

Albert Francis Pinches

Lance Corporal

20122

10th Battalion, South Wales Borderers

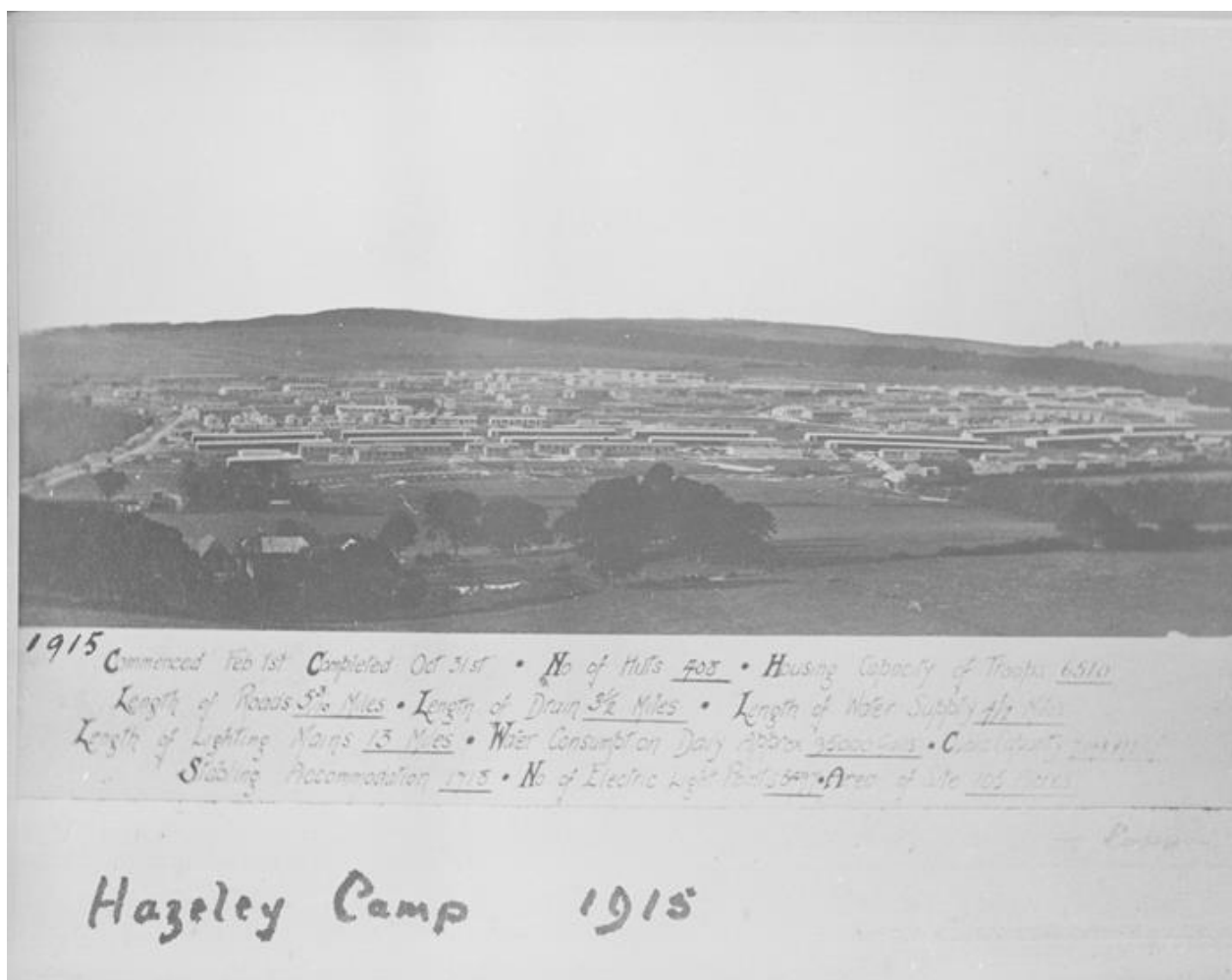


Albert Francis Pinches was born in Kington in the early part of 1879. He was the only son born to Thomas and Elizabeth Pinches. Thomas, a labourer from Kington, married Marian Elizabeth Hoppe, a young lady originally from Putney, in the spring of 1875 in Southwark, London. Their first child, Elizabeth, was born soon after in Wandsworth and by 1879 the family had moved back to Thomas's home town of Kington. In 1882 a further daughter was added to the family when Ada Agnes was born. Census returns from the period confirm that the family were living in Floodgates and we also know Albert attended Kington Boy's School on Gravel Hill. The next time we learn of Albert is in the 1901 census which informs us that he, now aged 25, was working as a groom for the three young Misses Corbett at Greenfields House in Presteigne. Also revealed in the 1901 census is the intriguing fact that just across the bridge into England, a Jane Gummer was living with her widower father Samuel, at Roddhurst. As the crow flies, across the fields, Greenfields and Roddhurst