

## The Story of Percy Buck

Percy Buck was born in 1891 into a fairly typical late Victorian family in the Northamptonshire town of Peterborough (now Cambridgeshire). Percy was the first son of ? children to John Buck, a railway carriage fitter from Lincolnshire and Elizabeth Ellen Buck of Peterborough.

The family home from around 1890 was in a small 1815 built property at No 16 Hankey Street in Peterborough (pictured). It is here that the National Census of 1901 (below) finds the Buck family residing.



Percy and his siblings would have attended school locally throughout the 1890s and would have lived a modest life like so many other working class families at the time.

The Buck family would likely have all been home after visiting church locally on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901 when the National Census enumerator knocked on the door of no 16 Hankey Street and recorded the following information from John Buck.

Administrative County		The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the													Page 18				
Civil Parish		Registration Parish		County-Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District			Ward of Municipal Borough		Rural District		Parliamentary Borough		Town or Village or Hamlet						
of Peterborough		of Peterborough		of Peterborough			of West part of		of		of Peterborough		of Peterborough						
Dole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17		
No. of Houses	ROAD, STREET, &c. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	Uninhabited	Uninhabited	Uninhabited	Uninhabited	Uninhabited	Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Complete Marriages	Age last Birthday	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	Employer, Worker, or Own account	If Working at Home	WHERE BORN	(1) Deaf and Dumb	(2) Blind	(3) Lunatic	(4) Imbecile, Feeble-minded	
92	16 Hankey Street	1					Joseph Burgess	Head	M	32	Printer & Clerk	Worker		Peterborough					
							Brother	do	M	32				Northampton					
							Widder	do		6				do					
							Maisie	do		5				do					
							Edrie	do		2				do					
							Leslie	do		10mo				do					
93	do	1					Arthur John Goss	Head	M	28	Railway Porter	Worker		do					
							Mary Jane	do	M	22				Leamington					
							Miss Dore	do		1				Northampton					
94	do	1					Francis Hanson	Head	M	40	Printer & Paperhanger	Worker		Cambridge					
							Emma	do	M	39				Northampton					
							Edith Annie	do		17	Widow	Worker		Northampton					
							Gertrude	do		15				do					
							Albert Love	do		12				do					
							Tom	do		8				do					
95	do	1					Francis John Burdett	Head	M	39	French Colporter	Worker		Northampton					
							Emily Sarah	do	M	34				do					
							John Thomas	do		14				do					
							Edith	do		3				do					
96	do	1					John W. C. Buck	Head	M	35	Railway Carriage Fitter	Worker		Northampton					
							Elizabeth	do	M	34				Northampton					
							Percy	do		9				do					
							Beatrice May	do		7				do					
							George Edward	do		6				do					
							Annie Jessie	do		4				do					
97	do	1					James William Hudd	Head	M	46	Iron Founder	Worker		do					
							Elizabeth	do	M	44				do					
							Elizabeth	do		21				Northampton					
							Winifred	do		6				do					
6	Total of Schedules of Houses and of Tenements with less than Five Rooms	6					Total of Males and of Females..			13	16								

NOTE—Draw your pen through such words of the headings as are inapplicable.





Percy Buck's next recorded life incident is that of his marriage to Bertha Stevens, a Hertfordshire native. Their marriage took place on Saturday 9th November 1912 at the historic St Mary's church, Hitchin (pictured).



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Life for 20 year old Percy was seemingly going very well around this time. Both physically active and religious, Percy spent his recreation time at scoutmaster of St John's Troop in Hitchin, as a member of that choir and also as a Sunday School teacher. Clearly the church played an important part in his daily life.

Interestingly, Percy was also a patriotic man, spending part of his weekends and summer break with his local Territorial Army unit, The Hertfordshire Regiment, where he was an excellent shot and spent time teaching others in the art of Musketry.

Sometime around 1913 Percy's time in Hitchin came to an end. With his new wife he moved away from his close-knit family to the county town of St Albans where he moved into No 59 Upper Culver Road (pictured in the city and took up new employment locally in the printing industry. Around a year later the Buck family grew with the arrival of Cyril Bernard Charles Buck on 15th August 1914 just 10 days after the Outbreak of a war that would tear apart so many families throughout Europe.



### To War

As a pre-war Territorial soldier and with a young wife and child to support, it is not perhaps surprising that Percy did not sign up immediately to serve abroad in the early months of the Great War but in fact decided to stay at home and continue in his new employment. That is not to say that the Great War did not play its part of the family life. Corporal Buck, the Territorial soldier continued to serve with the Hertfordshire Regiment on home service as a musketry instructor in nearby Tring. From here he trained recruits in the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the Hertfordshire Regiment in preparation for war with the units fighting arm; the 1st Battalion Hertfordshire Regiment, known affectionately as the "Herts Guards".

Sadly, with the devastating losses incurred on the Western Front in 1914 and 1915 the need for manpower in the war meant that even Percy could no longer stay at home and so he duly presented himself on 10th January 1916 at St Albans where he enlisted for overseas service and underwent a medical examination. Fortunately pertaining to Private Percy Buck's Military service survived the rather ironic incident in WW2



when so many WW1 records were lost in a Luftwaffe bombing raid, and so we can chart Percy's military career with some level of certainty.

The following pages provide details of Percy's enlistment with the Hertfordshire Regiment and medical examination.

**ARMY SERVICE.**

the War, with the Colours and in the Army Reserve)

**ATTESTATION OF**

Name Percy Buck Corps Herts

Card No. 30  
WATFORD 66 298

Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlistment.

1. What is your Name ... Percy Buck
2. What is your full Address? ... 59 Upper Bulwer Road  
St Albans
3. Are you a British Subject? ... Yes
4. What is your Age? ... 24 Years 6 Months
5. What is your Trade or Calling? ... Composite
6. Are you Married? ... Yes
7. Have you ever served in any branch of His Majesty's Forces, naval or military, if so\*, which? ... Yes 1st Herts 4 yrs
8. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated? ... Yes
9. Are you willing to be enlisted for General Service? ... Yes
10. Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you? ... Yes Name E. North Corps Beds

Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided His Majesty should so long require your services?  
For the duration of the War, at the end of which you will be discharged with all convenient speed. You will be required to serve for one day with the Colours and the remainder of the period in the Army Reserve, in accordance with the provisions of the Royal Warrant dated 20th Oct., 1915, until such time as you may be called up by order of the Army Council. If employed with Hospitals, depots of Mounted Units, or as a Clerk, etc., you may be retained after the termination of hostilities until your services can be spared, but such retention shall in no case exceed six months.

11. Yes

I, Percy Buck do solemnly declare that the above answers made the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made.

Percy Buck SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT  
E. North, Sergt Signature of Witness.

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.

I, Percy Buck swear by Almighty God I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs, and Successors, and that I will be duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and Dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers over me. So help me God.

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.

The Recruit above named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he is liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.

The above questions were then read to the Recruit in my presence

I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered and the said Recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at ST ALBANS

on 10 day of January 1916

Signature of the Justice [Signature]

† Certificate of Approving Officer.

of the above-named Recruit is correct, and properly filled in, and I hereby approve, and appoint him to the rank of [Rank]

Note: This document shows that Percy has previously served 4 years with the Hertfordshire Regiment as a territorial. The page also bears his signature.

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT ON ENLISTED PERSONNEL  
 (To correspond with Entries on the Medical History Sheet)  
 Applicable to all ranks.

Name Percy Buck  
 Apparent age 24 years 6 months. Height 5 feet 11 1/2 inches.  
 Chest Measurement { Girth when fully expanded 36 inches.  
 Range of expansion 3 inches.

