

27: Joseph Downes

Basic Information [as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC]

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: J. Downes Recorded by the CWGC as S J Downes
Rank: Lance Corporal
Battalion / Regiment: 4th Bn. The King's (Liverpool Regiment)
Service Number: 109418 Date of Death: 23 October 1918 Age at Death: ?
Buried / Commemorated at: Montay-Neuvilly Road Cemetery, Montay, Departement du Nord, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France
Additional information given by CWGC: The son of Mrs. Mary Downes, of Liverpool Road, Neston

Joseph Downes was born in Neston in 1889 (possibly October), the son of coalminer James and Mary Downes.

Coalminer James, aged 24, married Mary Quigley, 30, a widow with (at least) four children of Little Neston, at Neston Parish Church on 16 January 1882. James was the son of labourer Joseph Downes and Mary's father was labourer Thomas Williams of Little Neston.

Mary Williams had, in 1874, married James Joseph Quigley in Liverpool in mid-1874 but nothing is known of James or when he died.

James and Mary had at least a further four children (two of whom died in infancy) and Joseph's birth was registered in the first quarter of 1891 although there is no record of his baptism at Neston Parish Church.

By the time of the 1901 census James, Joseph's father, had died although no record of his death or burial has been found in the BMD Records or the burial registers of Neston Parish Church. In the 1901 census Mary Downes (widow, 49, charwoman) and Joseph (10) were visiting one of Mary's daughters from her first marriage (Mary C Quigley, 29) who was a domestic servant in the house of retired architect William H Hay at 37 King Street, Birkenhead. Perhaps, following the death of James, Mary Downes was unable to cope with raising her family as her daughter Alice (11, born Little Neston), Joseph's slightly older sister, was living with her aunt, Mary Nolan, in Eccles, Lancashire at the time of the census.

By 1907 Joseph was working as a driver for a grocery shop (Trampton's Ltd) on Neston Cross. On 12 August 1907, when he was aged 17 years 10 months, he attested in Liverpool for 6 years for the Army Special Reserve, to serve in the depot of the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion Cheshire Regiment which was based in Chester. He was then 5ft 4ins tall, weighed 112lb (exactly 8 stone / 51kg), had a 33-inch chest, a fresh complexion, grey eyes and dark brown hair. We know also from his Service Record that he was a Roman Catholic and that he had scars on the back of his right forearm and above the right knee.

Joseph's attestation followed very soon after the passing of the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act, 1907 on 2 August 1907 which reformed the auxiliary forces of the British

Army by transferring existing Volunteer and Yeomanry units into a new Territorial Force (TF) and disbanded the Militia to form a new Special Reserve of the Regular Army.

Joseph's surviving Service Record is sparse and gives no detail of his service in the field or, indeed, any record after his discharge from the Army Reserve in 1913. We do, however, get some idea of his physical development between his first medical examination in August 1907 and his examination at Altcar (a training camp on the coast between Liverpool and Southport) on 1 June 1908 when he was recorded as being 18 years 3 months old. Still recording his occupation as 'driver', Joseph was then 5ft 5½ins tall and weighed 127lb – in the course of the year he had grown nearly 2ins and increased his weight by 15lb. We know also that his physical development was described as 'fair', he had a helmet size of 21½ and wore size 7 boots!

| MEDICAL HISTORY of | | | |
|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Surname <u>Downes.</u> | | Christian Name <u>Joseph.</u> | |
| TABLE I.—General Table. | | TABLE II.—Service Table. | |
| Examined | on <u>1st</u> day of <u>June</u> 190 <u>8</u> . | Station or Troopship | Date of arrival or embarkation |
| | at <u>Altcar</u> | <u>Chester</u> | <u>21.6.08</u> |
| Birthplace | Parish <u>Neston.</u> | | Date of departure or disembarkation |
| | County <u>Cheshire</u> | | <u>11.8.13</u> |
| Declared Age | <u>18 ³/₁₂</u> | | |
| Trade or Occupation | <u>Driver.</u> | | |
| Height | <u>5</u> Feet <u>5 ⁸/₈</u> Inches. | | |
| Weight | <u>127</u> lbs. | | |
| Chest Measurement | Minimum <u>32</u> inches | | |
| | Maximum expansion <u>34</u> inches | | |
| Physical Development | <u>Fair.</u> | | |

When he was discharged from the Army Reserve on 11 August 1913 Joseph had served for 5 years 52 days and his Service Number was recorded as 7752.