are only a short distance apart and before long love blossomed and in the second quarter of 1902 that love was formalised when Albert and Jane were married in Presteigne. The marriage was consummated and in 1903 their first child, Lillian was born in their marriage town.

Our story now transports us to an unexpected change of location. A son, Albert Pinches, was born to Albert and Jane in 1905 in Pontnewydd. Pontnewydd is a South Wales mining town located just to the north of Cwmbran in Monmouthshire and whilst it is true to say that many men from this area moved south and went

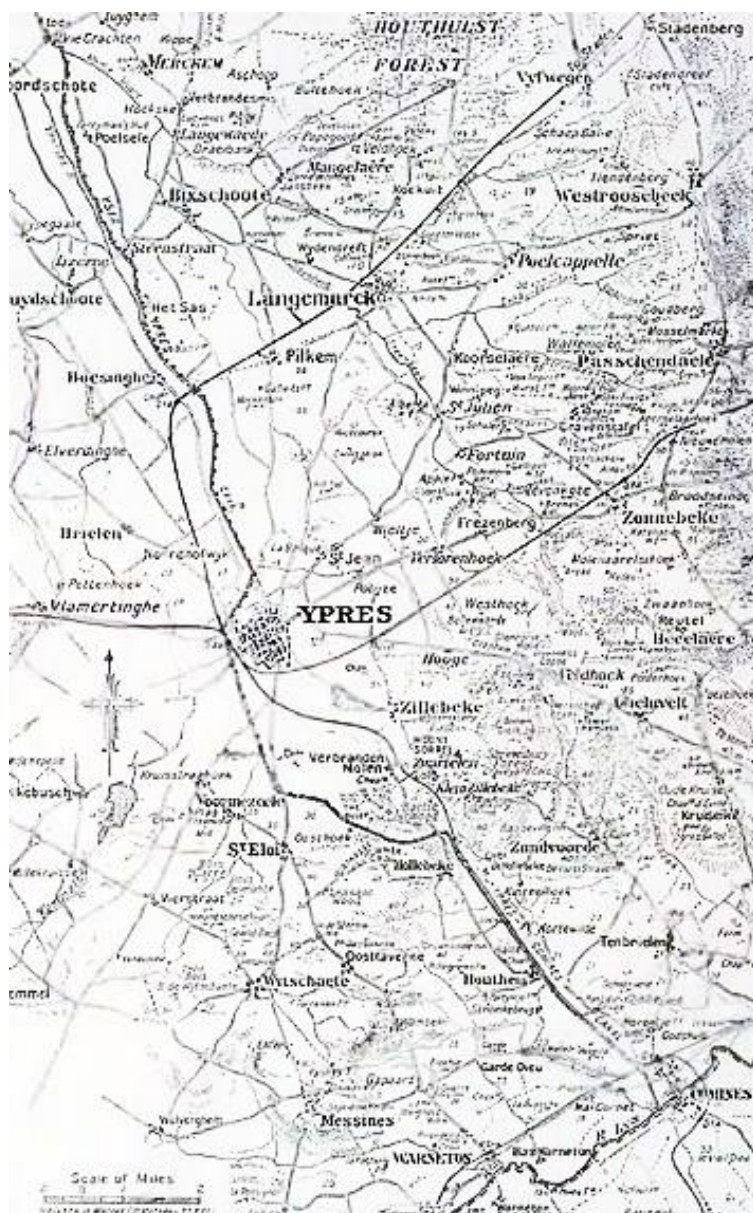
into the mines, this was not to be the fate of Albert. The 1911 census informs us that he was working as a grocer's haulier and that the family had grown by two, with the births of Launcelot in 1907 and Thomas in 1909 and were happily ensconced in Ladywell Row, Pontnewydd. Did the family move for work or some other unknown reason, we can speculate but never know for certain? We do know that the family move again, this time into larger premises at 77 Victoria Avenue in Newport. This picture of domestic bliss is undoubtedly engaging and then the war came.

