

1) 9876 Private George **WINTERSON**

Kia 05/11/14, **Age** 22
2nd Bn. Coldstream Guards

Born Chirton, Wilts
Enlisted Devizes
Residence Aldermaston

Awarded: 1914 Star (with date clasp)
British War Medal
Victory Medal

Date arrived in theatre of war: France, 12/8/1914

At the outbreak of war on 4th August 1914, it is probable that George Winterson was already a serving soldier with the 2nd Grenadier Guards, else a reservist re-called to the colours. At the time they were based at Victoria Barracks, Windsor. They set off and arrived at Southampton on the 12th and were embarked on the *SS Olympia* and *SS Novara* and sailed for France arriving at Le Havre on the 13th, some of the first British troops of the BEF to arrive in France.



A squad of Coldstream Guards August 1914 immediately before departure to France

They stayed here until 15th August and went by train to Vaux-Andigny, from here they marched to Vadencourt (16th), via Etreux and Oisy to Fesmy (20th), onto Noyelles (21st) and La Longueville (22nd). They moved forward to Hyon (23rd) and then to Harveng.

24th August 1914 saw the 'Battle of Mons'. The 2nd Coldstream moved back to Malargni (24th) and Landrieces (25th). They were in support throughout the night during enemy attacks astride the Etreux Road south of Landrieces (26th).

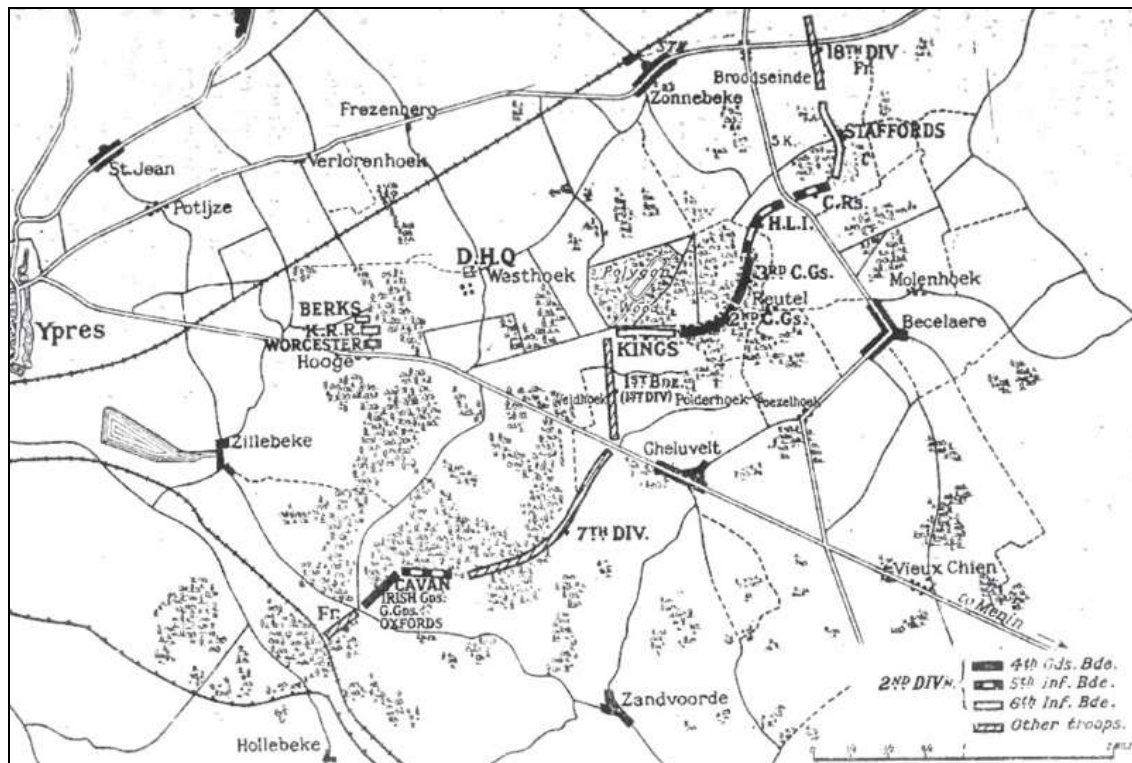
There followed the famous 'Retreat from Mons', a series of holding actions by units village by village facilitating the retreat of the British and French armies back to the river Marne which they reached on 7th September. The 'Battle of the Marne' allowed the French and British once again to take the offensive pushing the Germans. At one action around Petit Villiers on 8th September an estimate 300 German soldiers were killed for the losses of just 12 men to the battalion. This advance continued to the river Aisne where they engaged the enemy on 13th September forcing a passage across the river. Here the Germans now held their ground on the Aisne Heights and the positions would become fixed. Both sides would now extend their flanks in what became known as the 'Race to the Sea', the British army slowly moving northwards, the 2nd Coldstream taking over the line at Chavonne on 18th September. Here they would remain until relieved by the French army on 13th October, Pte F.W.Dobson of the battalion gaining the VC for rescuing a wounded man in front of the German trenches on 28th September.