In the 1911 census Joseph Downes (20, single) is recorded as boarding with shop assistant Joseph and Sarah Cavanagh and family at Rock Cottages on Bridge Street, Neston. Joseph Cavanagh was also killed in WW1 [see [11: Joseph Cavanagh](#)]. Having left his work at the grocery shop he was now a contractor's labourer in the building trade. Interestingly, Joseph's mother, Mary Downes (60, born Little Neston) is recorded as the domestic housekeeper to 45-year old widower William Kendrick (a rope man [below ground]) at the colliery and his 80-year old mother at 4, New Street. Mary is recorded as being married (for 27 years although it is known she was a widow) with four of her eight children having survived. Alice Downes, Joseph's sister (who, in the 1901 census was recorded as living with her aunt in Eccles) had now returned to Wirral and was (single, 22) the domestic servant of Harold and Elizabeth Garnett at White House Farm, Brimstage.

| PART of the SERVICES of <i>Joseph Downes</i> | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|---|------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|--|
| Corps | Regt. or Depôt | Promotions, Reductions, Casualties, &c. | Rank | Dates | From | To | Signature of Officer certifying correctness of Entries |
| Service towards engagement reckons from | | | | <i>12-8-04</i> | | | |
| Joined at | | | | <i>Liverpool</i> | on | <i>12-8-04</i> | |
| <i>Cheshire</i> | <i>3</i> | Special course of training? <i>Reserve Militia</i> | | | <i>12-8-04</i> | <i>20-6-08</i> | <i>William</i> |
| <i>Cheshire</i> | <i>S.R.</i> | <i>Attended to complete bym. Para 55. 4/23/12 04</i> | | <i>21-6-08</i> | <i>21-6-08</i> | | |
| <i>Cheshire</i> | <i>3</i> | Annual Training. | | | | | |
| " | " | <i>Present</i> | <i>Plt</i> | <i>1909</i> | <i>28.6.09</i> | <i>14.4.09</i> | <i>Engones</i> |
| " | " | <i>Present</i> | <i>Pte</i> | <i>1910</i> | <i>12.6.10</i> | <i>2.4.10</i> | <i>Engones</i> |
| " | " | <i>Present</i> | " | <i>1911</i> | <i>5.6.11</i> | <i>1.4.11</i> | <i>Engones</i> |
| " | " | <i>Present</i> | " | <i>1912</i> | <i>3.6.12</i> | <i>29.6.12</i> | <i>Engones</i> |
| " | " | <i>Present</i> | " | <i>1913</i> | <i>2.6.13</i> | <i>28.6.13</i> | <i>Engones</i> |

As well as regular drills prescribed by regulation, reservists had to attend annual training for eight to fifteen days per year, with the Crown able to extend the period of training up to thirty days or abandon annual training altogether as necessary. In fact Joseph Downes' Service Record indicates that his annual training exceeded this as, in both 1909 and 1910, he attended for 20 days but in 1911, 1912 and 1913 this was extended to 27 days.

During his time with the Army Reserve Joseph appears not to have committed any significance offence although, whilst attending his annual training at Conway on 25 June 1911, he was reported by Sgt. Blease because he 'was dirty on Sick Parade at 9.30am'. For this misdemeanour he was sentenced to '2 days C.B.' - confinement to barracks.

It appears that Joseph moved from the building trade to work at Neston Colliery as, now aged, 27, he was recorded as being injured on 25 March 1918 whilst working underground at the 6-Foot Seam. This injury record gives his address as Liverpool Road, the same address as recorded for his mother on his later Service Record. This would also suggest that it was only towards the end of the war that Joseph re-enlisted.