We do not know for sure when Albert enlisted but we know he joined the South Wales Borderers, 10th Battalion (1st Gwent). On the 10th October 1914, the government had given permission for two new service battalions to be raised in the valley's, by public subscription. Men flocked to sign up and in April 1915, the 10th South Wales Borderers was to form part of the 115th Brigade, 38th Welsh Division. Established at Ebbw Vale, the battalion were soon undertaking basic training at Colwyn Bay and from here were moved to Hursley Park on the outskirts of Winchester. Later they were to be moved again to Hazeley Down Camp which had been established on farmland to the southeast of Winchester. This huge camp was used as a holding camp for units awaiting embarkation for France. The camp



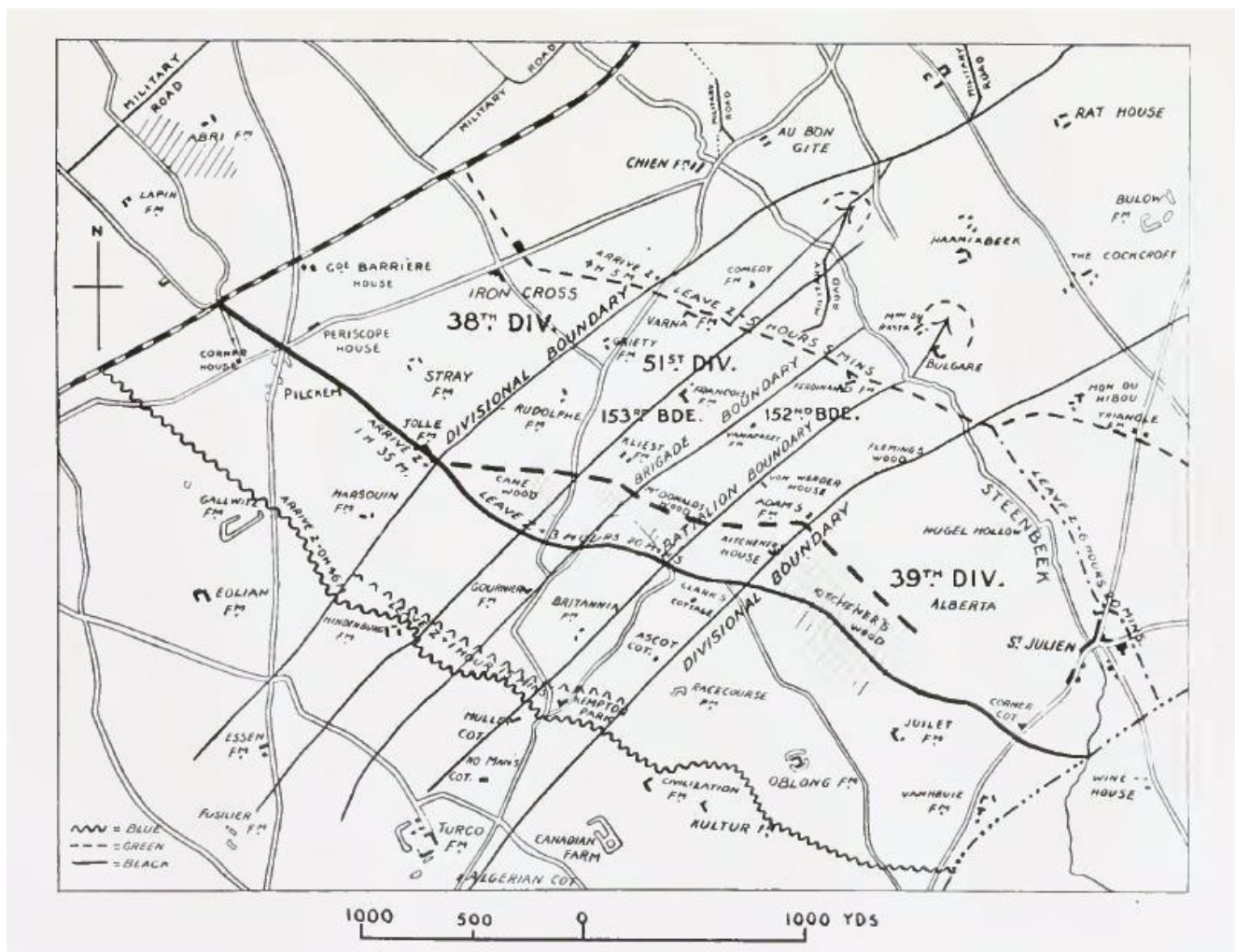
may be long gone but the area around is still used as an army firing range to this day.

