

MAYFIELD AND THE GREAT WAR - NO. 37 - APRIL 2017

On the Western Front The British and French Armies launched major offensives east of Arras, in Champagne and along the River Aisne. The British lead with the Arras offensive where the intention was to draw off German troops and reserves from the Aisne River. The French, under General Nivelle, had promised to 'smash the Germans' along a 40 mile front between Soissons and Reims.

Following a five day bombardment, on the 9th April the British, in what became known as the Battle of Arras, made significant gains. Of particular note was the success of the Canadian Corps which captured Vimy Ridge, just north of Arras, relieving a long time observation point over allied lines. In addition the British XVII Corps advanced some 4/5 miles over 1/2 days; a considerable achievement when matched against the previous year's Somme struggles and indicative that some lessons had been learned. The Royal Flying Corps, an increasingly vital element of the conflict, suffered heavy losses owing to the temporary superiority of the German aircraft. The Hindenburg Line was also broken into at Bullecourt but within days the offensive slowed to a stalemate.

The French opened their 'Nivelle Offensive' a week after the British attacks at Arras. However, the Germans were aware of the plan for the main thrust to capture the thickly wooded ridges along the front line known as Chemin Des Dames. There had been little secrecy and the Germans had captured plans of the attack. The French losses were heavy and within days it was clear that the promised decisive breakthrough would not be achieved. Both the British and French offensives developed into stalemate and dragged on inconclusively into mid May. Whilst some limited success had been achieved, in its aftermath and of extreme concern to the Allied Command, mutiny spread with some swiftness throughout the French Armies. One of its immediate consequences was that leadership of the 1917 military effort along the Western Front fell to the British.

In the Middle East the British failed to gain ground against the Turkish forces in the Second Battle of Gaza, leading to significant changes in the Military Command structure. In Mesopotamia, British forces continued their advance beyond Baghdad but had to postpone further offensives until the Autumn owing to intense heat.

Internationally, two events of the highest significance occurred. First, Lenin arrived in Petrograd from exile in Switzerland and prepared to create a Bolshevik Government. In this intent he was much encouraged by the German Government, who foresaw much advantage to be gained by a weakened Russia and potentially a war winning military advantage if Russia could be brought to seek armistice terms. Secondly, whilst playing their cards well in Russia, the German Government played a disastrous hand against the USA by instigating an unrestricted submarine campaign against neutral shipping and encouraging/enticing Mexico (the Zimmermann letter) to declare war on the USA. On the 6th April the USA declared war on Germany although it would be months before its full military and industrial resources were able to contribute significantly to the Allied war effort. However, the USA navy was better prepared for immediate action. Curiously, the USA did not become a full ally of the Triple Entente and opted to be an Associate Power.

Nationally, the war Government formed by Lloyd George provided new energy and direction for the war effort and had introduced the National Service Scheme as a way of providing fresh manpower for the military whilst maintaining essential war production jobs. As reported in the K&SC: *'National Service Week is over but the appeal continues. Indeed, it is even more urgent than before. Mr Bonar Law told the House of Commons on the 29th March that the recruits for the Army since the beginning of the year had fallen short of the number estimated by 100,000. Therefore there are 100,000 men to be taken from civilian life to fill up the deficit and the places of these 100,000 must either be left vacant or they must be filled by National Service Volunteers. And Mr Bonar Law has admitted that the Government is waiting to see what is to be expected of the National Service Scheme.'*

Also of growing concern was the disruption caused to imports, particularly of food supplies, caused by the introduction of unrestricted sinking of shipping by German submarines. Whilst options for overcoming this new peril were thought through, a further appeal was made to the public to eat one pound weight less of bread per week. A request from the President of the Board of Agriculture for field work to be undertaken on a Sunday drew comment from the Archbishop of Canterbury and subsequent further comment from the Vicar of Mayfield in the Parish Magazine.