Distinctive marks  
Religion C. O. E.

INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY RECRUIT.

Name and Address of next-of-kin Bertha Buck, 59 Upper Bulwer Rd  
St Albans: Herts. Relationship Wife

Particulars as to Marriage.

(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
<u>Stevens</u> <u>Spinster</u>	<u>Holtkin</u> <u>9<sup>th</sup> Nov 1912</u>	<u>59 Upper Bulwer Rd</u> <u>St Albans</u>	<u>Wife</u>

Particulars as to Children.

Christian Names.	Date and Place of Birth.
<u>Bernard Charles</u>	<u>15/8/14 St Albans</u>

MILITARY HISTORY SHEET.

Passed classes of Instruction †		
Includes any authorised of instruction, e.g., in swimming, chiropody, &c.		
Campaigns ... (including Actions)	<u>Home 28.3.16 to 23.11.16</u>	<u>at home</u>
Medals ...		
References of citations		
Name of Medal	Clasp	

Note: At 5 feet 11 inches Percy was much taller than average (5 feet 6 inches in 1900).

... Regular Army and (b) for ...  
 ... when they are admitted to Hospital.  
 ... used for Special Reserve recruits and Special  
 ... enlistment into the Regular Army.

# MEDICAL HISTORY of

Surname Buck Christian Name Percy

## TABLE I.—GENERAL TABLE.

Birthplace ... Parish Delnalyne County Lincoln North

Examined ... (on 20<sup>th</sup> day of January 1916  
 at M. H. H. H.)

Declared Age ... 24 years 180 days.

Trade or occupation ... Compositor

Height ... 5 feet 11 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Weight ... 140 lbs.

Chest Measurement { Girth when fully Expanded 36 inches.  
 Range of Expansion 3 inches.

Physical Development ... Good

Vaccination { Arm ... Right ... Left ...  
 Marks { Number ... 4

When Vaccinated ... Young

Vision ... { R.E.—V=6/24  
 L.E.—V=6/36

(a) Marks indicating congenital peculiarities or previous disease ... Int

(b) Slight defects but not sufficient to cause rejection ... 10 teeth missing  
Slightly inflat foot (left)

Approved by (Signature) Percy Wigglesworth  
 (Rank) Major Medical Officer.

Enlisted ... at St Albans  
 on 10<sup>th</sup> day of January 1916

Corps.	Regtl. No.
<u>Herts Regt.</u>	<u>6195</u>

Transferred to ...

Active by ...

Note: Percy's occupation seems to be that of a Compositor (someone who set letters for printing).

Private Percy Buck, now a fully-fledged soldier in service for the 'Duration of War' began his training locally as a regular soldier. As a sign of his character and professionalism, Percy received two successive promotions in less than a year whilst serving in the 3/1<sup>st</sup> Hertfordshire Regiment to the rank of Corporal. Around this time he would have probably had some chance to see his wife Bertha and their 18-month-old child. However, this was not to last.

After completing his full training, Percy was one of many men to be rushed to the Western Front, in part to make up number after the devastating Battle of the Somme which had taken place that summer at great



cost. Percy was transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Hertfordshire Regiment where he joined men of 'No 4 Company' which was the Hitchin and Letchworth contingent of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. It is likely that he would have seen many familiar faces when he turned up as part of a replacement draft.

Percy unfortunately had to revert to the rank of Private once joining the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and landed in Boulogne on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1916 as Private 267098 P Buck, No 4 Coy, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Hertfordshire Regiment.



Percy did not actually go straight to the front but was kept at a base unit until the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1916 when he was finally sent to join his pals in the Herts. Records show that on that day a draft of 52 'Other Ranks' joined the Battalion who were at that time in a 'rest' phase in the area to the North of the Belgian city of Ypres.

Buck's first experience of 'going up the line' would have been a terrifying one, even for a man who had spent four years in the Army before the war and was well accustomed to a soldier's life. It was on the 12<sup>th</sup> December that the Herts moved by train to the 'Hill Top Section' of the 'Canal Bank' in the Ypres salient to relieve the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Cambridgeshire Regiment in the trenches. The Cambs were another one of the four Battalion's who together with the Herts formed the 118<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 39<sup>th</sup> Division; the other two being the 6<sup>th</sup> Cheshire's and the 4/5<sup>th</sup> Black Watch.

By following the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Hertfordshire Regiment's 'War Diary' through the early months of 1917 we can get a flavour of the life that Private Buck experienced at this time. The 1<sup>st</sup> Herts numbered over 700 men at this time and so the diary does not mention him by name, although references to 'No 4 Coy' provide closer detail as to where he was. Of course, although the diary is useful in explaining Percy's movement, it does not even attempt to provide any information on the terrible experiences, incredible fear, adverse weather and threat of death on a daily basis that he must have experienced.

#### **War Diary for December 1916.**

1-12-16. **Lieut. E MACINTOSH** joined & **2/Lieut F.M. Drury** [**Follett McNeill DRURY**] joined the Bn from England.

4-12-16. The Bn was relieved by the 11th S.W.B. & moved by train to D CAMP. A draft of 8 OR joined the Bn from Base.

7-12-16. The Bn was inspected by **Brig. General J.V. MARDEN** commanding 114th Brigade which the Bn had been temporarily attached to since November 29th. A draft of 52 OR joined the Bn from Base.

8-12-16. The Bn moved to G CAMP.

12-12-16. The Bn moved by train & relieved the 13th Royal Sussex Regt. in the left Reserve Battalion HILL TOP section on the CANAL BANK, coming under the orders of 116th Brigade.

14-12-16. A draft of 120 OR joined the Bn from Base

15-12-16. The Bn was relieved by the 11th Royal Sussex Regt. & rejoined the 118th Brigade, proceeding by train to E CAMP.

16-12-16. The camp was inspected by **Major General CUTHBERT** commanding the 39th Division.

21-12-16. The G.O.C. in C. intended to inspect the 118th Brigade. Owing to bad weather the parade was cancelled & he started to inspect the camp. Owing to the darkness coming on he was unfortunately only able to inspect one battalion of the 118th Brigade (the 6th Cheshire's).

22-12-16. It appeared in Divisional Routine Orders that the GOC II Corps had awarded the Military Medal to the undermentioned NCO's and men: 2684 Pte Taylor W. [William Edward TAYLOR, MM], 4833 Pte Hansford [Albert S. HANSFORD, MM], 3513 L/Cpl Linge E. [Robert E. LINGE, MM] 4119 Pte Currell [Herbert CURRELL, MM], 2208 Pte Cherry [Leonard CHERRY, MM], 2537 Pte Sweeney [Claude SWEENEY, MM], 2563 Cpl Kingham [Phillip Edward KINGHAM, MM], 4277 Sgt Clements [George CLEMENTS, MM & Bar], 4279 Pte Rowley [George Henry ROWLEY, MM], 2291 Pte Page [Richard G. PAGE, MM], 2865 Cpl Reynolds [George Albert REYNOLDS, MM], 2731 Sgt Longthorne [William Gerald LONGTHORNE, MM], 2416 Pte Bowers [Sidney BOWERS, MM], 3322 Pte Hart [Frederick HART, MM], 6090 Pte Holland [Percy S. HOLLAND, MM]. A draft of 12 OR joined the Bn from Base.

23-12-16. The Bn moved by train & relieved the 11th Royal Sussex Regt. In the left CANAL BANK.

24-12-16. The Bn relieved the 13th Royal Sussex Regt. in the left front of the HILL TOP section.