On 3rd December 1915, the battalion embarked at Southampton aboard the Empress Queen, a reliable old paddle steamer which was to ship them across the Channel to Le Havre and at 7am on the 4th December the 10th South Wales Borderers first set foot on French soil. Sadly, few of Alberts service records survive but as far as we know he served all his time with the 10th South Wales Borderers. He would have seen action at the Battle of Albert in July 1916, this being one of the first offensives in the larger Battle of the Somme. Here his Division, the 38th Welsh, were badly mauled suffering heavy casualties, which resulted in them being omitted from further major actions for the next year while they regrouped. The battalion were moved from the Somme front and relocated onto the Ypres Salient near Hazebrouck and on the 18th August 1916, they were back in the trenches on the West Bank of the Yser Canal, north of Ypres.



We now turn to the battalion's official war diary to discover the events surrounding Alberts sad demise in August 1917. The preceding months had been spent rotating in and out of the trenches in the Ypres area and the next notable battle the 10th Battalion were involved in was the Battle of Pilckem Ridge which took place between the 31st July and 2nd August 1917. This battle was to be the opening confrontation in the much vaunted 3rd Battle of Ypres more commonly known as the Battle of Passchendaele. At 9:30pm on the 30th July the battalion had left the safety of their reserve camp and marched forward to their allocated assembly point, north of Ypres and on the west bank of the Yser Canal, where they arrived at 11:15pm. The diary informs that on the 31st July 1917, 18 Officers and 509 Other Ranks were available for action. At 5am on the

31st they emerged from their trenches and advanced, crossing the Yser Canal, toward their objective of Kiel Cottage. Ahead of them were the men of the 113th and 114th Brigades, who were fighting for possession of Pilckem Ridge and advancing under the cover of a creeping barrage. The barrage was effective and resistance light and by 7am the advance troops and 10th SWB had reached their first objectives. Alberts battalion then prepared to move on to their next objective, IRON CROSS RIDGE just east of the village of Pilckem. While advancing on Iron Cross they came under heavy enemy artillery fire, much of it containing mustard gas shells.



The contemporary map above shows the corridor of responsibility the 38th Division were given with Iron Cross clearly visible in the centre of their corridor. The 10th Battalion reached their objective at 4pm and proceeded to dig in. Battalion HQ was established at Rudolphe Farm, seen on map above, and a constant supply of hot tea revived the men. The weather was appalling with persistent rain falling turning

all around into a mud bowl. A cup of tea today may seem a mundane thing but on the Western Front the men truly appreciated their hot tea which not only warmed the body but helped maintain morale and kept spirits high. The 1st August was quiet until 5pm when the enemy opened-up on their positions, casualties began to rise. The battalion stayed at Iron Cross until



British stretcher bearers carrying a casualty in deep mud near Pilckem

5am on the 3rd when they were gratefully relieved by the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. The men were moved back from the front to a point called Stoke Farm Camp where they regrouped, cleaned themselves up and could bathe and eat hot food, a luxury which alluded them while at Pilckem. At rollcall on the 6th it was discovered that 22 men had been killed and 159 were wounded casualties. The battalion, severely depleted, received a reinforcement draft of 81 men which prepared them for the inevitable next offensive.