At a Parish Meeting as reported by the K&SC *'The Clerk (Mr E J Whapham) mentioned that reports had reached him that it was considered by some in the village that he should be serving in the Army, and he would like to ask the Council whether they considered he should be replaced by a man over military age.'*

Councillor E Coppard said that he had heard no such reports and he should be very sorry if he (the Clerk) had to join the Army as his services were of great value where he was, and he considered he was doing work of national importance in his present duties. Councillor C E Napper also considered that the Clerk's services were of great value to the Council and Overseers and proposed that he carry on his present duties, which proposal was seconded by Councillor R Jenner and carried unanimously.'

17 Cwts of waste paper had been collected in Mayfield and sent to paper mills in Battersea which made a profit of £1 4s. and was donated to the local VAD hospital. In view of the immense amount of work involved in collection for such a small profit the local collection is to be sent to Tunbridge Wells for amalgamation with a similar scheme organised by the Boy Scouts.

Owing to an exceptionally severe winter the supply of vegetables to the Royal Navy practically ceased. It was hoped after more genial weather and new crops coming in, to send any surplus available.

The Uckfield Tribunal considered a large number of claims for exemption and may well have been aware that the Chairman of the Southborough Tribunal had been subjected to threats from an aggrieved claimant earlier in the month. Heated arguments at Tribunals were often encountered as married men complained of single men not being called up and small business owners/farmers complained bitterly of livelihoods being ruined and essential manpower resources being commandeered.

The K&SC 13/4/17 P3 reported: *' A claim by Mr A Tyler of Pages Farm, Mayfield on behalf of Mr R M Faulkner, cowman and assistant carter, was supported by Mr Herbert Sprott of Crowborough. Mr Tyler's representative told the Tribunal that the farm consisted of over 120 acres including 40 acres arable. Mr Tyler took it over in October 1915 and it was then in a derelict condition. It was rather heavy land to work. The stock comprised 160 head and there was a milk contract under which 15 gallons per day were supplied. In response to the Government's appeal he had ploughed an extra 6 acres this year and that looked like being a millstone round his neck. Only 3 men were employed on the farm. The Tribunal agreed to allow Faulkner to remain until a suitable substitute is provided.*

E Luck aged 22, a cowman of Mayfield, was applied for by Mr Denis Bibey. Six months were allowed.

In the case of J Hartfield aged 30 and passed B2, an engine driver, stone dresser and miller, employed by Mr E T B Coppard of Mayfield. The Tribunal granted 3 months exemption.

Mr E Eaton a Mayfield Farmer, applied on behalf of his two sons, Boaz Eaton, carter and assistant stockman aged 28, and Azor Eaton, milkman and engine driver aged 37. Applicant said he had 5 sons, and neither (sic) was in the Army. However, one was expecting to go as soon as a substitute is found and another had been rejected. Mr Eaton denied an assertion by the Military representative that he had the largest number of men of military age on his farm of any farm in the district. The case was adjourned.

Mr W L Hunt a Mayfield Farmer asked to retain W Page, his cowman and milk driver aged 19,. Two months exemption, not renewable was allowed.'

HOME FROM THE FRONT/ON LEAVE: K&SC 6/4/17 P3 reported: *'The Rev Father Hanlon who before being appointed Chaplain to the Forces, was Priest at the Convent Church, is now on leave from the front and paid a visit to Mayfield for a few days.*



'Lance-Corporal Frank Coomber, who is wounded, joined the Sussex Regiment early in the war. He has been to the Dardanelles, Salonika and France. Before joining he was on the railway staff at Mayfield Station.'

Image 1: Private Frank Coomber, wounded, K&SC April 6th 1917 p.3



'Private George Knapp, Sussex Regiment, joined early in the war, and was formerly employed by Dr. Hedges in the gardens. He is now reported seriously ill with spotted fever in hospital in France.'

Image 2: Private George Knapp, wounded, K&SC April 6th 1917 p.3



'Driver W. Hook, Transport Section, the Royal Sussex Regiment, has been wounded. He was one of the first men from Mayfield to volunteer. He sustained his wound while taking provisions to the trenches for the Sussex Regiment. His arm and shoulder were fractured, and he is likely to be permanently disabled. He is now at Shoreham in hospital.'