28-12-16. 2/Lieuts. R.L. Hardy [Robert L. HARDY] & E.W. Marchington [Eric William MARCHINGTON, MC] joined & 2/Lieut. B.H. Johnston [Basil H. JOHNSTON] rejoined the Bn.

29-12-16. The Bn was relieved by the 1st Cambs & moved back into the left CANAL BANK dug outs.

### War Diary for January 1917

3-1-17. The Bn relieved the 1st Cambs Regt on the left Hill Top sub section.

4-1-17. Divisional routine orders published the following awards earned on the 13th November D.S.O.: **Captain A.G. Clark** [Aylmer G. CLARK, DSO, MC], M.C.: **Lieut F.R. Hart** [Frederick Reginald HART, MC], **Captain E.B. Smallwood** [Eric Butler SMALLWOOD, MC], **Lieut L.R. D'A Fisher** [Lionel Robert D'Arcy FISHER, MC], 2/Lt G.H.Y. Gilby [George Harold Yates GILBEY, MC], 2/Lt J.R. Johnston [John Rodney JOHNSTON, MC], **2/Lt A.M. Gallo** [Antonio Marie GALLO, MC], **Captain G.M. Brown** [George Macdonald BROWN, MC]. D.C.M.: 2099 C.S.M. Gregory, G.S. [2099, later 265282 George Stanley GREGORY, DCM, MM], 4589 Sgt Gladding J. [Joseph W. GLADDING, DCM], 1853 Sgt Warterton [Harry WARTERTON, DCM], 2544 Cpl Willey [George A. WILLEY, DCM], 2145 Cpl Barrington [Horace Leonard BAVINGTON, DCM], 2942 Cpl Hibbert [Wallace HIBBERT, DCM], 4549 Pte Gray [John GRAY, DCM], 3318 Pte Hobbs [John Henry HOBBS, DCM, MM].

The following also appeared in the New Years Honours mentioned in despatches: **Lieut. Col. F. Page** [Frank PAGE. DSO & Bar], **Captain C.F. Hacker** [Charles Frederick HACKER, MC, RAMC], 2283 Sgt. G.F. Curtis [George F. CURTIS, MM].

The following Officers who are now detached from the Regiment also appeared in the New Years Honours: Military Cross: **Captain E.G. WHATELEY** (Staff Captain 6th Brigade) **Captain A.M. KENNEDY** G.S.O. 3rd ANZAC Corps) Mentioned in Despatches: **Brig. Gen. Viscount Hampden** [Lord Thomas Walter HAMPDEN, CMG], **Capt. P.E. Longmore** [Phillip Elton LONGMORE] (D.A.A.G. 2nd Army), **Capt. G.M. Brown** [George Macdonald BROWN, MC] (Staff Capt. 118th Bgde), **Capt. S. Milburn, D.S.O., M.C.** [Booker MILBURN, DSO, MC].



6-1-17. The following Officers joined the Bn: **2nd Lieut. K.J. Ritchie** [Kenneth James RITCHIE], **Lieut. S. King** [Sydney or Simmonds KING], **2nd Lieut. R.T.N. Hickley** [Richard Trollope North HICKLEY], **Capt. H.M. Tyler** [Hector Malcolm TYLER] (12th Sussex).

7-1-17. At 2.45am under cover of an intense barrage the Germans raided on the front held by the Bn. They managed to reach one of our posts and unfortunately 3 men were taken prisoner. From another post which was also attacked the Germans were driven off and for conspicuous gallantry at this post **2254 Cpl Beer** [Henry BEER, MM] was awarded the Military Medal. Our casualties were : **Capt. E.B. Smallwood** [Eric Butler SMALLWOOD] killed. 3 O.R.'s died of wounds. 1 O.R. killed and 14 O.R.'s wounded. A draft of 57 O.R.'s from base joined the Bn.

8-1-17. The Bn was relieved by the Cambs Regt. and moved into dugouts on the CANAL BANK.

11-1-17. **Captain B.C. Molony** [Brian Charles MOLONY], **Lieut. W.L. Grice** [William Lucas GRICE] rejoined & **2/Lt W. Thompson** [Wilfred John THOMPSON] & **2/Lt R.I. Edwards** [Ronald Irving EDWARDS, MC] joined the Bn.

12-1-17. The Bn relieved the 10th Liverpool Scottish in the WIELTZE sub sector. During the relief the Germans heavily bombarded the front line with Minnewerfen. Our casualties during the relief were 3 O.R. killed and 4 O.R. wounded.

14-1-17. **Captain Tyler** [Hector Malcolm TYLER] left the Bn being posted Oxford & Bucks Light Infantry. **Capt. C.F. Hacker** [Charles Frederick HACKER, MC, RAMC] left the Bn to do duty with No.10 C.C.S. **Lieut. A.C. MURRAY** took his place as Medical Officer.

18-1-17. The Bn was relieved by the 1st Cambs. Regt. & moved to dugouts on the CANAL BANK near YPRES.

24-1-17. The Bn was relieved by the 17th Notts & Derby Regt. & moved to C CAMP. [Comment; **Lieut. Frederick Reginald HART** died of wounds on the 28-1-17.]

Appendix 1/1 Herts Date 7th January 1917 Unit 1st/1st Herts Regt.

Point of Entry - C.15.c.7.5. between Nos. 4&5 posts. Results - Our casualties Killed 1 Officer, 2 O.R.'s, Wounded 15 O.R.'s, Missing 3 O.R.'s. One Lewis Gun smashed, Front and Support lines seriously damaged. Enemy raiders killed or captured garrison of No.4 Post. Remarks - At about 2.45am two hostile barrages were formed by artillery and trench mortars. (c) Along front line from C.15.c.9.4. to C.15.c.1.8. lifting to approximately an E. and W. line through TURCO FARM. (b) Along Support Trenches from C.15.c.13.7 C.20.a.9.6. S.O.S. Signal was sent up and responded to by our artillery. Bombardment ceased about 3.20am. Our front line in this sector is held by a series of posts all overlooked by the enemy. Enemy attacked on a front from Post 4 to Post 7 inclusive. Posts 5,6 & 7 repulsed attack with Rifle fire. Party of enemy about 40 strong got through wire, which had been cut, between Posts 4&5 unobserved and attacked Post 4 from the rear as well as from the front. The garrison of this post was either killed or captured. Nos. 3 & 5 Posts delivered bombing attacks towards No.4 Post to help Garrison. Directly after capture of No.4 Post the enemy retired rapidly under heavy rifle fire. After the raid all posts were immediately re-garrisoned and a strong working party sent forward to repair wire and trenches.

### **War Diary for February 1917**

3-2-17. The Bn relieved the 17th Notts & Derby Regt on the CANAL BANK near YPRES. 2 Companies remained at C CAMP. **2 Lieuts E.M. Paul** [Eric Maclean PAUL], **R.H. Secretan** [Reginald Herbert SECRETAN], **E.A. Taylor** [Edward Algernon TAYLOR] and **F.S. Walthew** [Frederick Selby WALTHER] joined the Bn from England.

4-2-17. The Bn relieved the 16th Notts & Derby regt. in the WEILTZE sub section.

7-2-17. **2342 Pte Messenger A.** [Alfred MESSENGER, MM] & **2626 Pte Terry J.** [James Henry TERRY, MM] rescued a wounded man of the 4/5th Black Watch from off the wire. For this they were awarded the Military Medal by G.O.C. VIII Corps.

9-2-17. The Bn was relieved by the 1/1 Cambs and moved back to dugouts on the CANAL BANK near YPRES.