The 4th (Extra Reserve) Battalion The King's (Liverpool Regiment) was stationed in Seaforth at the outbreak of war, and they then moved to Edinburgh.

On 6 March 1915 the troops mobilised for war and landed at Havre and transferred to the Sirhind Brigade of the Lahore Division based at Robecq. They were engaged on the Western Front and involved in various actions including The Battle of Neuve Chapelle, The Second Battle of Ypres and The Battle of Loos.

In November 1915 they transferred to the 137th Brigade of the 46th Division and in December 1915 transferred to the 56th and 58th Brigades of the 19th Division.

On 27 February 1916 they again transferred, this time to the 98th Brigades of the 33rd Division.

During 1916 they were engaged on the Western Front and involved in various actions including The Battle of Albert, The Battle of Bazentin, the attacks on High Wood, and the capture of Boritska and Dewdrop Trenches.

During 1917 the 4th Battalion was at The First Battle of the Scarpe, The Second Battle of the Scarpe, the actions on the Hindenburg Line, Operations on the Flanders coast, The Battle of the Menin Road Ridge and The Battle of Polygon Wood.

During 1918 the 4th Battalion was at The Battle of Messines, The Battle of Hazebrouck, The Battle of Bailleul, the defence of Neuve Eglise, The First Battle for Kemmel Ridge, the recapture of Ridge Wood, The Battle of the Epehy, The Battle of the St Quentin Canal, The Battle of the Beaurevoir Line, The Second Battle of Cambrai (8 - 10 October 1918), the pursuit to the Selle and The Battle of the Selle.

It is most probable that Joseph Downes died during the last days of this final conflict which lasted from 17 - 25 October 1918.

By 11 October British forces had closed up upon the retreating Germans, now hastily dug-in immediately to the east of the River Selle. Haig, sensing the enemy's near exhaustion, initiated a series of operations designed to get British troops in strength across the river, and clear a way for a move against the Sambre-Oise Canal, a further five miles to the east.

After a six day halt for preparations and artillery bombardments Fourth Army troops attacked in thick mist at 5.20am on Thursday 17 October; infantry and tanks, preceded by a creeping barrage, moved forward on a ten mile front south of Le Cateau. The centre and left of Fourth Army forced crossings of the river despite unexpectedly tenacious enemy resistance and much uncut wire. Fighting was particularly fierce along the line of the Le Cateau – Wassigny railway. The right of the attack, across the upland watershed of the Selle, made most progress and by nightfall enemy defences had been broken and Le Cateau captured. Severe fighting continued on 18 and 19 October, by which time Fourth Army (much assisted by the French First Army on its right) had advanced over five miles, harrying the enemy back towards the Sambre-Oise canal.

Third and First British Armies (immediately to the left, north, of Fourth Army) maintained the offensive pressure next day. In a surprise joint night attack in the early morning of 20 October Third Army formations secured the high ground east of the Selle. Following a two day pause, to bring up heavy artillery, the attack was renewed on 23 October with a major combined assault by Fourth, Third and First Armies; the fighting, which continued into the next day, resulted in further gains.

The Battle of the Selle constituted a highly significant British victory: considerable advances were made and over 20,000 prisoners taken.

[Source:

<http://www.cwgc.org/victory1918/content.asp?menuid=38&submenuid=55&id=55&menuname=Selle&menu=sub>]