The Battle of Langemarck was that next offensive. Langemarck can be seen in the map above just north of Ypres and a few miles in advance of Pilckem. On the 16th August, the British attack opened with the obligatory creeping barrage. Barrage tactics had improved over the years and was now slow enough that advancing



troops could keep up. As each objective was achieved destructive shells were exchanged for smoke shells which enabled the advancing troops to consolidate the newly acquired ground. Once consolidated the barrage continued its slow advance to the next objective with the troops staying as close to it as they dare. It appears the 10th South Wales Borderers were not involved in the early phases of the battle but held in reserve at Stoke Farm. However, on the 18th August Albert and his battalion were again advancing toward the frontline trenches. The diary informs us the battalion were allocated CANDLE TRENCH. The trench map above indicates that Candle Trench was to the south of Pilckem, their old stomping ground and location of earlier success. They arrived in Candle Trench at 9pm, having relieved the 10th Welch Borderers, and were dismayed to find the trench in a 'parlous state'. At 10pm 'A' Company came under intense enemy artillery bombardment with casualties resulting. One other rank was killed and thirteen more wounded. We can surmise that Albert's involvement in the Battle of Langemarck was limited and that he was one of those injured in the bombardment of 'A' Company. The record shows that Albert Francis Pinches succumbed to his injuries and died of wounds on the **18th August 1917**. Even though the battalion were well behind the frontlines his death is testimony to the devastation artillery fire could cause. By the 18th the advance on Langemarck was complete and this small village lay in British hands, sadly Albert did not live to learn of this success. The following day life for the battalion continued as if nothing had happened the previous day. Platoons were sent forward to Stray Farm to act as working parties on the tramline seen on the included map. If the allies were to defeat their enemy life in the trenches had to carry on despite the horrors meted out to them.

Albert was buried in the nearby Dozinghem Military Cemetery, grave reference III.

J.15. Dozinghem was one of three cemeteries established in July 1917 in preparation for expected casualties from the forthcoming offensive. Black humour within the forces was and is still rife and Western Front troops named the three cemeteries Mendinghem, Dozinghem and Bandaghem. Please look carefully at these three names and see the humour within.

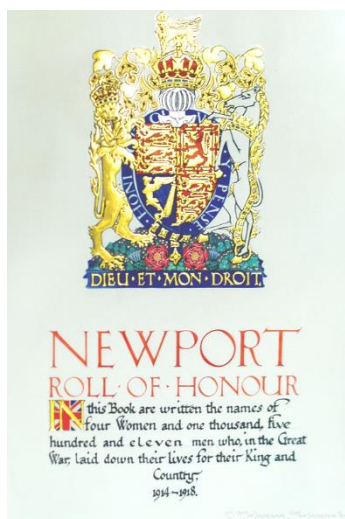


Back home in Newport news of Albert's death was met with dispare. Jane was left to bring up her young family alone and four children had lost their father

prematurely. Janes pride and grief was apparent in the memorial she left to her beloved husband in a local newspaper.

**One of the many to answer the call
For those he loved, he gave his all
Somewhere afar in a soldier's grave
Lies our loved one among the brave.**

The dead of Newport were remembered by the erection of a cenotaph, Newport War Memorial. This memorial stands in Clarence Place at the busy junction of Chepstow Road, Church Road and East Usk Road in Gwent, South Wales. It is the town's main war memorial and takes the form of a 12-metre-high cenotaph, built of Portland stone



atop two steps of Cornish granite. Being a cenotaph Newport War Memorial contains no names of the fallen, those names including Alberts, are listed separately on an illuminated Roll of Honour, stored at Newport Library in John Frost Square. Because Albert was a son of Kington and spent his formative years in the town his sacrifice is also remembered on our memorial.

When the dust had settled Alberts army account was made up and on the 24th November 1917, the grand sum of £3 1s 11d (£65.66) was forwarded to his grieving widow. This was followed on 10th December 1919 by the princely sum of £12 (£254.52) War Gratuity, recognising the family's unbearable

loss. Alberts long struggles, discomfort and fear, endured in mud, blood and bullets, resulting in him paying the ultimate sacrifice, was also recognised when he was awarded the 1914-15 Star, Victory and British War medals. Such sacrifice must never be forgotten.

Researched and produced by Mark Wheatland