12-2-17. The two companies which had been training at C CAMP rejoined the Bn. It had been intended that these two companies should raid the enemy trenches but owing to the fact that the cutting of the wire could not be observed, the party was cut down to 3 Officers and 64 O.R. At 11.15pm this party, after a successful assembly in "No Man's Land" entered the German trenches. Two Germans from a listening post were captured but the rest of the area which was raided was found to be so knocked about that the enemy had evacuated there. After staying in the trenches for 15 minutes the party withdrew. Our casualties were slight, 5 O.R.'s being wounded. **2/Lieuts Drury** [Follett McNeill DRURY], **Thompson** [Wilfred John THOMPSON] & **Hardy** [Robert L. HARDY] were the three Officers in charge of the party. For their very good work during this

raid No. 2771 L/Cpl Reeves W. [William REEVES, MM] was awarded the Military Medal by the G.O.C. VIII Corps. 2/Lieut R.N. Farwell [Robin Noel FARWELL] joined the battalion.

14-2-17. The Bn relieved the 1/1 Cambs in the WEILTZE sub section.

16-2-17. The Bn was relieved by the Liverpool Scottish and moved to CANAL BANK dugouts.

17-2-17. The Bn was relieved by the 5th Loyal N. Lancs Regt. and proceeded by train to POPERINGHE and marched from there to Y Camp.

25-2-17. A draft of 78 O.R.'s joined the Bn from the reinforcement camp.

27-2-17. The battalion marched through POPERINGHE to "ST. LAWRENCE CAMP".

#### **Appendices Date - 12th February 1917, 11.15pm. Unit 1st/1st Hertfordshire Regt., 39th Division.**

Officers 3, O.R.'s 60. Point of Entry - C.29.a.55.66. Result - The enemy wire well cut & trenches badly damaged. Two prisoners taken, both 161st Inf. Regiment. Our casualties 4 O.R.'s slightly wounded. Narrative - The bombardment of the enemy trenches for five days prior to the raid and "drill" barrages were carried out each night to deceive the enemy. No serious opposition was encountered, the few Germans in the area being at once overpowered. Three of the enemy were found where No.1 Sap joins the front line, one was bludgeoned and two others captured. The enemy retaliation was very light.

#### **Report of the raid carried out by the 1st/1st Hertfordshire regiment on the night of 12th/13th February 1917.**

The raiders left the CANAL BANK and moved via LA BRIQUE and St. JEAN to front British Line and thence to the assembly position in no man's land according to the programme. The whole of this movement was carried out without a hitch and without it being observed by the enemy. At Zero minus 2 the raiders advanced to their objective. The patrol to ARGYLE FARM found it unoccupied. The two parties detailed to deal with Nos. 3&4 saps found these saps obliterated and also unoccupied. The remainder of the raiding party (with the exception of the southern flanking party which took up its position in NO MAN'S LAND) entered the German trenches and worked over the area as pre-arranged. They found the German wire well cut and lying around in a tangled mess. It consisted principally of rusty barbed concertina wire and knife rests. The trenches themselves were badly knocked about by our shell fire. There is no doubt the raid was a surprise to the enemy and the few men in the area were at once overpowered. Three Germans were found where No.1 Sap joins the front trench, one of them was bludgeoned and the other two captured. A number of dead Germans were seen partly buried in the damaged trench. The raiders worked rather beyond the allotted area and it appears that this part of the German line was very lightly held. One NCO reports that he saw a number of Germans in their support line and he thinks they were preparing to counter attack. A raider says he approached the Support Line and found it wired. The raiders withdrew on the signal being given (blue rockets) and waited a short while in NO MAN'S LAND to allow the enemy gunfire to die down. They then returned to the CANAL BANK with the exception of a few who reported in accordance with orders to advanced battalion headquarters, WIELTJE. All the raiders were accounted for by 2am. The two prisoners belonged to the 1st battalion, 161st Regiment. They were brought to WIELTJE by 11.54am and, having been searched, were sent under escort to the 1st/1st Cambridgeshire Regiment at ST. JEAN. The 3 Officers who led the raiders 2/Lieut F.M. Drury [Follett McNeill DRURY], 2/Lieut R.L. Hardy [Robert L. HARDY] and 2/Lt W. Thompson [Wilfred John THOMPSON] all returned to WIELTJE before 12 midnight. There were only 4 casualties, all slight. Our artillery barrage was exceedingly good. The enemy reply to it was feeble and fell chiefly on or near our front line, some being sprinkled in NO MAN'S LAND. He did not barrage his own front line. The hostile gunfire consisted of 77mm shells and 2 or 3 inch "Minnies". Small pieces of the enemy's trench which remained intact were found to be revetted with brushwood and had plank floors. They were dry. Width of trench about 3'6 to 4'6 at top, depth about 5'6". A small dugout with brushwood roof was found in the front trench and 3 or 4 funk holes, large enough to hold about 4 men each with concrete roofs built into the parapets. These funk holes were in front trench south of Sap 1, 100 yards of which were explored. No.1 Sap was partly blown in; it is merely an unrevetted trench. No machine gun was found in it, only a broken box of machine gun ammunition. There was a machine gun emplacement marked E.M.14 at C.29.a.54.60 but no machine gun, There was no trace of Gas Cylinders nor were there arms or equipment lying around. "P" Bombs were used to destroy the woodwork of the trenches. It is reported that a party of about 15 to 20 Germans were out wiring further North and were caught by our barrage. A machine gun was fired from No.5 Sap. The raiders appeared to have carried out the programme exactly as rehearsed and the conduct of both Officers and men was all that could be wished. They belonged to Nos.1 and 4 companies and were trained by Captain B.C. Molony [Brian Charles MOLONY] and Lieut. L.R.D'A Fisher [Lionel Robert D'Arcy FISHER, MC].

#### **War Diary for March 1917**

2-3-17. A draft of 84 OR's joined the Bn. Inspection of the Bn by Lieut.-Gen. Sir MORLAND K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O. commanding X Corps

3-3-17. The Bn moved into Divisional Reserve. Headquarters at KRUISTRAAT.

6-3-17. The Bn relieved 1st/1st Cambs. Regt. on left sub section, OBSERVATORY RIDGE sector.

9-3-17. The Bn was relieved by 14th Hants and marched to Infantry Barracks, YPRES.

12-3-17. The Bn relieved the 1st/1st Cambs Regt in the left sub sector - HOOGE.

15-3-17. The Bn was relieved by the 12th Bn Sherwood Foresters and marched to ST. LAWRENCE CAMP. **Capt. A.G. Clark, D.S.O., MC. [Aylmer G. CLARK, DSO, MC]** rejoined the Bn from England.

21-3-17. The Bn moved into Divisional Reserve. Headquarters at KRUISTRAAT.

24-3-17. The Bn relieved the 1st/1st Cambs Regt in OBSERVATORY RIDGE sector.

25-3-17. On the night 25th/26th March the enemy attempted to raid our trenches after an intense barrage. They were repulsed by Lewis Gun and rifle fire before reaching our trenches.

27-3-17. The Bn was relieved by the 11th Royal Sussex Regt. and marched to Infantry Barracks, YPRES.

### **War Diary for April 1917.**

1-4-17. The Bn relieved the 1st/1st Cambs Regt in the left sub sector - HOOGE.

3-4-17. The Bn was unexpectedly relieved by 16th R.B. and moved by train to ST. LAWRENCE CAMP.

5-4-17. The Bn moved to reserve billets in HOUTERQUE.

