

## **In Memory of**

### **Rifleman GUY CLARK**

**2771, 1st/9th Battalion, London Regiment  
(Queen Victoria's Rifles)  
who died on 29 April 1915**

**Son of Alfred Allen and Jessie Clark  
of The Homestead, Christian Malford, Wiltshire**

#### **Remembered with honour YPRES (MENIN GATE) MEMORIAL**

The Memorial is situated to the eastern side of the town Ypres (now Ieper) in West Flanders. The Menin Gate is one of four memorials to the missing in Belgian Flanders which cover the area known as the Ypres Salient. Broadly speaking, the Salient stretched from Langemarck in the north to the northern edge in Ploegsteert Wood in the south, but it varied in area and shape throughout the war. The Salient was formed during the First Battle of Ypres in October and November 1914, when a small British Expeditionary Force succeeded in securing the town before the onset of winter, pushing the German forces back to the Passchendaele Ridge. The Second Battle of Ypres began in April 1915 when the Germans released poison gas into the Allied lines north of Ypres. This was the first time gas had been used by either side and the violence of the attack forced an Allied withdrawal and a shortening of the line of defence. There was little more significant activity on this front until 1917, when in the Third Battle of Ypres an offensive was mounted by Commonwealth forces to divert German attention from a weakened French front further south. The initial attempt in June to dislodge the Germans from the Messines Ridge was a complete success, but the main assault north-eastward, which began at the end of July, quickly became a dogged struggle against determined opposition and the rapidly deteriorating weather. The campaign finally came to a close in November with the capture of Passchendaele. The German offensive of March 1918 met with some initial success, but was eventually checked and repulsed in a combined effort by the Allies in September. The battles of the Ypres Salient claimed many lives on both sides and it quickly became clear that the commemoration of members of the Commonwealth forces with no known grave would have to be divided between several different sites. The site of the Menin Gate was chosen because of the hundreds of thousands of men who passed through it on their way to the battlefields. Amongst those of other Commonwealth nations, it commemorates United Kingdom casualties before 16 August 1917. It now bears the names of more than 54,000 officers and men whose graves are not known.



**Queen Victoria's Rifles.** Like almost every London Territorial Regiment, Queen Victoria's Rifles were under strength. When the 'call rang out' on the 5 August 1914, "the QVRs filled up within forty-eight hours and in four days a second Battalion was in being". After arriving at Harvre on 5 November the Battalion spent the bulk of their first month in training, initially in Aroques and later Bailleul. This period of familiarisation did not last long. On 1 January 1915 the Battalion experienced its first major loss of life in trenches at Wulverghem, with forty-two casualties

including eleven fatalities. This was followed on 5 January by a German attack at Neuve Eglise; in this instance seven men were killed and fifteen wounded.

**Hill 60.** The fight for the strategically important Hill 60 overlooking the Ypres salient in April 1915 was the QVRs first 'hellish' action, during which they incurred crippling losses, yet succeeded in holding the line. Another rifleman wrote, "The strain was awful and to see your pals' go one by one adds to the horror. We cried like children and were completely broken up. Our dear old Major gone, our Captain, two Lieutenants and nearly all our fellow comrades; the only consolation was that we held the position and kept up the traditions of our army."

**From the Parish Magazine:** It is with deep sorrow and sympathy that we have to announce the death in action near Ypres on April 30th [sic] of Rifleman Guy Clark, son of Mr Alfred A. Clark, Parishioners' Churchwarden of Christian Malford. Queen Victoria's Rifles have been praised in the public reports for their skill and valour, and Rifleman Guy Clark, whose cheerful, clever, and vivid letters from the Front have been published for many weeks past in a Surrey newspaper, told some time ago how after one attack all the men in his section were killed or wounded except himself and one more. Now his brave young life, like thousands of others, has been laid down for his country and the cause of freedom and right, and when we at home hear of such sacrifices, we pray, move earnestly and believe more confidently, that they may not be in vain.

**From Letters Written Home:** Since last writing we have been shifted 12 miles to the north. We were barracked in that famous town round which a great battle raged recently. It is in an awful state, the majority of the houses having been reduced by the enemy's guns to mere masses of crumbled masonry and broken beams. The cathedral is in ruins, and many historical buildings have been battered into shapeless heaps. Being in barracks, we are only allowed out for two hours a day on a pass. We sleep on a stone floor, but sleep very well nevertheless. The weather has been glorious for days now. It is such a treat not to suffer any more from cold feet, etc: The trenches are very near, and we can see the star shells easily from the barrack windows, and hear the roar of the guns and trench mortars and the rattle of the rifles too loudly for comfort. A spice of grim humour is lent to the excitement of living in this town by the fact that when, as often happens, a hostile aeroplane flies overhead, a look-out blows a certain number of warning whistles, whereupon, wherever we happen to be, or whatever we may be doing, we have instantly to dash for cover. I haven't yet found it necessary to dive into a coal-hole, or to hurl myself through an open window, but may have to any time.

We left the town last Sunday. At about six in the morning, while I was on guard, a German Taube flew quite low overhead. Our guns started on it at once, and while we were standing in the open, gazing up at it, there was a sudden rain of shrapnel bullets all around us. When it was over we searched for souvenirs; one man picked up a time-fuse, still quite hot; I only got a few bullets.

There is a little town about four miles from here, into which we are allowed to go. I went once, and had the best dinner I have had since I left England - soup, meat, potatoes, and vegetables, cheese and biscuits, fruit, and coffee, for 1 franc 70 centimes. We also had tea, which is not obtainable everywhere.

After two days in the huts we were sent out again to the trenches. We trudged over open fields in bright moonlight, under rifle fire the whole way, until we came to a railway cutting, where we were safe. The particular section of trenches occupied by our platoon was the most advanced in the line the Germans were only 40 yards away, and were most extraordinarily vigilant. It was instant death to show your head above the parapet for a second. In two days we lost about a dozen men, including a couple of officers, most of whom were shot through the head. During the night the rifle fire was continuous, and there was a perpetual stream of bullets across the trench. In the day-time there was less rifle fire, but we and the enemy shelled each other's supports. Fortunately the firing trenches were so close that we ourselves were free from shells. These trenches were real firing trenches, and had no dug-outs. We were in the open, exposed to all kinds of weather day and night, and were cramped together to such an extent that we had scarcely room to stretch ourselves. It rained part of

the time, and we felt pretty miserable, huddled up under our waterproof sheets, wet and cold, for hours. One night we had a hard frost.

These trenches and the vicinity abound with corpses - of Frenchmen chiefly. They have been only partially buried, and here and there portions of bodies, arms and legs, pieces of clothing and equipment, stick out of the ground. Just behind the trench where I was stationed was the corpse of a Frenchman sprawling in the mud, just as he fell. Outside, between the trenches, there were dozens of bodies lying about.

These trenches are said to have been rushed by the Germans a few days ago, and held by them a couple of hours or so, when they were recaptured, so you may imagine how watchful we had to be. We had also the pleasant knowledge that they were sapping towards us, with the intention of blowing us skywards, but our engineers knew all about it, and had a nasty little surprise in store for them, had they attempted it.