Unfortunately, the Regimental War Diary gives only sparse detail of events around the time of Joseph Downes' death although it notes that the battalion was in the Montay area (and probably just to the west of the village of Montay), the area in which Joseph was buried:

| WAR DIARY | | | | Army Form C. 2118. |
|--|----------|------|---|--------------------------------------|
| INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY. <u>VOLUME XXXII (cont)</u> | | | | <u>3</u> |
| (Erase heading not required.) | | | | |
| Place | Date | Hour | Summary of Events and Information | Remarks and references to Appendices |
| CLARY. | 19/10/18 | | Showery weather - Bde Gas N.C.O. tested Bn S.B.P.s. L.S. training. 3 O.R.s to leave Major J. STOPFORD TAYLOR to hospital. | |
| CLARY | 20/10/18 | | Wet weather - Church parades. Message racket demonstration to A.M. officers and N.C.O.s. 2/Lt J.E. SMITH to U.K. on leave. 3 O.R.s to leave | |
| TROISVILLES | 21/10/18 | | Wet weather. Bn moved from CLARY to TROISVILLES. Lt Col C.M. BEAUMONT to S.M.2. Small arms school. CAMIERS. Capt. E. ASHTON, Lt A.B. R. LITTAIR and 2/Lt D. WERR to U.K. on leave. 2/Lt H. BOARDMAN M.C. from leave to U.K. | Cm. O.S.O. |
| TROISVILLES | 22/10/18 | | Wet weather. C.O. and Adjutant reconnoitred front area. Bn moved to assembly place prior to attack on FOREST. 2/Lt E.C. HYDE to U.K. on leave. 7 O.R.s from Third Army Rest Camp. | |
| MONTAY AREA | 23/10/18 | | Fine weather. Bn attacked and moved thro' FOREST to CROIX. Capt. A.R. NICHOLLS killed Lt A.P. DIXON wounded. | |
| CROIX | 24/10/18 | | Fine weather. Bn continued in attack towards ENGLEFONTAIN. Lt. I. ROTHFIELD - 2/Lt F.J. BAUGHEN - 2/Lt E.W. BELL - 2/Lt F.P. ARTHUR - Wounded in action | |
| LA FAUGETTES | 25/10/18 | | Fine weather. Bn continued in operations. 2/Lt W.H. MASON to hospital. | |

A6945 Wt. W11422/M1160 350,000 12/16 D. D. & L. Forms/C.2118/14.

War Diary extract 4th Battalion The King's (Liverpool) Regiment Partial transcript