6-4-17. Divisional Routine Orders published that **265298 Pte F. Aldridge [Frederick ALDRIDGE, MM & Bar]** had been awarded a Bar to the Military Medal and that **265202 Cpl. F.W. Waters [Frederick William WATERS, MM]** and **269583 Pte W. CRANE** [Comment: **269583** is **Private Arthur FINCH**, so I am unable to verify who this is with any certainty] had both been awarded the Military Medal.

9-4-17. The Bn marched to B CAMP

11-4-17. The Bn moved to tents and a few huts in C CAMP and except for a slight redistribution of huts on the 17th remained her until the 28th, employed on constructing a new railway close by.

28-4-17. The Bn relieved the 14th Hants Regt. in the HILL TOP sub section.

Reinforcements: April 12th - a draft of 27 O.R. joined the battalion April 23rd - a draft of 50 O.R. joined the battalion April 24th - **2/Lieut. F.G. Lake [Frank Gilbert LAKE]** rejoined the Bn from the R.F.C.

### **War Diary for May 1917.**

3-5-17. The Bn was relieved by the 1st Cambs Regt and on relief marched to dugouts on the CANAL BANK. On this tour in the trenches two raids were carried out through our lines. On the 29th the Welsh carried out a successful raid and on the 30th another Bn of the Welsh also carried out a successful raid. The enemy's retaliation on our trenches was not very heavy and we were fortunate in having only one casualty.

10-5-17. The Bn relieved the 1st Cambs Regt. in the HILL TOP sub section.

13-5-17. **2/Lieut. B.H. Johnson [Basil H. JOHNSON]** was unfortunately hit by a bullet in the left forearm.

15-5-17. The Bn was relieved by the 17th Sherwood Foresters and on relief half the Bn marched and half went by train to C CAMP and carried on with Railway construction.

18-5-17. **2/Lieut. H. Symons [Henry SYMONS]** rejoined the Bn from England.

23-5-17. The Bn less Nos.1 & 4 Coys relieved the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers in the WIELTJE sub sector - Nos.1 & 4 Coys remained at C CAMP.



26-5-17. **2/Lieut. B.V.A. Tennant [Bernard Victor Ashlin TENNANT]** joined the Bn. London Gazette published that the undermentioned have been mentioned in Despatches: **Lieut. Col. F. Page D.S.O. [Frank PAGE, DSO & Bar]**, **Lieut. Col. G.E. Whitfield, M.C. [Geoffrey Ernest WHITFIELD, MC]**, **Major T. Barber [Quartermaster and Honorary Major Thomas BARBER, OBE, TD]**, **Captain A.G. Clark D.S.O., M.C. [Aylmer G. CLARK, DSO, MC]**, **Captain T.P. Gibbons [Thomas Pilling GIBBONS, MC]**, **2/Lieut. G. McMullen [Gordon McMULLEN]**, **265292 Sgt. Rand S. [Sidney RAND]**.

27-5-17. The Bn was relieved by the 14th Hants Regt. and rejoined Nos.1 & 4 Coys at C CAMP.

29-5-17. The Bn marched to WORMHOUDT.

### **War Diary for June 1917.**

3-6-17. The Kings Birthday was celebrated by a Parade at WORMHOUDT.

6-6-17. **Lieut. D Perry [Donovan PERRY]** joined the Bn.

11-6-17. The Bn marched to ARNEKE.

12-6-17. The Bn marched to TATTINGHAM.

13-6-17. The Bn marched to BAGENGHAM-LEZ-SERINGHAM.

21-6-17. The Bn marched to SERQUES.

24-6-17. **Captain V.H. Palmer [Vernon Hugh PALMER]** and **2/Lieut. R.H.J. Rowley [Robert Halford Taylor ROWLEY, MC]** joined the battalion.

28-6-17. Lecture by General Sir IVOR MAXSE, commanding 18 Corps (sic?).

29-6-17. The Bn marched to WATTEN and entrained for POPERINGHE and on arrival marched to tents at C CAMP.

30-6-17. The Bn marched to the CANAL BANK and relieved the 17th Sherwood Foresters in the HILL TOP left sub section (Reserve). **Captain G.E. Whitfield M.C. [Geoffrey Ernest WHITFIELD]** joined the Bn.

The War Diary has taken us up to the start of July 1917, providing details in the small scale actions that the Herts were involved in at that time. It was however, July 1917 that saw the beginning of a build up to the great offensive in the infamous Ypres Salient, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Ypres – today known simply as ‘Passchendaele’.

The 39<sup>th</sup> Division, of which the Herts were a part, was taken out of the ‘line’ in July 1917 and taken to a specially prepared training facility away from the front for practise in ‘going over the top’. Replicas of the trench system that the Herts would attack at the end of the month were built and the men spent weeks making mock attacks and identifying areas that they would have to avoid or destroy at the earliest opportunity.

The section of trench that the Herts were to attack was to the north of Ypres just outside the small village of St Julien (today called Sint Juliaan), the system itself formed part of the German 3<sup>rd</sup> line trench system known as the ‘Langemarck line’. It was well known to be heavily defended by artillery and machine guns and covered by thousands of yards of barbed wire.

The plan for the attack at St Julien (which was the final objective of the day) was that the Herts would cross the small Steenbeke River and advance across open ground some 600 yards to the enemy trench-line where they would storm the objective and ‘dig-in’ using the newly captured position. The Herts would be supported by two ‘tanks’ and a large scale artillery bombardment designed to ‘soften up’ the enemy defences as they approached.



Despite all the excellent preparation that the Herts Regiment made, there was one factor which unfortunately they could not control; the weather.

The last week of July 1917 in northern Belgium saw some of the heaviest rain the area had ever experienced, turning the already shell filled landscape into a morass of mud that made the ground virtually impassable. Trenches were filled with water and tales of soldiers drowning in waterlogged shell-holes spread throughout the area. Moving up supplies for the 'big push' was severely hampered by the weather and men left in the trenches were soaked through and desperately tired even before the advance had begun.

The Herts 'war diary' tell us of Percy Buck and his comrades' movements throughout July in the lead up to the attack on the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup> July.

*1 to 7-7-17. Bn in Reserve on CANAL BANK in HILL TOP sector, YPRES.*

*7 to 16-7-17. Bn relieved 1st Cambs Regt. in Front Line system, HILL TOP sector*

*16-7-17. Bn was relieved by the 6th Border Regt. and marched to C CAMP.*

*17-7-17. Bn marched to POPERINGHE station and entrained to WATTEN where it detrained and marched to billets at HAULE, arriving 7am 18th inst.*

*18 to 21-7-17. Bn did splendid training for offensive action.*

*22-7-17. Bn moved by bus to Z CAMP, arriving about 2am 23rd inst.*

*23 to 28-7-17. Bn continued special training and equipping.*

*29-7-17. Bn moved to bivouacs near C CAMP.*

*30-7-17. Bn moved into assembly positions about X lines, HILL TOP sector.*

The 30<sup>th</sup> July 1917 would have probably been an incredible surreal day for most in the 1<sup>st</sup> Herts. In the knowledge that they would 'go over the top' in the next 24 hours, there must have been an incredible amount of tension borne out in many ways. Local newspaper accounts from the time tell of high spirits and singing mixed with nerves and rushed letters home to loved ones. Where Percy's thoughts were on this day as he waited to advance we can only guess, although doubtless thoughts of his wife and three years old son were frequent. He may also have thought of Hertfordshire, Hitchin and St Albans, places he knew fondly, distractions from the situation, if only short ones. Although we can also assume that ever-professional Percy did also have his mind on the job in hand, the attack, and his individual roll in it...

