

Nelson Arthur Pullen

Private

26388

16th Battalion, Manchester Regiment



Nelson Arthur Pullen was not a native of Kington, having been born in Chorlton on the outskirts of Manchester in 1894. His father, Edward Pullen, was a watchmaker and jeweller from Deptford in London who travelled the country learning, then plying his trade. In 1888 he was working in South Wales and found romance, followed by marriage, to Elizabeth Agnes Weeks in Newport. Frederick, their first child, was born the following year (1889) in Grays, Essex and a few years later, in 1892, Sidney Frank Pullen was born in Manchester. Just two years later Nelson arrived and in 1898 another brother, Percy, was born in Ulverston, in Lancashire. As a matter of interest, in 1974 due to boundary changes, Ulverston was removed from the county of Lancashire and absorbed into Cumbria. It was shortly after the birth of Percy that the Pullen family arrived in Kington. In the 1901 census they were living at 16 Headbrook and Nelson was attending Kington Boy's School on Gravel Hill. Edward was employed in his trade as a watchmaker.

By the 2nd of April 1911, the date of the 1911 census, many of the Pullen boys had left home. Nelson had moved away from Kington and was lodging at the home of a Charles Hoff at 14 West Street, Leominster. Mr Hoff was a hairdresser and Nelson is recorded as being one of his assistants. Sydney too had moved away and was recorded living in Tottenham working as a printer's compositor. His work would have had him setting type and illustrations ready for printing for newspaper, magazines etc. Frederick was

living in Beckenham in Kent and is recorded as being a Chemists Assistant. In the meantime Edward and his depleted family had again moved and were living in Castle Road, Knighton, just below what remains of the old castle. And then came war.

All four of the Pullen boys enlisted for army service. In December 1914 The Kington Times reliably informs us, that Sydney had been promoted to Acting Sergeant in the Herefordshire Regiment. In Beckenham Frederick enlisted into the Royal Garrison Artillery in 1915. Percy was very young but he too enlisted toward the end of the war, joining the Welch Regiment. It is not clear when Nelson enlisted but we know he joined the Manchester Regiment, 16th Battalion in Manchester. Private, 26388, Nelson Pullen was about to do his bit for King and Country.

The 16th Manchester Regiment formed part of the 90th Infantry Brigade and by turning to the regimental war diary we are able to discover their involvement in the war. The diary begins with the opening entry, '5.30am, 8th Nov 1915, at Larkhill, marched to Amesbury station, bound for Folkestone'. They arrived in Boulogne at 4pm on the 8th November and headed south to their initial base camp at St Riquier, outside Abbeville in the Somme region. They arrived on the 10th amid 'much rain and thunder'. The battalion first entered the trenches on the 8th December at Hebuterne, where they were shelled by the enemy as soon as they arrived and started taking casualties immediately. Throughout mid-December the battalion were buddied up with the Gloucestershire Regiment who taught them the rudiments of trench warfare. On Christmas Day 1915 they were not in the trenches but billeted in a farm house in Bonneville. The day did not go well and one incident made it memorable. About 12.30am a fire started in the farm house 'D' Company were billeted in. The fire was put out and no one was injured but the event shook everyone up.

From January to April they alternated trench duties between Maricourt, just outside Albert and Suzanne slightly to the south. Their downtime was taken at Corbie, halfway between Amiens and Albert. Rest periods did not last long during this period and mostly they served in the trenches, where casualties occurred regularly. May and June were again spent in the trenches, now at Sussane and a poignant note on the 8th of June records the death of Lord Kitchener on the 5th June 1916. Clearly sad news travelled fast to the front. Throughout June the battalion were in trenches at Etinehem to the east of Amiens, but rested at Oissy on the safer western side of Amiens. It may have been safer but the diary comments on disgruntlement at the long marches entailed.

On the 1st of July the 16th Battalion, Manchester Regimental diary simply records 'Attacked Montauban'. This would have been Montauban-de-Picardie, a tiny village to the east of Albert. A report by Lt Col Petrie, officer commanding the 16th Battalion, provides a vivid account of what happened on that day. The battalion left their assembly trenches at 8:30am in perfect formation. They advanced across 'no-mans-land' keeping as close to the supporting artillery barrage as they dare. They kept in contact with the 17th Manchester Regiment on their right but lost communications with the formation on their left. This left them open to heavy machine gun fire from the enemy and their advance was brought to a halt at 9:20am. Just after 10am the support troops on their left arrived and this enabled the regiment to restart their advance. They passes right

