

Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment on 11th November 1914, which does not square with him already serving as a regular with the Royal Field Artillery. The 2nd Battalion of the Glosters was a battalion of regular soldiers that had just returned from China and when they sailed for Le Havre in December 1914, shortages were apparently filled by Territorial units taken from other divisions. So I think that Frank may have been at Bulford Camp in 1911 as a Territorial and this is how he came to be enlisting as a regular in 1914.

Frank's battalion landed at Le Havre, as part of the 27th Division, just before Christmas 1914 and traveled around 130 miles to Arques and Aire in northern France. However, in January they moved to



British infantrymen -Ypres April 1915

the area around Ypres and got their first taste of action in March on the front line near St Eloi. The fighting was heavy and after just two days, they had five men missing and twelve wounded – and this was just the start of two months in the line. As German mortar bombs and heavy shelling signaled the start of the 2nd Battle of Ypres, the 2nd Glosters lost another 44 men killed or wounded between the 18th and 25th April. By the beginning of May, the Ypres Salient was in serious danger of being lost if the Germans succeeded in encircling the beleaguered positions of the Allies.

On 8th May, the Germans moved against the British 27th and 28th Divisions southeast of Ypres on Frezenberg Ridge. Their objective was to smash

through the Allied front line using their superiority in guns and ammunition. Sir John French's despatch describes how on the 9th May, "very heavy shell fire was concentrated for two hours on the trenches of the 2nd Gloucestershire Regiment and 2nd Cameron Highlanders, followed by an infantry attack which was successfully repulsed. The Germans again bombarded the salient, and a further attack in the afternoon succeeded in occupying 150 yards of trench. The Gloucesters counter-attacked, but suffered heavily and the attack failed. The salient being very exposed to shell fire from both flanks as well as in front, it was deemed advisable not to attempt to re-take the trench at night."

Frank was killed in action the next day – the day his battalion was relieved by the 1st Royal Scots and the day that the Germans released yet another cloud of chlorine gas. Like Reginald Neale, Frank was 21 years old, has no known grave and is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial. Maynard Colchester Wemyss alluded to his death, when he told of writing a letter of sympathy to Frank's mother who was in the Gloucester Infirmary when she received the news. He also expressed the horror shared by so many at this first use of poison gas.

For further copies of this leaflet or if you have any information to add, please contact Di Landon on 01452 760531

Westbury Remembers - Part 4

Ypres - Reginald Neale and Frank Allen

Written by Di Landon

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Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council



Every night at 8pm, the traffic stops in Ypres as the Last Post is sounded beneath the arches of the Menin Gate - just one of four memorials in this area which are dedicated to those who have no known grave. The area around Ypres saw particularly intensive fighting throughout most of the war and amongst the 54,896 names on the



The Menin Gate in Ypres

Menin Gate are those of Reginald Neale and Frank Allen, two more of Westbury's soldiers, who died here in the first days of May 1915.

It has been estimated that the remains of around 80,000 British soldiers who died in Flanders have never been found. On this battlefield, the fighting often moved back and forth over the same ground, and graves and burial grounds near the front were often damaged or lost in subsequent fighting. Many casualties died in collapsed underground tunnelling operations and firsthand accounts also tell of men disappearing in the waterlogged shell craters and deep, deep mud. Added to this, the weaponry used by all sides frequently caused such dreadful injuries that it was not possible to identify

or even find a complete body for burial.

Reginald Neale was born in 1894 and, like so many at that time, was one of a large family, having ten older brothers and sisters. His parents,

William and Emma Neale, had also had four more children who did not survive. When Reginald was little, the family lived in Church Lane in Newnham, where his father was a wheelwright and carpenter, but by 1911, Reginald's parents, together with seven of their children, now mostly grown up, had moved to Broadoak. Sixteen year old Reginald was a market garden labourer, while his siblings followed various paths of employment - insurance agent, railway plate layer, housekeeper, labourer and milk seller.