No 4 Coy's specific role was to form the left hand flank of the Herts attack and to maintain the advance and the link with the neighbouring unit, the 4/5<sup>th</sup> Black Watch. Maintaining contact with neighbouring units was of vital importance and would certainly have been a focus for the men of No 4 Coy.

### **The Attack**

In broad terms, the 31st July 1917 attack which formed the start of the first phase of the 3rd Ypres offensive was a large scale attack made along the front of the Ypres sector involving tens of thousands of men, with the aim of capturing strategically important ground in the region and to form a more advantageous position for the allies from where they could stage further attacks.

The attack itself was planned to take a series of 'objective lines', points plotted on a map designated the blue, black and green lines. The final objective of that day, the green line, was the objective which the Herts were tasked with taking. Being one of the most experienced units in the 39th Division, the Herts were given this task in the knowledge that it would likely prove to be the most difficult objective of the day.

We can again turn to surviving records to describe the first stage of the morning's attack where the 118th Brigade, including the Herts formed the Divisional 'reserve' until they reached the River Steenbeek, at which point they would transfer to the attack role, becoming the leading unit of the advance for the final objective. A copy of Lt Col Page's Operational Orders for the day still survives and can be seen on the following pages:



SECRET

Copy No. 111

OPERATION ORDERS No. 44

by  
Lieut. Col. F. Page. D.S.O. Comdg. 1st. Bn. Herts. Regt.

Ref. Maps:- St. Julien 1/10,000. July 28th. 1917.  
Sheet 38 N.W.  
Zonnebeke 21 N.E. 1.

1. Information. (a) The 5th Army is to capture the hostile trench systems east and N.E. of YPRES on "Z" day. (to be notified later).

(b) The XVIII Corps will capture the hostile trench system on its present front.

Right Division..... 38th.  
Left Division..... 51st.  
Reserve Divisions.. 48th. (R) & 11th. (L.)

(c) The 38th. Division will attack at zero hour on Z day and will capture the German trenches on the frontage shown on attached map as far as the green line, which will be known as Guthbert Trench when consolidated.

(d) The 353rd. Division (Prussians) is holding the area to be attacked by the 38th. Division. Its probable dispositions are, 1 Battalion 448th. Inf. Regt. and 1 Battalion 449th. Inf. Regt. in front line system; The same in the KITCHENER system and the same in LANGLOIRE LINE. 450th. Inf. Regt. is said to be in the neighbourhood of POULCAPILLE.

(e) Appendix A shows the dispositions of Divisions and troops on flanks and dispositions of Units of the 38th Division.

(f) The objective of the 118th Inf. Bde. is the GREEN LINE. The attack on the green line will be carried out with :-

1/5th. Cheshires. on right. .... objective D.7.b.30.0.C. to D.7.a.5.8.5.3. both inclusive.  
1st. Herts. in centre. objective D.7.a.58.53. to G.6.d.3.1. both exclusive.  
4/5th Black Watch. on left. objective G.6.d.21 to G.6.d.00.15. both inclusive.  
1/1 Cambs. will be in Brigade reserve near BORDER HOUSE. G.15 b.0520

The dividing lines between Battalions are shown on attached map.

(g) 3 machine guns of 118th. M.G. Coy. and 2 Stokes Mortars are allotted to the 1st. Herts. Regt.

2. ASSEMBLY. The Brigade will move into the assembly position on Y/Z night.

The 1st. Herts will leave Camp at 8.45 pm. and march via QUEENS ROAD - BRIDGE 2 - and overland track to assembly positions. No. 1 & No. 3 Coys. near IRISH PARK; No. 2 & No. 4 Coys. and Battalion Headquarters to LA BELLE ALLIANCE and SONEY STREET.

Order of March :- No. 2, No. 4, H.C., No. 1, No. 3...  
All movements by platoons at 100 yards interval.  
The greatest care will be exercised when marching to the assembly positions. Every man is to know beforehand where he is going and there is to be no delay in getting into the available dugouts. No smoking or talking during the assembly and no movement after the assembly.

**3. ADVANCE :-** (A) At zero plus 1 hour 40 min. the 118th Inf. Bde will advance from their assembly position. Herts and Cheshires from the X line and Black Watch and Cambs from the Canal Bank.

Appendix B shows movement and barrage.

(b) The Herts. will arrive just west of the BLUE line at zero plus 2 hours 10 min. The further advance will be made so that the three attacking Battalions are on the east bank of the STEENBECK by zero plus 6 hours 10 min.

**4. ATTACK :-** The Battalion will attack in four waves No.1 Coy. (right) and No.2 Coy. (~~xxxxxxx~~ left), forming the first 2 waves, the two Coys. being in line, each on a two platoon frontage. No. 3 & No.4 Coys. will each provide 1 platoon as "moppers up". These platoons will follow the 1st wave of the leading Coys.

No. 3 and No.4 Coys (less 1 platoon each) each on two platoons frontage will follow and support No.1 & No.2 Coys. respectively.

1 machine gun will move with the rear platoon of No.3 Coy. 2 machine guns will move with the rear platoon of No.4 Coy.

The two Stokes Mortars will follow the attack and take up position near No.3 & No.4 Coys. to fire on selected points in advance of CUTHBERT TRENCH.

**5. OBJECTIVES :-** Objectives of right Coys. D.7.a.58.53 to D.7.a.10.90.

Objective of left Coys. D.7.a.10.90. to C.6.d.65.35.

**6. CONSOLIDATION :-** Coys. will consolidate a line of platoon posts on our side of the crest line, No.3 & No.4 Coys. forming a support line 100 yards in rear of leading Coys. and covering the gaps in the line of posts.

No.1 & No.2 Coys. will push out Observation Posts over the crest and Lewis Gun Posts in or near the Captured German trench which will be filled in.

No.2 Coy. will form a strong post astride enemy trench about C.6.d.83..

Touch will be established with the CHESHIREs on the right near ARBRE and the BLACK WATCH on the left near VANCOUVER.

Trenches will at first be dug 4' 6" deep by intensive digging. Afterwards joined up and deepened to 6' with fire step 4' 6".