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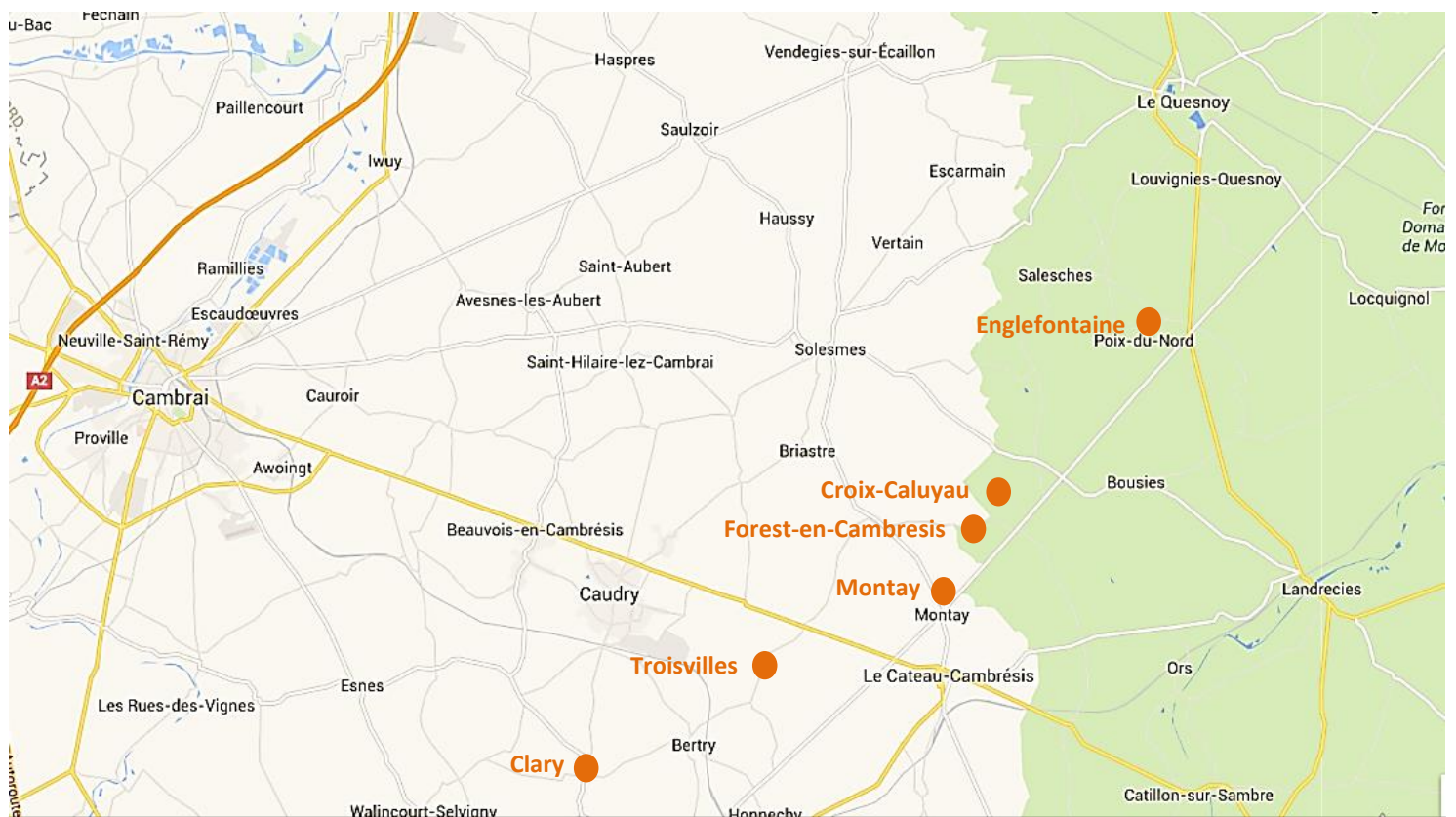
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Wounded in action.

