

MAYFIELD AND THE GREAT WAR - NO. 51 - JUNE 2018

In early June the German Army abandoned its third offensive of the Spring along the Western Front. Its attack along the River Marne sector resulted in an advance of some 20 miles on a front extending 30 miles but had run out of steam meeting stiff resistance from French and US forces. The German losses amounted to some 130,000 men and although this was matched by allied casualties, it was the German Army which found it increasingly difficult to find sufficient trained replacements. Nevertheless, the German Army prepared for a fourth offensive, again along the Marne sector, to unite two adjacent salients that previous advances created in the Amiens and Aisne-Marne areas. Forewarned, by local intelligence and information gained from German deserters, the French/US forces were successful in slowing and then preventing any further German advance.

Paris was once again threatened by German artillery in the shape of 'Big Bertha', a huge howitzer having a range of 60 miles. The recent advances by the German Army along the Western Front brought Paris within range. Shells fell indiscriminately on Paris suburbs, the extreme range of gun fire causing major difficulties in targeting.

In Italy, the Austro-Hungarian Armies, now bereft of German support, launched a powerful attack against Italian forces across much of Northern Italy in what became known as the Battle of the River Piave. In the North of this area the A-H Army was stopped, by the Italian Army (including some British and French forces), and forced to retreat suffering some 40,000 casualties. To the east on a wide front across the River Piave, small gains were made by the A-H before vigorous resistance by the Italian Army forced a retreat in some disarray. The A-H casualties, including prisoners, amounted to some 150,000 men and left the Italians poised to mount their own offensive later in the year.

In Russia, Anglo-French-US forces occupied the port of Murmansk to prevent it falling into the hands of the Bolsheviks. Similarly Archangel and Vladivostok were occupied. The latter by US troops, not only to aid the 'White Russians' but also to prevent the Japanese from taking over the port facilities.

The 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment marched from Costo to Carriola at the beginning of the month, where they spent most of the month working on roads and wiring at the forward area and front line. On the 15th of the month they came under attack from the Austrians, and manned the red line until relieved on the 16th; 7 ORs wounded. At the end of the month they retraced their steps and marched back to Costo. The War Diaries note that the working strength of the battalion was much reduced during the month due to an epidemic of "Mountain Fever", affecting 287 men, most of whom rejoined the battalion by the end of the month. It is interesting to note that en route back to Costo all men were inoculated who had not been inoculated in the last 12 months; it is not clear what they were being inoculated against!

Nationally, the National Salvage Council was encouraging local authorities to stimulate the recovery of all kinds of waste material for national purposes. Bones, condemned meat, fish and vegetable refuse, slaughtered horse waste, old tins, scrap metal, rags, waste paper and broken glass were all needed by the nation. Bones were of particular importance as they contained glycerine for shells. It was stated that 18 lbs of bones would provide the propellant for an 18lb shell, phosphates for manure and meal for poultry.

Locally, the Kent and Sussex Courier newspaper, week by week, and very carefully, began to report a growing optimism of the eventual outcome of the war. The German Army was gaining a little ground in France at great cost and not achieving any decisive blows and there was 'something in the air' that suggested the tide was on the turn.

In TW and District an appeal was launched for another 'Savings Week', this time called Tank Week, with an aim to raise £250,000 to finance a Tank to be sent into battle with Royal Tunbridge Wells inscribed on its side. Given that an earlier savings week had been based on the purchase of a submarine for £100,000 this latest appeal appeared ambitious. In the event only £100,000+ was raised which disappointed some but in fact the central national savings committee had only asked the town to raise £85,000.

Proposals to open a community kitchen in Mayfield before the coming winter were aired and to help raise funds for such a facility a fete was held at Firtoll. The Government had recently announced the introduction of general rationing, which no doubt prompted ideas for schemes in which a whole community might pool some resources for the greater good.

The WI continued to flourish and at the monthly meeting it was revealed that the Mayfield branch had over 100 members.

Uckfield Rural Tribunal: The K&SC 21/6/18' P5 reported: '*Exemption was sought by Mr A Fenner of Mayfield for B Eaton, 34, a railway and coal carman, of Mayfield. It was felt that the man's work was important, but that it should be done by an older man and the case was adjourned for the provision of a suitable substitute.*

One month was allowed in the case of W G Paine, 43, a motor and cycle engineer, of Mayfield.'

Wounded: The K&SC 14/6/18 P7 reported: '*Mrs S Bourne has released news that her son Pte William Bourne is in hospital in France suffering from mustard gas and burns.'*

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