through Montauban and advanced to Montauban Alley, a trench occupied by the enemy. This they took by 10:30am and consolidated. At 9:30 that evening the enemy counterattacked on their front and left. An S.O.S. was despatched for assistance and a barrage was laid down. The barrage, combined with frantic rifle and machine gun fire, enabled the German advance to be repelled. Once again the enemy counterattacked at 3:30am on the 2nd, this time in increased numbers. Lt Col Petrie estimated this attack consisted of two battalions of enemy soldiers, perhaps as many as 2000 men. The enemy entered Montauban Alley on the right and support troops were sent for. When they arrived desperate fighting resulted in the Manchester's forcing the enemy to retreat and by 4am they again held Montauban Alley. In this desperate skirmish the battalion succeeded in capturing two German machine guns and about 100 prisoners.

To put this engagement into context we need to look at the bigger picture. The 1st of July was recorded as the start of the Battle of the Somme. This was the day when the French Sixth Army and the British Third and Fourth Armies attacked the German Second Army of General Fritz von Below, to the east of Albert. The British and French made huge advances during the morning and the village of Montauban was one of their successes. The Germans counter attacked in the afternoon and casualties on both sides were extreme. Several localised truces were negotiated so that casualties in no-mans-land could be recovered by both sides. British losses were extraordinary with the British alone suffering 57470 casualties of which 19240 were deaths. The French lost 1590 men and the German 2nd Army between 10000 and 12000 men. It is to be remembered that these horrific figures are for one days fighting, the 1st July 1916. For the British, the minimal gains made for the huge number of losses suffered, has been a source of controversy and grief to this day. For the French and Germans, The Battle of the Somme and their losses have been all but forgotten and have been absorbed into all their other losses throughout the war.

The failure of the British was put down to their ineffective artillery barrage and that the infantry literally marched into no-mans-land and consequently to their deaths. General Haig had a different view of things and at 3am on the 2nd July it all started again. Losses for the 16th Manchester Regiment during the month of July amounted to one officer and 17 other ranks killed, 5 officers and 97 other ranks wounded (a footnote states that 3 of the wounded subsequently died) and 2 officers and 97 other ranks were officially recorded as missing. Private Nelson Arthur Pullen was killed in action on the **1st July 1916**, the first day of the Battle of the Somme.



Dantzig Alley British Cemetery

Mametz is a village about 8 kilometres east of the town of Albert. It was captured by the British on the 1st July 1916 following hard fighting at Dantzig Alley (a German trench). Later that month a cemetery was started at the site and was used by field ambulances and fighting units until the following November. By the end of the war there were 183 burials in the cemetery, however, after the armistice in November 1918, bodies from other burials in the area were brought in and

Dantzig Alley British Cemetery now contains 2,053 burials and commemorations of the First World War. Nelson's body was recovered and he is buried in Dantzig Alley British Cemetery, grave reference IV.V.10, two miles from where he died. Nelson is in Plot 4 so we can assume he was one of those originally buried elsewhere and reinterred later.

The Army Register of Soldier's Effects survives from this time and from this document we know that on the 24th November 1916 Nelson's military pay account was made up. £3 15s 5d was passed to his father and on the 22nd November 1919 a further £2, War Gratuity, was forwarded to his mother, Elizabeth. Nelson was awarded the British War and Victory medals and although no records exist, we can assume the 1915 Star. He is remembered on the Kington memorial and on Knighton's memorial. Additionally, as a mark of respect, Nelson's name was one of the 65 read out at the Kington Peace Service held on 6th July 1919.

Elizabeth Pullen saw all four of her sons go to war, three returned. Frederick was not mobilized until January 1917 when he served as a bombardier in 351 Siege Battery. He entered France on the 9th June 1918 and at the end of the war he stayed in theatre becoming a gunner in an anti-aircraft battery. Prior to being demobilized on the 9th November 1919 he successfully undertook a pharmacy course then moved back to Knighton where he lived with the family. Frederick died on the Isle of Wight in 1976 aged 87. As mentioned earlier Sydney joined the Herefordshire Regiment early on in the conflict. On the 22nd May 1915, in Lower Edmonton, North London, he married Alice Matilda Wheeler and it appears he survived the war. As for young Percy, he joined the 9th Welch Regiment and served in its Base Depot. He does not appear to have served overseas and never saw action. He passed away in Watford in 1969 at the age of 70.

The young men of the Pullen family did their bit but sadly one son, Nelson Arthur Pullen, gave the ultimate sacrifice on what was to be the British army's darkest day.