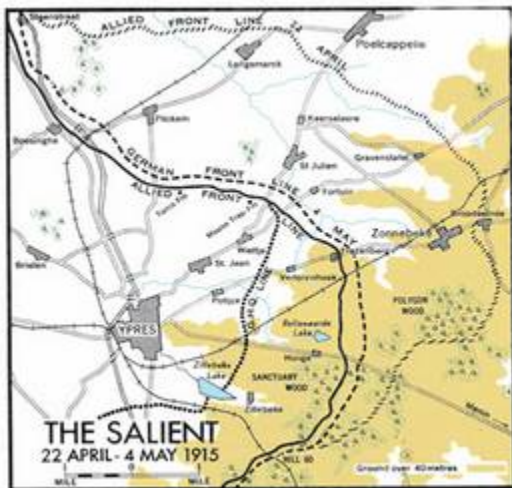
By November 1914, Reginald had obviously moved away from this busy household. He enlisted in the 3rd Battalion of the Monmouthshire Regiment in Abergavenny, although his record shows that he said he was liv-

ing in Bath at the time. After training in England, his battalion sailed from Southampton on the night of 14th February and then traveled by train to Flanders for ten days of final training in the techniques of trench warfare. A detachment of 40 men were then sent off to join the newly formed 171st Tunnelling Company which would first see service at Hill 60.

When the British had relieved the French in the Ypres region, following the 'race to the sea', it was determined that Hill 60, which was a valuable vantage point held by German troops, must be retaken at all costs. On 17th April 1915, after bitter fighting and with the new concept of offensive mining, the top of the hill was literally blown off by the explosion of five mines and after four days of fierce German counter attacks, the British took control of the hill.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the 3rd Battalion, which most likely included Reginald, were transported in a fleet of 100 London buses to Bailleul, near Lille, where they joined the 28th Division. Each of four companies went in turn for 24 hours instruction in the front line under the care of regular troops before the battalion was made responsible for 1000 yards of the front line near Wulverghem, a small village five miles south of Ypres. For five days they were

under almost constant heavy fire and they continued in front line service there until they were relieved on 2nd April. After a brief rest period, they were back on the buses to Ypres, and then through the Menin Gate and up to another part of the line, where they were to relieve French troops to the east of Polygon Wood. One of the soldiers in Reginald's battalion wrote "It is much worse fighting where we are now to what it was in the last place."



Ypres 1915

As the battle for Hill 60 was subsiding on 22nd April, the German army carried out a surprise attack against two French divisions holding the line further north. This attack witnessed the first use of

poisonous gas and its deadly effect was carried on a gentle breeze towards the French troops. It is said to have affected 10,000 men – half of whom died within ten minutes. As a result of its devastating effect, German infantry were able to take possession of successive lines of trenches and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle pulled no punches when he described them as being "tenanted only by the dead garrisons, whose blackened faces, contorted figures, and lips fringed with the blood and foam from their bursting lungs, showed the agonies in which they had died."

Sir John French described the attack as "a cynical and barbarous disregard of the well-known usages of civilised war," although within months the British too were using gas at the Battle of Loos.

The men of the 3rd Monmouthshire Battalion knew that a heavy bombardment had started just north of their position and heard many rumours about the gas attack which were eventually confirmed, but although they sustained some casualties, at this point it was relatively quiet in Polygon Wood.

What they did not realize was that the gas attack had enabled the German army to make a significant advance into Allied territory and the Second Battle of Ypres had begun. The German guns had been brought up to Pilkem Ridge and Polygon Wood was soon under heavy shellfire and becoming untenable. To avoid the danger of being cut off, the order was given to withdraw from the wood under cover of darkness on the night of 1st May. Reginald died on 2nd May. He was 21 years old and has no known grave. *The Allies had reluctantly withdrawn to a new front line, but as they did, the Germans again attacked with gas. They were met with fierce resistance and were held back by an Allied force of British, French, Canadian and Indian troops. The battle continued for three more weeks, and cost 120,000 lives - 59,000 of them British.*

Frank James Allen

Frank had much in common with Reginald Neale. He was born in the same year (1894) and he, too, died during the Second Battle of Ypres. His mother, Fanny, had been the cook

at Westbury Workhouse and his father, Alfred, was a bricklayer and stonemason in the village. Alfred's brother Cornelius Allen (Frank's uncle) was also killed in the war and is listed next to his nephew on the war memorial.

Frank was the middle child of three, having an older brother, Alfred, and a younger sister, Mabel. The 1901 census, taken when he was seven, finds him with his grandparents, Alfred and Jemima Panter, in Ombersley in Worcestershire, but it is not clear whether this was a permanent arrangement or whether he was just staying with them at the time of the census. Certainly his brother and sister were still living at home in Westbury with their parents.

The 1911 census shows Frank as serving in the 139th Battery of the Royal Field Artillery, stationed at Bulford Hut Barracks in Salisbury. This doesn't quite tie up with other information about him. For example, he was one of Westbury's church bell ringers who were commemorated by a special peal of bells on Armistice Day in 1921 but it seems unlikely that he could have been a regular bell ringer if he was away serving as a regular soldier. Also, he is recorded as enlisting in the 2nd



The commemorative plaque in the church tower