

34) 552566 Private John Wentworth **KERSLEY**

Kia 11/11/17, **Age** 42
10th Bn. Canadian Infantry

(several Canadian sources used in the description below)

John Wentworth Kersley was born on 18th May 1876 in Aldermaston and was a farmer by profession. He had emigrated to Canada before the war and had served in the R.N.W. Mounted Police at some stage for over three years. He resided in Pincher Creek, Alberta. He volunteered to join the Canadian Army in March 1915 at the 'apparent age' of 39 years. His next of kin was given as his sister Kathlyn Hutchinson of Ashamstead, Reading, Berkshire.

John Kersley had joined the 10th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force this unit being part of the 1st Canadian Division from 1914 to 1919. The battalion participated in every major Canadian battle of the First World War, and set a record for the most decorations earned by a Canadian unit in a single battle at Hill 70. The unit was known to its contemporaries simply as '*The Fighting Tenth*'.

The battalion had assembled at Valcartier in Quebec, and sailed for the United Kingdom with the first Canadian contingent in late 1914. Their commanding officer was Lieutenant Colonel Russ L. Boyle, a veteran of the war in South Africa.

The unit trained on Salisbury Plain, and went into the trenches in France in early 1915 with the rest of the Division.



Men of the 10th (Alberta) Battalion pass Stonehenge

Given an enlistment date of March 1915, it might be expected John Kersley would have joined his battalion as a replacement at some time in 1916: It is therefore probable that he was present with his battalion at the following actions:

Mount Sorrel, 1916 — An action that is often omitted in British accounts of fighting in the Ypres Salient, for some Canadians, it was this action in 1916 that they wished to be called the 'Third Battle of Ypres. This counter-attack by the 10th Battalion was launched on a small knoll in the Ypres Salient on 3 June 1916. Considerable losses were suffered. Despite the relatively low height of this feature, it provided an excellent viewpoint over the otherwise flat terrain in the area and was of considerable strategic importance.

Battle of the Somme, 1916

Thiepval — Thiepval Ridge, near the town of Courcellette, represented a successful offensive operation for the 10th Battalion, fought on 26 September 1916, at the cost of 241 casualties.

Ancre Heights — Another successful defensive battle fought by the 10th Battalion, during the Somme Campaign, near the town of Albert, France. Modest casualties were suffered during the action on 10–11 September 1916.

Battle of Arras, 1917

Vimy Ridge — Intended as a diversion to draw attention away from French actions further south, and often serving only as a footnote to the less successful overall Battle of Arras in 1917 waged by the British armies, Vimy was the greatest victory of the war for the Canadian Corps, which by 1917 numbered four divisions. In a dramatic assault on Easter Monday, the 9th of April, and representing the best in Canadian tactical ingenuity, military engineering, and technical innovation, the Canadians seized most of this dominating feature in a few short hours, and finally clearing the entire ridge in three days. The British and French had been unable to clear these heights since the Germans first seized them in 1914, and had lost more men in the process of trying than the Canadians as a whole started out with on 9 April. The 10th Battalion had its own role to play in this great drama, and reached all its objectives on time, at the cost of 374 casualties.

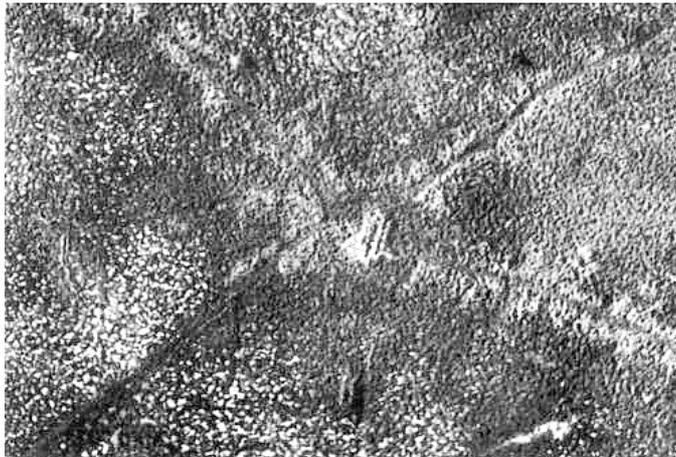
Arleux — The Arleux Loop was a follow up to the Vimy operation, launched on 28 April 1917, aimed at capturing a major German billeting area at Arleux-en-Gohelle. The operation went in over open ground and produced serious casualties.

Hill 70 — Rising only 15 feet over surrounding terrain, this hill north of Lens, Belgium was the scene of a diversionary attack to relieve pressure on the city of Lens itself. On 15–16 August 1917, a strong German counter-attack was repulsed by the 10th Battalion. Private Harry Brown, who was killed acting as a runner during this battle, was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. In addition to the VC, three DSOs, 7 MC, 9 DCMs and 60 (!) MMs were earned by the 10th Battalion, *giving the 10th Battalion the distinction of receiving more medals than any other Canadian combat unit in a single action in the course of the First World War.*

Third Battle of Ypres, 1917

Passchendaele — Named for a village located on a low rise in the Ypres Salient, the very word Passchendaele has become synonymous with suffering and waste. Strong German defences in this area, developed over the course of more than two years, gave the British extremely hard going. The 10th Battalion were called out of reserve to assist an attack on Hill 52, part of the same low rise Passchendaele itself was situated on. The battalion was not scheduled to attack, but the CO wisely prepared his soldiers as if they would be making the main assault—a decision that paid dividends when the unit was called out of reserve. On 10 November 1917, the 10th Battalion took the feature with light casualties.