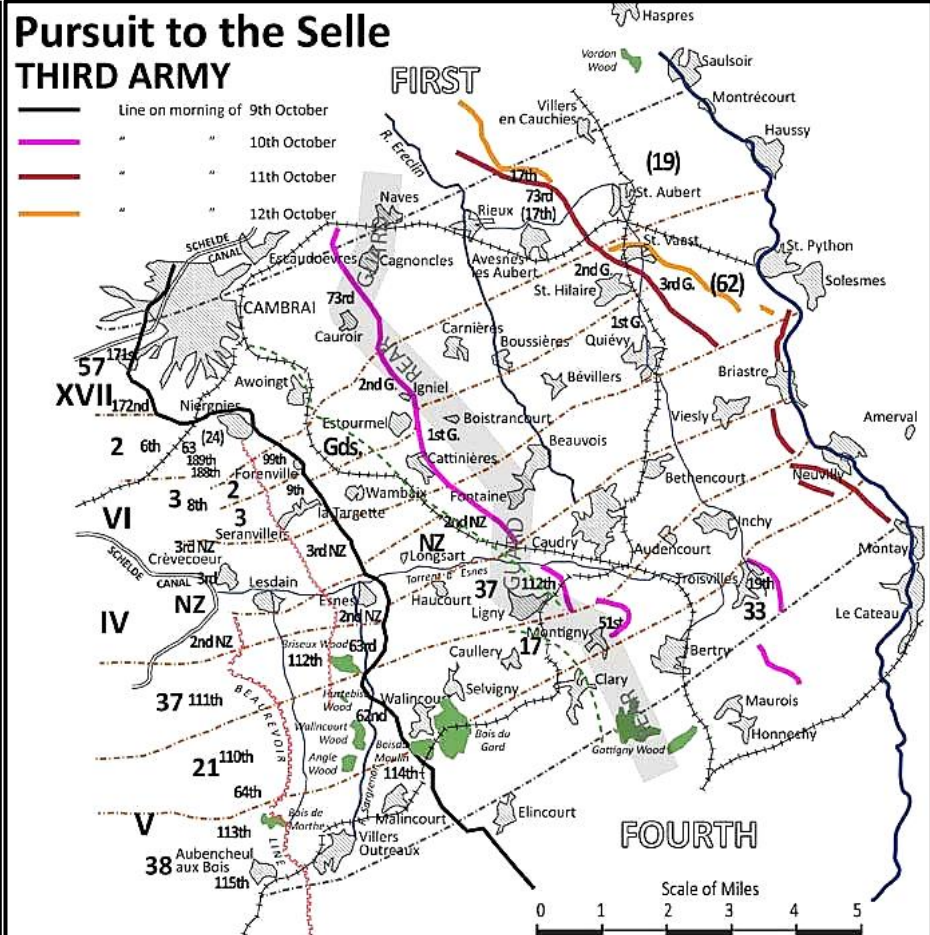
LA FAUGETTES 25/10/18 Fine weather. Bn. continued in operations. 2/Lt. W.H. MASON to hospital.

