

L/Cpl L.J.Ward – The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment)

Lionel Ward was born in 1895, the son of Thomas and Marion Ward of St John's Road. He was a farm labourer and attested for service on 7th August 1914, just three days after the war started. After joining the Queen's, he was transferred to the 1/23rd (County of London) Battalion, The London Regiment which had been made part of the Corps of the East Surrey Regiment and was serving in France.

Lionel joined his new unit on 22nd September 1916. The Battalion was engaged in the Battle of the Somme and had just come out of the line having taken heavy casualties. The regimental diary records that a draft of 306 Other Ranks joined that day. The Battalion had fought in France continuously since March 1915 and would continue to do so until hostilities ceased. It was subsequently engaged in the actions at Messines, Ypres, Cambrai, Lille and Tournai.

By 1918 the United States had entered the war and on 9th March the Germans launched their massive 'Spring offensive' in an attempt to break the allied lines before the Americans reached the front. The Allies were forced back and the 1/23rd London Regiment soon found itself defending the area of High Wood, ground it had fought for in the Battle of the Somme two years earlier. The regimental diary records on 21st March that the enemy opened a 'terrific bombardment' on the Battalion's position. On 24th March the diary contains the following entries:

8.00 am Bn occupied defensive line along sunken road running SW from Le Transloy.

3.00 pm Bn moved to trenches near Geudecourt leaving these later to High Wood arriving at dusk where outpost line was occupied W of the wood. Owing to the impossibility of holding this position after daybreak at 2.30 pm (25th) Bn withdrew through Bazentin le Petit to Contalmaison.

On 28th March the diary recorded that the Battalion's casualties for the period 21st-26th March were 20 killed, 102 wounded and 149 missing. Lionel Ward was numbered among the wounded, having received a shrapnel wound in his back on 24th March. He died of his wounds on 4th April 1918 at the 6th Stationary Hospital, Frevent and was buried in the St Hilaire Cemetery Extension at Frevent. He was 23.

Although our war memorial gives Lionel Ward's rank as a Lance Corporal, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission record and medal index card state that he was a Private. The regimental title on our memorial also appears to be incorrect - Lionel Ward served in the 1/23rd (County of London) Battalion, The London Regiment which was a different regiment to the Royal Fusiliers.

The German offensive of 1918 is said to have been the greatest crisis faced by the Allies in the war. On 11th April Field Marshal Haig issued his famous 'Backs to the Wall' message to his troops. The Allied lines held and the Germans were forced to fall back. In July the Allies began their final advance which culminated in the Armistice of 11 November 1918.