The capture of Passchendaele was the final stage of the Third battle of Ypres, the British Army could advance no further. Nothing remained of the village itself except a brick coloured stain in the moonscape of mud and water-filled shellholes. However, the Canadian troops looking now from the top of the Passchendaele Ridge eastwards could see untouched green fields and farm houses and yet more villages ahead. Behind them was four miles of featureless mud.



The village of Passchendaele – Before and after its capture

For the 10th Battalion Canadian Army the day following the capture of Passchendaele would be 'quiet' as they might have expected a German counter-attack, but none would come:

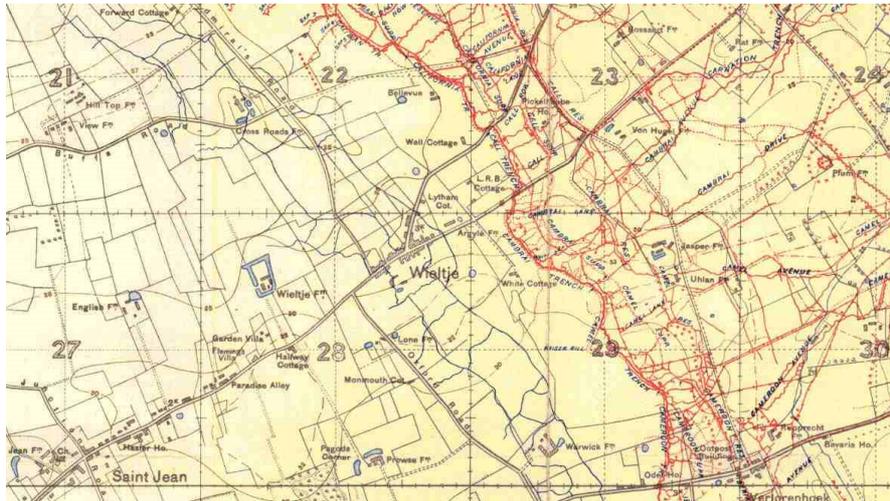


'We died in Hell – They called it 'Passchendaele''

The war diary of the 10th Battalion for 11/11/1917 is as follows:

'Battalion was relieved in Front Line positions by the 58th and 52nd Canadian battalions, and on completion of relief at 8.00pm moved back to billets in 'C' Camp, WEILTJE. Battalion was reported 'Rested in Billets' by 10.30pm.

Enemy aircraft were again very active during the day. Seven hostile 'planes flew over the Battalion Transport lines, near YPRES, at a very low altitude and dropped a number of bombs over the camp. One man was killed and four wounded, and eight horses were killed and one wounded. Lewis Gun fire was directed on the 'planes but with no success. Weather dull and cold.'



Location of Weiltje - the lines had moved well to the east by 11/11/17

An older man at 42, it might be expected that John Kersley might have been posted with the Transport Section – he would have known the skills of working with horses all his life. It is very likely that the 'one man was killed' in the War Diary does actually refer to John Kersley.



Excavations at Weiltje – 100 years on the trenches remain preserved



Canadian troops working at the 'Horse-lines in the rear

The Canadian 'Circumstances of Death' files provide no further details other than to provide official confirmation that John Kersley could now be presumed dead. Given the circumstances, it can also be assumed there was no body to have buried, therefore John Kersley's name is commemorated on the:

YPRES (MENIN GATE) MEMORIAL, Belgium, Panel 24 - 28 - 30.

**SON OF ANTHONY JAMES AND EMILY KERSLEY, LATE OF ALDERMASTON,
READING, ENGLAND.**

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.

HALL A. B.	POPE G. L.
HALL J. E.	PREW A. H.
HALL S. G.	REID F. J.
HANNAH H. McD.	RENTON S. C.
HARDY R.	REYNOLDS J.
HARRISON O. W.	RICHARDSON G.
HENDERSON J. R.	RICKETTS L. J.
HEWER F. C.	RIORDAN A. J.
HIGHGATE W. G.	RIPPENGALE G.
HILL E. A.	RITCHIE E. G.
HOGARTH G. M.	ROBERTSHAW F.
HOLLAND C.	ROBINS C. R.
HOOD A. A.	ROSS G. R.
HOYLE W.	ROY R. W.
HUGHES A.	RUMBOLD F.
HUGHES A. F.	SAMSON W. E.
HULME A.	SAUNDERS J. W.
ISABELLE U. I.	SAWERS O. C.
JACKSON H. W.	SCOTT G. H.
JACOBS W. H.	SCOTT J. McC.
JENNISON V.	SELBY G. D.
JOHNSON W. L.	SERGEANT J. F. McC.
KEITH T. A.	SIMMONS G. E.
KENNEDY A. F.	SINCLAIR A. G.
KENNEDY F.	SLOAN R.
KERR G. D.	SMITH B.
KERSLEY J. W.	SMITH T. K.
KNOCK E.	SMITH W. A.
LAWRENCE R.	SOMERSET V. H. P.
LEA J.	SPALDING C. M.
LEEMAN L. F.	STARKEY C. S.
LEMON S. H.	START H. J. B.
LENNON T.	STEVENSON S.
LEWIS F.	STRACHAN E. M.