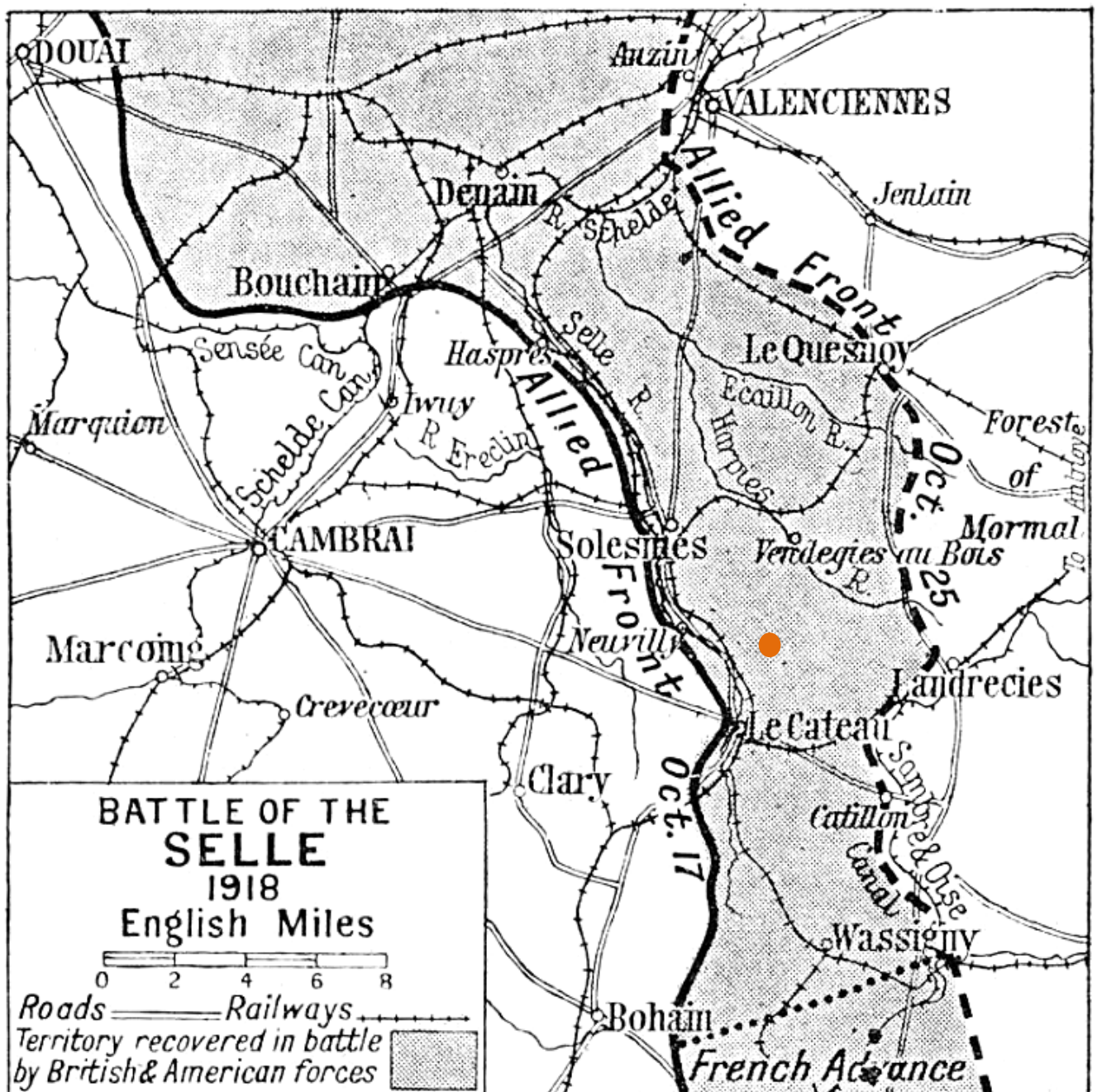


The area of France to the east of Cambrai showing the route north eastwards, from Clary (20 October) to Englefontaine (26 October) taken by the 4th Battalion The King's (Liverpool) Regiment in 1918. Joseph Downes died near Forest-en-Cambresis on 23 October but the troops continued northwards to attack and capture Englefontaine. The Battalion was then, on the same day, relieved and they then returned to their billets at Montay (around 10km to the south) which they reached at 6.0pm. [Source map: Google Maps]

The map indicates the north eastern advances of the Divisions of the Third Army from 9 – 12 October 1918. The 33rd Division, which included 4th Battalion The King's (Liverpool) Regiment constituted the southern sector of this advance. Although the Montay area had been reached, and occupied, by 11 October the KLR did not enter this area until 23 October when there was still sporadic German resistance. It was here that Joseph Downes was killed.

[Source: <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/103205-the-pursuit-to-the-selle/>]





The map shows the territory gained between 17 October and 25 October 1918. The Forest-en-Cambresis area, where Joseph Downes probably died, is indicated by the orange circle.
[Source: http://www.ossett.net/WW1/Leslie_Giggall.html]

The notification of Joseph's death in the *Chester Chronicle* of November 1918 states that *Much sympathy is extended to his two young children* but no definitive record of either his marriage or these children has been identified – and his sole legatee was his mother, Mary.



Ambulance on a bridge over the River Selle, October 1918.



The War Grave of Joseph Downes at
Montay-Neuvilly Road Cemetery,
Montay, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France
[Source : CWGC]

NESTON SOLDIER FALLS IN FRANCE.—Yet another name is added to the list of our local heroes who have given their lives for their country. Word has been received that Pte. J. Downes, of Liverpool-rd., has been killed in France. This soldier only went to France five weeks ago. Much sympathy is extended to his two young children.

Chester Chronicle - Saturday 9 November 1918

| Name. | Corps. | Rank. | Regt. No. |
|--------------------------------|---------|--------|-----------|
| DOWNES Joseph | L'poolk | Pte | 109418 |
| Medal. | Roll. | Page. | Remarks. |
| VICTORY | H/2/102 | 334503 | |
| BRITISH | do | do | |
| STAR | | | |
| Theatre of War first served in | | | |
| Date of entry therein | | | |

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

[illegible]

Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In Summer 1919 the army paid outstanding credits – mainly remaining wages – to soldiers or, in the case of those who had died, their family or nominated representatives. At the same time a War Gratuity was often paid.

Joseph Downes had accrued a credit of 12 14s and this was received by his mother, Mary, as joint legatee (although no other legatee is named). Mary received also the £5 War Gratuity.

The total payment, £6 14s, is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of about £1000 in 2016.

The War Gratuity was introduced in December 1918 as a payment to be made to those men who had served in WW1 for a period of 6 months or more home service or for any length of service if a man had served overseas. The rules governing the gratuity were implemented under Army Order 17 of 1919 but the amount paid was related to the length of war service.