From here, the 2nd Coldstream continued to march north into Belgium arriving in the famous city of Ypres on 20th October. The following day they moved eastwards from the city to take part in an attack on the Zonnebeke-Langemarck road capturing their objective with a cost of 8 killed, 24 wounded and 1 missing. The following day they lost a further 18 men consolidating their gains. They were relieved during the night of 23rd October to the village of Zillebeke.

Now in reserve, they were again brought forward east of Hooge and into Polygon Wood on 25th October. Here they were to hold these positions till again relieved by the French on 16th November.

Here, east of Ypres, surrounded on three sides by low hills, the remnants of the original BEF (now known proudly as the 'Old Contemptibles') prepared to defend the city of Ypres, in the full knowledge that behind them there were no reserves. If the city of Ypres was taken, there would be no possibility the invading German Army could be stopped before reaching the channel ports and the war would be effectively lost.

Confident of breaking through, the German Army launched a massive offensive against Ypres that would become known to history as the 'First Battle of Ypres' on 31st October 1914. The 2nd Coldstream Guards were detailed to hold Polygon Wood at all costs until relieved, no matter the cost – the enemy must be held.



1st Battle of Ypres Oct/Nov 1914 – Polygon Wood and 2nd Coldstream Guards (C.G's)

At this point the battalion war diary breaks down into a simple narrative telling the story of the next days as attack after attack was launched against Ypres. In truth, the density of trees Polygon Wood prevented a major assault though it, however the Germans were able to make use of the ample cover to harass the men of the 2nd Coldstream.

October 26th: *The Battalion moved through the wood at 2.30am and before reaching the Irish Guards came under considerable rifle fire. The woods during the latter part were so thick that the Battalion had to advance in single file. Succeeded in linking into Irish and Grenadier Guards and dug in under heavy fire, though little could be seen of the enemy owing to the dense woods.*

October 26th to November 17th: *This position was continually held by the Battalion until relieved by French troops. Throughout this period innumerable attacks and demonstrations were made against the line, and a great deal of annoyance and loss was caused by the enemy's snipers and rifle bombs, as well as by their artillery. The positions were improved from day to day, elaborate rifle pits and communication trenches were constructed, wire entanglements and 'abattis' obstacles erected and so forth. On the other hand the enemy constantly sapped closer and closer to us and in places their trenches were eventually nearly 20 yards from our own. Much discomfort was caused by the wet, especially during the latter part, and many of the trenches became waterlogged.*

The composition of the line was frequently altered, the troops on either flank [...] being removed repeatedly, but the line held by the Coldstream remained unaltered throughout this period.

The casualties of the Battalion from October 26th to November 17th were Officers: 2 killed, 5 wounded. Other Ranks killed and died of wounds 64, wounded 151, missing 1.

