of August, Queen wasps were in short supply. In 1916 approx 4000 had been caught as against the rather paltry 400 recorded for 1917. Whether this was reflected fairly in the price of 2/6d offered per 100 is unknown.

At the end of August a fierce gale on the 27th caused great havoc across the area, many large trees were blown down and apple trees stripped of their fruit.

At the Mark Cross Petty Sessions William Ball, aged 17, stated his intention to join the Army.

UCKFIELD TRIBUNAL: The K&SC 17/8/17 P5 reported 'Application was made by Mr E T Coppard for the retention of J Hartfield, 30, of Hill Cottages, Mayfield, who is a Miller's Engine Driver and Stone Dresser. Granted 6 months exemption. Six months were allowed to a Five Ashes farm helper, F W Hartfield, aged 21, who was applied for by Mr A Hartfield.'

HOME ON LEAVE: The K&SC 10/8/17 P6 reported: 'Sergeant George Hepper and Private Isaac Diplock both of the Sussex Territorials have been home on leave from the Front.'

The K&SC 17/8/17 P6 reported '*Lance Corporal Keeley, Sussex Regiment who has been in hospital with rheumatic fever has ten days leave.*

*Private T Bridger, Machine Gun Section, has been home from the Front for 10 days leave.*

*Private W Pettit, Sussex Territorials has 10 days leave from France.*

The K&SC 24/8/17 P6 reported '*Corporal John Luck, Transport section, who has been driving an ambulance car at the Front for over 12 months is home on 10 days leave.*

*Private Luther Wicker who has been at the Front for a long period is now home on leave. Before joining the Army he worked in Mr Brown's nursery. His brother Raymond who went out with him was killed by a shell about six months ago.*

*Private Richard Lusted is home on leave from hospital. He was wounded in the foot by a machine gun bullet. Two Companies of us, says Pte Lusted were told off for labour duty at night and we were engaged in carrying up timber for the Canadian tunnellers, when the Germans, who had evidently heard us, sent up some coloured lights and the whole place was as light as day. They then peppered us with machine guns and before we could lie down a lot of us were hit. I got hit in the foot and the man next to me in the chest.'*

WOUNDED: The K&SC 10/7/17 P6 reported '*Private George Knapp son of Mr & Mrs T Knapp of Borden Cottages has been wounded for the second time with shrapnel and is now in a London hospital.*'

The K&SC 24/8/17 P6 reported '*Private Ernest Colvin, Sussex Regiment, is reported wounded and in hospital at Cambridge. This is the third time he has been wounded.*

*Private Edgar Eaton, Royal Fusiliers, is officially reported by the War Office as wounded on 31 July but his wife has received no news of his whereabouts.*' See July 1917 article.

K&SC 31/8/17 P6 reported '*Lt Edward Elwyn Nott-Bower RE son of Sir William and Ladet Nott-Bower of Hillcrest, Station Road has been awarded the MC for services with the Mesopotamia Forces*'

No names are recorded on the Mayfield or Five Ashes War Memorials for the month of August.