



George Thomas Chapman

George Thomas Chapman was born in Gretton in 1887. His father was Henry Chapman of Gretton, his mother Sarah Ann Chapman.

Family History

According to the 1901 & 1911 Census, Henry Chapman was a shepherd. The 1891 Census shows he was a gardener's labourer, but the 1881 Census shows that he was a farmer employing 2 men and farming 87 acres around Gretton.

George Thomas Chapman was Henry & Sarah Ann's only son. In the 1911 Census, George's recorded occupation was baker.

George volunteered for military service on 24th November 1915 enlisting in Kettering and was a Private with the 4th Battalion (Reserve) Northamptonshire Regiment. He was in the Reserves until March 1917.

An extract from the Grantham Journal of 30th December 1916, records the fact that his continuing civilian employment was the subject of discussion at the Gretton Rural District Tribunal held in Uppingham –

George Thomas Chapman (28), single, of Gretton, a baker, employed by Mr. Hy. F. Jones, butcher and baker, of Rockingham, had his certificate of exemption reviewed at the request of the military authorities – Mr. Jones said Chapman attended to all baking business, while he managed the farm and butcher's business. He baked about a thousand half-quarter loaves per week, or about a sack of flour daily, and served several villages – Lieut. Nicholas stated that it had caused considerable comment in Rockingham because he was a single man, and married men in the district had to join. All the villages he supplied had other bakers also serving them. He was attested – Granted one month for medical examination.

Exemptions for key workers were in place throughout the War, however the categories of exemption were constantly under review. As the demand for manpower from the military grew, the number of exemptions granted reduced. Even those previously classified as unfit found themselves subject to re-examination. The age exemption category was further restricted. Often the request for an exemption was advocated by employers, concerned that they would not have adequate manpower with which to continue their business.



With the case of George Chapman, it was not unusual for an individual who volunteered to find themselves in the Reserves for a period of time.

Military History

George Thomas Chapman was mobilised for military service on 2nd March 1917. He remained in the UK until 22nd May 1917 and went to France, boarding at Folkstone, disembarking in Boulogne. He served as a Private (203386) with the 6th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment (he was transferred from the 4th Battalion when arriving in France). Private Chapman arrived at the front on 20th June 1917.

It is recorded that Private Chapman died of wounds on 11th November 1917. The wounds probably resulted from his participation in the Third Battle of Ypres. His body was never identified.

Private Chapman is remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial and the Gretton War Memorial.

The Tyne Cot Memorial 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. It commemorates those of all Commonwealth nations, except New Zealand, who died in the Salient, in the case of United Kingdom casualties before 16 August 1917 (with some exceptions). Those United Kingdom and New Zealand servicemen who died after that date are named on the memorial at Tyne Cot, a site which marks the furthest point reached by Commonwealth forces in Belgium until nearly the end of the war. Other New Zealand casualties are commemorated on memorials at Buttes New British Cemetery and Messines Ridge British Cemetery.

The Tyne Cot Memorial now bears the names of almost 35,000 officers and men whose graves are not known. The memorial, designed by Sir Herbert Baker with sculpture by Joseph Armitage and F.V. Blundstone, was unveiled by Sir Gilbert Dyett on 20 June 1927.

The memorial forms the north-eastern boundary of Tyne Cot Cemetery, which was established around a captured German blockhouse or pill-box used as an advanced dressing station. The original battlefield cemetery of 343 graves was greatly enlarged after the Armistice when remains were brought in from the battlefields of Passchendaele and Langemarck, and from a few small burial grounds. It is now the largest Commonwealth war cemetery in the world in terms of burials. At the suggestion of King George V, who visited the cemetery in 1922, the Cross of Sacrifice was placed on the original large pill-box. There are three other pill-boxes in the cemetery.

There are now 11,956 Commonwealth servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in Tyne Cot Cemetery, 8,369 of these are unidentified.

The cemetery was designed by Sir Herbert Baker.

Reference

Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Gretton Local History Society

Lest We Forget

George Thomas Chapman
of the Northamptonshire Regiment

d. 11th November 1917