Image 3: Driver W. Hook, wounded, K&SC April 6th 1917 p.3



'Private Clement Hazelden is one of five Sussex Pioneers wounded by a bomb. He has injuries in both legs, one being broken. He is in hospital in France. Before joining (early in the war) he was a clerk on the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway.'

Image 4: Private Clement Hazelden, wounded, K&SC April 6th 1917 p.3

K&SC 20/4/17 P6 reported: *'Private W Raymond has been home on short leave from hospital where he has been for several months having contracted malaria fever while at Salonika. Private Raymond has the unique experience of having been on a torpedoed Cruiser and narrowly escaped drowning, having clung to a pole for them(sic) hours and subsequently being rescued by a Destroyer.'*



K&SC 27/4/17 P3 reported: *'Private Edgar Eaton, Royal Fusiliers is home on 10 days leave from Birmingham hospital. He was wounded in the leg while storming a German trench in the Somme district. He joined in May 1916 and went to France in October 1916. Previous to joining the army he was in the gardens at "Cranesden".'*

Image 5: Private E. Eaton, wounded, K&SC April 6th 1917 p.3

Private Sheppard; Sapper A Manser (Royal Engineers); Petty Officer William Lade (who saw service at the Battle of Jutland); Corporal Frank Scammell (Canadian Infantry) is home from France to undertake a course of training with a view to a Commission. He has been in France and taken part in several engagements.

NEWS FROM THE FRONT: K&SC 13/4/17 P6 reports: *'Mr T Dann has written home to announce his safe arrival in India. He was called up on 30 May 1916 and after having been picked out for a draft to the Front, sprained his ankle a few hours before leaving, and was subsequently sent to India.'*

K&SC 20/4/17 P6 reports: *'Private Ernest Carpenter son of Mr & Mrs George Carpenter, is reported wounded in France. He went to France early in the New Year.'*



K&SC 27/4/17 P3 reports: *'Private Richard Lusted, youngest son of Mr & Mrs Lusted of Albert Villas, Station Road, Mayfield was wounded while carrying up timber for the Canadian Tunnelers. He enlisted in October 1915 and was drafted to France in January and is now in hospital in Erith. He is only 19 years of age and prior to joining the Army was employed by Mr J Sivyver.'* A brief account of the same soldier in the previous week's newspaper referred to an ankle wound and also that he has a brother serving in the Army.

Image 6: Private Richard Lusted, wounded, K&SC April 27th 1917 p.3

'Private William George Wicker son of Mr & Mrs Wicker of Warren Road is reported wounded in France. Private Wicker who is 22 years of age joined the Canadian Infantry last June having been in Canada three years. His younger brother, who has been discharged from the Army on account of ill health, was only 16 years of age when he joined the RSR.'

Information has been received that Captain G M Shackel, eldest son of Dr & Mrs Shackel has been again wounded in both hands while serving in France. Capt Shackel was gazetted 2nd Lt in August 1914 and when Lt was wounded in the hands at the Battle of Loos. He returned to France with the RSR last June when he was promoted to his current rank.

Shoeing Smith Percy Marsh of the Lancers, son of Mr & Mrs Marsh of Woolbridges, Mayfield is reported wounded in action. He joined the Army about five years ago and went to France with the first Expeditionary Force and was in retreat from Mons, and had several narrow escapes having his horse killed under him. He was one of a very small number left in the Battalion.'

Image 1: Private Frank Coomber, wounded, K&SC April 6th 1917 p.3

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000483/19170406/054/0003>

Image 2: Private George Knapp, wounded, K&SC April 6th 1917 p.3

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000483/19170406/054/0003>

Image 3: Driver W. Hook, wounded, K&SC April 6th 1917 p.3

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000483/19170406/054/0003>

Image 4: Private Clement Hazelden, wounded, K&SC April 6th 1917 p.3

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000483/19170406/054/0003>

Image 5: Private E. Eaton, wounded, K&SC April 6th 1917 p.3

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000483/19170406/054/0003>

Image 6: Private Richard Lusted, wounded, K&SC April 27th 1917 p.3

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000483/19170427/033/0003>

Image © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

All newspaper images and transcripts reproduced with kind permission of The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)