

06 JAN 05 THU

Dear John,

I heard you were in hospital. I do hope that you are bearing up OK.

I have sent you two communications about your Grandfather — the first results of my search, & a couple of sheets of addenda.

Re-reading it ^{all} today, I realize that it needs a new draft. A couple of things are not quite right: I need to separate ^{clearly} the known facts from the (informed) speculation; & what I've said about enlistment, ^{about the disembarkation,} and ^{about the} date of transfer to the 8/Somerset L.I. is not quite correct, or may not be correct at all!

I can deduce a lot more from the 3 regimental numbers your Grandfather held, it seems.

I may be able to work out, from those numbers, a rough date of enlistment, for example. Too complicated to explain here. His second number for the 1/20 London tells me that he was probably with that battalion until at least March of 1917. Anyway, with several facts still up in the air it might not be a good idea to pass on those spare copies. We'll speak soon, I hope, and

ADDENDA

Correction: Tyne Cot Memorial is 9km North-East of Ypres, not North of Ypres.

Date of Private TILBURY's disembarkation in France: 1st/20th London Regiment embarked from Southampton on four ships, 'Viper', 'Queen Alexandra', 'Duchess of Argyll' and 'Trafford Hall' during the afternoon of Tuesday, 9th March 1915. The battalion disembarked at Le Havre, France, the first soldiers going ashore at 0730 hours, on Wednesday, 10th March 1915. (WO 95/2738: War Diary: 1/20 Bn., London Regiment; 1915 March - 1919 May).

Letter from H. Harverson to Grace Tilbury, dated Thursday, 18th October 1917:

275107 Private Herbert HARVERSON: 3rd (City of London) Battalion (Royal Fusiliers), The London Regiment; formerly 634027 Private, 1st/20th London Regiment; formerly 8095 Private, 1st/20th London Regiment.

He was killed in action on Sunday, 11th August 1918 and has no known grave. He is commemorated on Panel 10 of the Vis-en-Artois Memorial, Vis-en-Artois British Cemetery (10km South-East of Arras), Pas-de-Calais, France.

Private HARVERSON was born in Dalston, enlisted Bexley Heath and resided in Sidcup. He was the husband of Ellen Harverson.

(Information from 'Soldiers Died...' and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission).

Given that his original regimental number of 8095 is adjacent to Private TILBURY's original number of 8096, it can be assumed that the two men enlisted at the same time and were or became friends.* Private HARVERSON's service papers have not survived.

Medals awarded as the result of the fighting of 4th October 1917: five more Other Ranks were also decorated but the War Diary of 8th Somerset Light Infantry omits to mention the name of the medal.

Correction: two, not three Other Ranks were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal as a result of the 4th October 1917 fighting.

A check with WO 363 MIS-SORTS/134: Soldiers' Service Records, WW1: THORNBURN, Donald - TITE, Henry, revealed no trace for Private TILBURY. A similar search in the Mis-sorts records revealed no trace for Private HARVERSON.

A period of roughly six months' training would most likely have preceded the disembarkation in France. This puts a possible date of enlistment for Privates TILBURY and HARVERSON at around September of 1914.

* When the men of 1st/20th London Regiment were re-numbered, Privates HARVERSON and TILBURY again had consecutive regimental numbers: 634027 and 634028, respectively.

According to 'Soldiers Died...', 3 Officers and 39 Other Ranks of the 8th Somersets were killed in action on 4th October 1917. The majority have no known grave and are commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial. As 8th Somersets' front line, a frontage of some 250 yards, did not change until September 1918, it is highly likely that those men lay where they had fallen for almost a year and that the bodies were subject to further and random destruction from constant shell-fire. The lethal circumstances of such a front line would not have allowed the bodies to be recovered. When the remains were eventually recovered *, identification would frequently be impossible**. It is very unlikely that those casualties received any form of burial prior to September 1918. The chivalrous attitudes prevalent in the early days of the war, when each side would every now and then allow the other to collect its dead and wounded, had long since disappeared.

By the end of the fighting of 4th October 1917 the 8th Somersets had established four isolated shell-hole outposts, the main body of the men being dug in some 80 yards to the rear of those outposts.

The 'Official History of the War' ('Military Operations...1917...', see SOURCES sheet), comments on the Southern flank of the action as follows (page 315):

'The right brigade of this (37th) division... renewed the attempt to capture the defended locality on Tower Hamlets spur; but the 8/Somerset L.I. and 8/Lincolnshire, which entered it, were swept by machine-gun fire from front and flanks, as in previous attempts, and had to fall back to their starting-line. Heavy losses were incurred, and intense German shelling, together with the muddy conditions of the Bassevillebeek valley, prevented the arrival of sufficient reinforcements in time to resume the attack.'

A footnote on the same page states:

'Private T.H.Sage (8/Somerset L.I.) was awarded the V.C. for saving the lives of a number of men by throwing himself on a bomb dropped by a neighbouring soldier who was shot down when about to throw it.'

The word 'bomb' refers to a grenade. Private Sage does not appear on the list of those killed on the day of the battle***.

Overall, the Battle of Broodseinde was a considerable success, the Germans losing a great deal of ground. The battle was the prelude to the fighting for the village of Passchendaele.

David Jackman 05JAN05WED



* Much of this unpleasant work was carried out by members of the Chinese Labour Corps.

** The identity discs worn by British soldiers during WW1 were made of a compressed cardboard which disintegrated after prolonged exposure to wet conditions.

*** To be investigated.