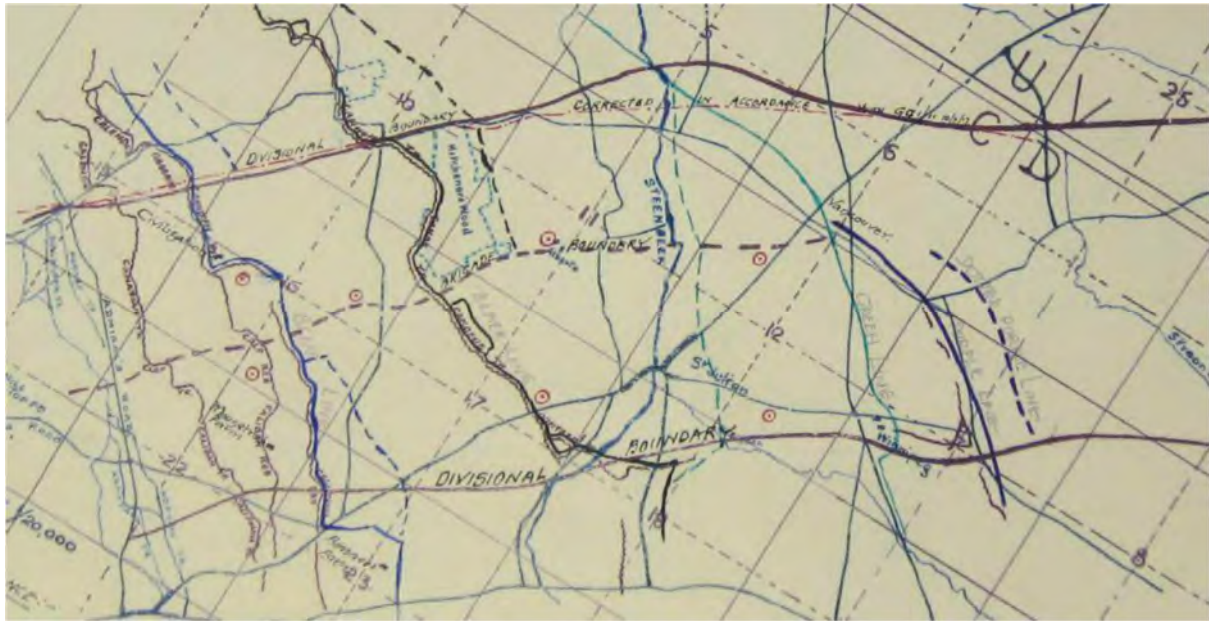
**7. AEROPLANE :-** A contact aeroplane will fly over our lines during the attack and the leading infantry will light flares on the aeroplane dropping a white Very light or sounding a series of "A"s. on the klaxon horn or daylight signalling lamp. Flares will be lit in the bottom of shell craters or trenches by the foremost troops only.

**8. COUNTER ATTACKS :-** The main line of resistance will be the consolidated line of platoon posts (Cuthbert trench) which must be held. The support Coys. will if necessary assist to repel counter-attacks and regain the Observation Line.

**9. MEALS :-** Breakfast at assembly position at zero, it is hoped to issue hot tea and rum at the blue line and on Z/A night every man is to use the contents of his water bottles most sparingly as the supply of water will be difficult.

**10. - S. O. S. :-** If a counter-attack is made during the operations, a protective barrage will if still on increase

The following map shows the Division's objectives on the 31st July 1917, attacking from left to right up to the 'green line'.



By all accounts the attack on the day started well, with 116th and 117th Brigades achieving their objectives without too much opposition. The preliminary bombardment of the enemy's 1st and 2nd line trenches had been successful and those German who were encountered had put up little resistance. Although the going had been tough due to the muddy and waterlogged ground, the 39th Division reached the Steenbeek with comparatively few casualties.

The attack of that morning had started at 3.50 am, with the Herts arriving at the Steenbeek sometime after 7am. Again the weather had turned against them as it had started to rain heavily.

It was now the turn of the Herts Regiment and Private Percy Buck to lead the advance. It was not known at the time, but events were already turning against them. The Germans had actually been well aware of the impending attack and so had virtually abandoned their First and Second trench lines in favour of heavily defending the third, which was out of range of most British artillery, this was the line that was about to be attacked. This would perhaps not have been such a terrible thing if the artillery barrage had been able to 'soften up' this target. Disastrously, as the Herts waited for the artillery to move within range and bombard their objective, it was realised that the ground was too waterlogged and churned up by shellfire for the guns to move. And so, the Green line was left almost completely intact, with fresh troops and machine guns waiting for the coming advance.

At 10am the order to advance was given, and the Herts Regiment left their trenches to a chorus of "good luck boys" from the soldiers of 116th and 117th Brigades. As the Brigade crossed the Steenbeek it suffered its first two casualties, the two tanks which were designated to take out enemy strongpoints and provide support for the advance. One was immediately stuck trying to cross the Steenbeek which had swollen due to the heavy rains, and the other made it some 50 yards before falling into a large shell hole where it bogged down and had to be abandoned.

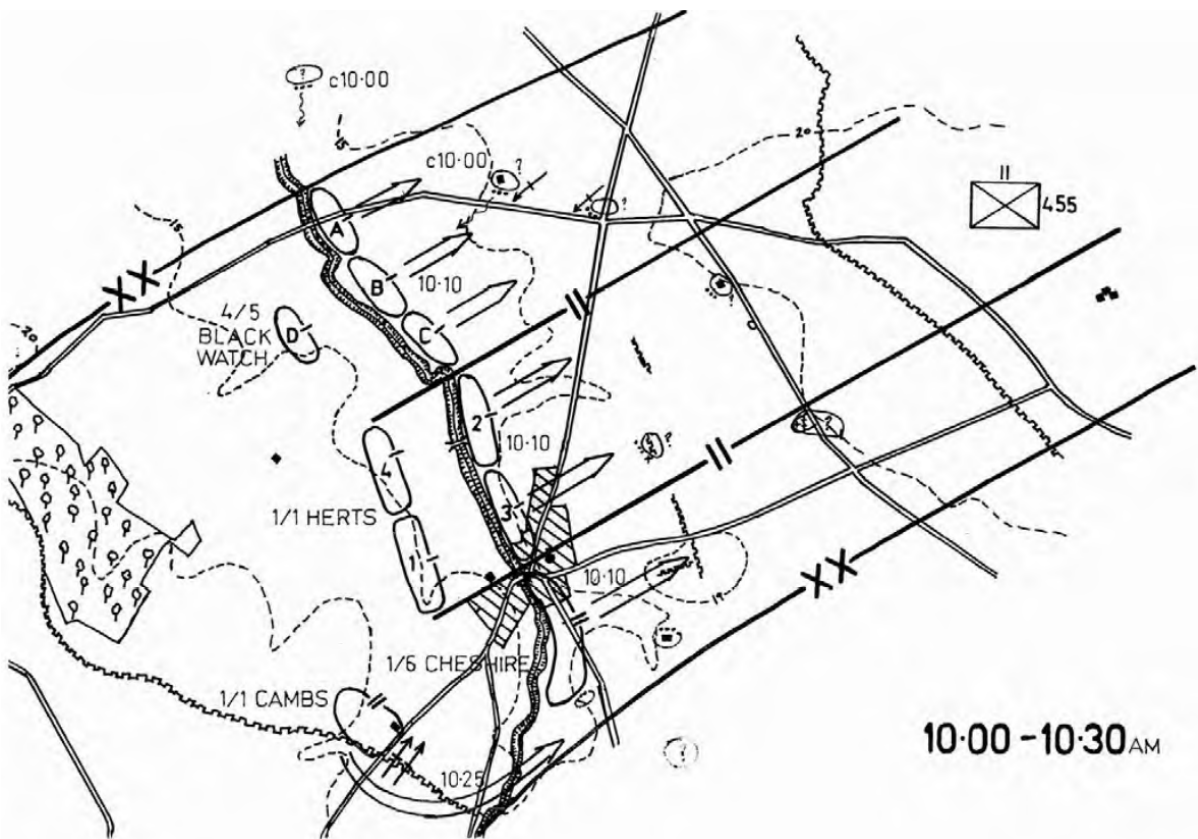
The area of the advance can be seen in the photograph below, looking from the Steenbeek River toward the 'Green line'. The windmill in the background was just behind the German line on 31st July 1917 and was known as the 'totemuhle' or 'death mill'.





Percy Buck and the soldiers of No 4 Company were initially on the left flank of the advance, following behind number two company as they advanced toward the enemy line.