The war diary makes no mention of the fate of George Winterson, though he is clearly one of the 64 Other Ranks given as having died in the trenches of Polygon Wood in this period. The remnants of the BEF succeeded in preventing the capture of Ypres by the German Army, though had the Germans fully known the pitiful state of the troops and lack of

reserves, they may have continued their efforts. However much ground had now been lost east of Ypres, including Polygon Wood. The lines here were to remain static for almost three years until the Third Battle of Ypres ('Passchendaele) in the summer of 1917 which was to once again push through Polygon Wood. This time there would no trees and the whole a landscape of flooded shell holes due to the shellfire of these three years. All traces of these actions in October/November would have been lost. Lost too would be the graves of the soldiers who fell, including that of George Winterson.



Polygon Wood today

Today George Winterson is commemorated on:

YPRES (MENIN GATE) MEMORIAL, Belgium, Panel 11.

SON OF MRS ANNIE WINTERSON, OF WEIR COTTAGE, CHIRTON, DEVIZES, WILTS.

HUSBAND OF MINNIE JANE BROOKS (FORMERLY WINTERSON, NEE COLLYER), OF DECOY COTTAGE, ALDERMASTON, READING.

YPRES (MENIN GATE) MEMORIAL

Location Information

Ypres (now Ieper) is a town in the Province of West Flanders. The Memorial is situated at the eastern side of the town on the road to Menin (Menen) and Courtrai (Kortrijk).

Each night at 8 pm the traffic is stopped at the Menin Gate while members of the local Fire Brigade sound the Last Post in the roadway under the Memorial's arches.



Historical Information

The Menin Gate is one of four memorials to the missing in Belgian Flanders which cover the area known as the Ypres Salient. Broadly speaking, the Salient stretched from Langemarck in the north to the northern edge in Ploegsteert Wood in the south, but it varied in area and shape throughout the war.

The Salient was formed during the First Battle of Ypres in October and November 1914, when a small British Expeditionary Force succeeded in securing the town before the onset of winter, pushing the German forces back to the Passchendaele Ridge. The Second Battle of Ypres began in April 1915 when the Germans released poison gas into the Allied lines north of Ypres. This was the first time gas had been used by either side and the violence of the attack forced an Allied withdrawal and a shortening of the line of defence.

There was little more significant activity on this front until 1917, when in the Third Battle of Ypres an offensive was mounted by Commonwealth forces to divert German attention from a weakened French front further south. The initial attempt in June to dislodge the Germans from the Messines Ridge was a complete success, but the main assault north-eastward, which

began at the end of July, quickly became a dogged struggle against determined opposition and the rapidly deteriorating weather. The campaign finally came to a close in November with the capture of Passchendaele.

The German offensive of March 1918 met with some initial success, but was eventually checked and repulsed in a combined effort by the Allies in September.

The battles of the Ypres Salient claimed many lives on both sides and it quickly became clear that the commemoration of members of the Commonwealth forces with no known grave would have to be divided between several different sites.

The site of the Menin Gate was chosen because of the hundreds of thousands of men who passed through it on their way to the battlefields. It commemorates casualties from the forces of Australia, Canada, India, South Africa and United Kingdom who died in the Salient. In the case of United Kingdom casualties, only those prior 16 August 1917 (with some exceptions). United Kingdom and New Zealand servicemen who died after that date are named on the memorial at Tyne Cot, a site which marks the furthest point reached by Commonwealth forces in Belgium until nearly the end of the war. New Zealand casualties that died prior to 16 August 1917 are commemorated on memorials at Buttes New British Cemetery and Messines Ridge British Cemetery.



The YPRES (MENIN GATE) MEMORIAL now bears the names of more than 54,000 officers and men whose graves are not known. The memorial, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield with sculpture by Sir William Reid-Dick, was unveiled by Lord Plumer on 24 July 1927.

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