The following map showing movements between 10-10.30am details the initial advance:



The war diary describes this phase of the attack:

*About 3.50am the Bn moved forward in 4 lines behind the 116th & 117th Inf. Bdes. east of the river STEENBEEK. Up till this time the casualties had been very slight indeed but as the Bn advanced from the STEENBEEK toward the LANGEMARCK line (the Bn objective) casualties grew heavier from sniper and*

*machine gun fire. However the Bn continued advancing. About half way to the objective some of No.3 Coy came upon a German strong point which they gallantly charged, capturing or killing most of the garrison and sending the remainder back as prisoners.*

Unfortunately, this was as good as things would get from the Hertfordshire Regiment. Shortly after capturing a German advanced trench, a hail of Machine Gun and Artillery fire was opened up on the Herts. They pushed on, taking severe casualties all the time until they reached the area directly in front of the enemy trench system. By this time, about 10.50 am, the last Officer (of 20 that started that morning) became a casualty, leaving the Regimental Sergeant-Major (who was wounded) in command of the Battalion.

Particularly vicious fire was directed on the Herts from several machine gun emplacements on the left flank of the attack from the strongpoints of 'Masion d'Hibou' and 'Triangle Farm'. These took a heavy toll on Number 2 and 4 Companies, who by now had formed one small company with the men that they had left.

Within 100 or so yards of the enemy trench, losing men all the time, the Hertfords encountered an impenetrable barrier; barbed wire. A contemporary account of the time states: *"The whole Battalion was left in the open with uncut wire in front of them. The few men who got through were killed. The rest just 'took it'."*

Stuck in front of the enemy positions, losing men all the time, and trapped by barbed wire, the surviving men of the 'Herts Guards' took any cover they could find to avoid total annihilation. It was very soon noticed by the German defenders that the Herts were in bad shape and so a counter-attack was launched from the left flank of the Battalion aimed at the survivors of No 2 and 4 Company. We know that Private Percy Buck was with these men, and had reached as far as the 'Springfield Farm pillbox' where 2 & 4 Company were sheltering. We also know that as pressure mounted on the Herts Regiment they were eventually forced to conduct a fighting withdrawal back toward the Steenbeek, leaving dead, wounded and separated men behind.

The 1st Herts war diary describes the final phase of the Herts attack with characteristic understatement:

*On reaching the enemy wire this was found to be practically undamaged (except in one place) & very thick. 2/Lieut Marchington & a handful of men of No.3 Coy got through the only gap and got into the enemy trench & killed a lot of Germans. The remainder of the Bn, being unable to get through the wire and suffering severe casualties from enfilade MG fire & the Germans making a strong counter attack from our left flank about this time, had to fall back having suffered exceptionally heavy casualties. The remnants of the battalion subsequently dug themselves in in line with the 1st Cambs Regt. on the west side of the STEENBEEK.*

Around 12.30 the remnants of the Hertfordshire Regiment made it back across the Steenbeek, harassed all the time. They crossed back to the point where they had started from some two hours earlier. Of the 620 officers and men who started the attack, not a single officer and only 130 'Other Ranks' returned. Percy Buck was not among them.



This scene of total devastation took place in what is today an unremarkable farmer's field (pictured here looking from the German line back towards the advance). The area in the foreground is where No 2 and 4 Company took their highest casualties.

The devastation of the days attack for the Hertfordshire Regiment was summed up succinctly by a conversation on the evening of 31st July 1917

between the Brigadier-General commanding 118th Brigade and Quartermaster Sergeant Gordon Fisher of the 1st Herts who had just arrived in St Julien with rations for 620 men:

*"I said to the general "excuse me Sir, I can't seem to find the Hertfordshire Regiment" he looked at me for a while and then said "I'm sorry quarters, there is no Hertfordshire Regiment".*

### Aftermath

Once the dust had settled for the Hertfordshire Regiment, the survivors were slowly reinforced and re-equipped. They spent the next few months in the line, again suffering very heavy casualties in September 1917 during the latter stages of Passchendaele.

Throughout the first two weeks of August, news of the attack at St Julien slowly filtered home through personal letters, wounded soldiers returning home, telegrams informing families of the fate of their loved ones and newspaper articles.

Throughout the first two weeks of August, news of the attack at St Julien slowly filtered home through personal letters, wounded soldiers returning home, telegrams informing families of the fate of their loved ones and newspaper articles.

One of the many anxious mothers to receive a dreaded letter was Mrs Bertha Buck who was staying at that time with her husband's parents at 9 Baliol Road, Hitchin. It is very difficult today to imagine the anxiety of knowing that her husband aged just 26 was missing in Action. Percy's service record indicates that he was officially reported 'MIA'

on 10th August 1917. The likely reason for this delay in informing Percy's family is that the days after the attack saw stragglers and wounded men make it back from no-mans-land, usually during the night.

Army Form B. 103. **1st. Bn. HERTS. R.** Regimental Number \_\_\_\_\_  
**Casualty Form - Active Service.**  
 Regiment or Corps **"A" Coy. 1st RES. HERTS. REGT.**

Rank *Pl* Surname *Buck* Christian Name *Percy*  
 Religion *C of E.* Age on Enlistment *24* years  
 Enlisted (a) *10.1.16* Terms of Service (a) *3 y* Service reckons from (a) *10.1.16*  
 Date of promotion to present rank *23.9.16* Date of appointment to lance rank *12.5.16*  
 Extended  Re-engaged  Qualification (b) \_\_\_\_\_  
 or Corps Trade and Rate \_\_\_\_\_  
 Attested on *A.F. B.2.512* Signature of Officer i/c Records. \_\_\_\_\_

Report		Record of promotions, transfers, transfers, appointments, Army Form B. 103. Army Form B. 103. Army Form B. 103. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place of Casualty	Date of Casualty	Initials to be put on Army Form B. 103. Army Form B. 103. Army Form B. 103. or other official documents
Date	From whom received				
		Embarked ...			
		Disembarked ...			
		Joined unit in the Field			
<i>14.2.17</i>	<i>103 B.A.</i>	<i>Transferred from 1st Bn. 1st RES. HERTS. REGT. to 1st Bn. 1st RES. HERTS. REGT.</i>		<i>14.2.17</i>	<i>103 B.A.</i>
		Attested on _____		<i>31 JUL 1917</i>	

**10 AUG 1917** Missing



The following months for Percy's wife and whole family must have been a terrifying waiting game - hoping that news would come that Percy had been taken prisoner and was safe. The waiting was finally over on 11th November 1917 when an unexpected letter arrived from far away Switzerland. This incredibly moving series of events was published in the North Herts express in late November 1917 with the following article:



A week later the same paper published the following article:



The articles found here tell a truly remarkable story, one which this writer cannot and should not try to explain; rather it should be left to the reader to draw their own conclusions and inferences.

It perhaps should be mentioned that the German soldier who was likely firing at the Herts Regiment that morning as they advanced was probably from the 448th Infantry Regiment of the 353rd (Prussian Division) of the Imperial German Army. Whoever this man was, he found Percy Buck, mortally wounded in no-man's-land and took it upon himself to take the photograph and write a letter back to Percy's family in Hitchin to save them the grief of uncertainty. Did this soldier speak to Percy in his last moments? Did he speak any English? Perhaps he stayed with him for a while, we will never know. All we can say with any

certainly is that this 'enemy' chose, for a moment at least, that humanity should triumph in the unspeakable carnage of war.

### Epilogue

Private Percy Buck's body was never recovered from the battlefield of St Julien. Just one man in a war that claimed over 8.5 million lives, Percy's story is both representative and unique of the conflict that we know today as 'The Great War'.

Private Percy Buck is remembered today as one of the 54,896 names inscribed on the walls of the Menin Gate Memorial to the missing in Ypres City centre and also his local memorial in Hitchin town centre, Hertfordshire, in the grounds of the church that he was married at in 1912.

