

## 73: Ratcliffe Handley

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Ratcliffe Handley

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 1st / 10th Bn. The King's (Liverpool Regiment)

Service Number: 4916

Date of Death: 09 August 1916

Age at Death: 28

Buried / Commemorated at: Thiepval Memorial, Thiepval, Departement de la Somme, Picardie, France

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of William and Mary Handley, of 8, Gladstone Road, Neston and the husband of Catherine Handley, of 3, Gorsey Lane, Clock Face, St Helens, Lancashire

Ratcliffe Handley, the penultimate son of carpenter William & Mary Handley (their last child, William, died after just 3 weeks), was baptised at Neston on 24 February 1888.

William Handley, a son of Neston joiner Peter (died 28 March 1886 aged 61) and Elizabeth (died 20 December 1891 aged 63) Handley, had married Mary Theresa Matthews at Our Lady & St Nicholas & St Anne, the Liverpool Parish Church, in early 1877 and their first child, William James, seems to have been born late in the same year although there does not appear to be a baptismal record.

In 1881, before Ratcliffe was born, the family was living at Sea View Cottages off Marshlands Road (then known either as Wood Lane or Colliery Lane). This area was populated by families associated with the colliery and it is very possible that William Handley was working at the coal mines:

William Handley	Head	Male	32	carpenter	Neston Cheshire
Mary do	Wife	Mar	33	formerly laundress carpenter	Liverpool Lancashire
William do	Son		3	formerly laundress	Parkgate Cheshire
Thomas do	Son		2		Parkgate do
Kate do	Son		1		Neston do

1881 census (extract) – 7 Sea View Cottages

William Handley	32	carpenter	born Neston
Mary	33	formerly laundress	born Liverpool
William	3		born Parkgate
Thomas	2		born Parkgate
Kate	1		born Neston

Ten years later, however, the family had moved to Gladstone Road, Neston; in the 1891 census Ratcliffe is recorded, aged 3, as living there with his parents (William, 42 and Mary, 43) and his siblings Thomas, 12; Kate, 11; Robert, 9; Anna, 5 and Maria, 4. By this date William and Mary had lost their first child, William James (buried at Neston, aged 5, on 3 July 1883) and three other children, none of whom had been recorded in a census. Indeed, the family lost three children within a 5-month period in 1883.

In 1901 the family was still at 8, Gladstone Road and it appears that Mary - recorded previously as a 'former laundress' - and daughter Kate were contributing to the family's income by taking in washing:

William Handley	Head	M	52	Carpenter Building Trade	Worker	Neston Ches
Mary do	Wife	M	53	Laundress Wash	own acct - house	Liverpool
Thomas do	Son	S	22	House painter	Worker	Neston do
Kate Handley	Daughter	S	21	Laundress Wash	do	do do
Robert Handley	Son	S	18	Builder's Labourer	do	do do
Maria Handley	Daughter	S	14			do do
Ratcliffe do	Son	S	13	Errand Boy Post	Worker	do do

1901 census (extract) – 8 Gladstone Road, Neston

William Handley	52	carpenter, building trade	born Neston
Mary	53	laundress, own account	born Liverpool
Thomas	22	house painter	born Neston
Kate	21	laundress	born Neston
Robert	18	builder's labourer	born Neston
Maria	14		born Neston
Ratcliffe	13	errand boy, post	born Neston

In 1901 Anna (Annie) Handley was recorded as a domestic servant at Leighton Court, the home of cotton merchant William Whineray.

In 1911 William and Mary, together with Thomas and Ratcliffe, were still at 8, Gladstone Road:

1	Wm Handley	Head	62	Married	34	9	5	4	Carpenter House	House Building	Worker	Cheshire Neston
2	Mary Handley	Wife	63	Married								Lancashire Liverpool 058
3	Thomas Handley	Son	32	Single					Painter House		Worker	Cheshire Neston
4	Ratcliffe Handley	Son	23	Single					Coal Miner House	Coal Mining	Worker	Cheshire Neston

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

Total		
Males	Females	Persons
3	1	4

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (House, Tenement, or Apartment). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom; nor warehouse, office, shop.

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: William Handley

Postal Address: 8 & Gladstone Rd Neston Cheshire

1911 census (condensed) – 8, Gladstone Road, Neston

William Handley	62	carpenter, house building	born Neston
Mary	63		born Liverpool
Thomas	32	painter, house	born Neston
Ratcliffe	23	coal miner, hewer	born Neston

William and Mary had been married for 34 years and five of their nine children had survived.

In 1911 Annie Handley was still a housemaid at the home of William and Catherine Whineray in Neston but the locations of Kate and Robert Handley have not been found although they would have been living at that time. The census notes that four children had died and these are known to be:

Richard	baptised 17 March 1882	buried 19 July 1883 aged 1 year 5 months
William James	no record of baptism	buried 3 July 1883 aged 5
Mary Elizabeth	baptised 22 June 1883	buried 5 November 1883 aged 5 months
William	baptised 27 September 1889	buried 9 October 1889 aged 21 days

Maria Handley (born 6 August 1886), Ratcliffe's sister, married James Henry Oxtan (born 26 September 1882) of Neston at St Peter's Church in Liverpool in July / September 1908. James was the older brother of William Robert Oxtan who was killed in WW1 on 24 October 1918 [see [67: William Robert Oxtan](#)]. Maria died on 1 March 1945 aged 58 and James died in July / September 1966 aged 83. It is believed that James and Maria had five children: James Henry (born mid-1909) ; Emma Virginia Pettigrew (born mid-1912 in Neston) ; Frank (born late 1913) ; Steve (born mid-1915) ; Joan (born 21 February 1917). In the 1939 Register James, Maria and Joan were living at the Domino Stores on Liverpool Road, Neston; Maria was running the shop (shopkeeper, general dealer), James was a builder's general foreman and Joan was a hairdresser. Joan later married Ronald Francis Evans at Neston Parish Church in mid-1940.

Ratcliffe Handley married Catherine Price in a Civil Marriage at Toxteth Park, Liverpool, in the last quarter of 1911 - it is probable that she was the daughter of shipyard labourer William and Mary Emma Price of Toxteth; in the 1911 census Catherine Price, aged 22 and recorded as a paper bag maker, was living with her widowed mother at 36 Goring Street, Toxteth. A son, William Robert Handley, was born in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 1912 in Neston.

Sometime after the birth of William, Ratcliffe and the family moved to the St Helens coalfield where Ratcliffe was a miner.

Ratcliffe enlisted for the army at Liverpool on 23 June 1915, joining the 1/10<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Battalion The King's (Liverpool) Regiment. His address was recorded as 3 Gorsey Lane, Clock Face, St Helens.

Ratcliffe's Service Record shows that he was aged 27, was a collier, was 5ft 4ins tall, weighed 126lb (9 stone / 57kg), had a 38-inch expanded chest and was of good physical development. He appears to have been a Signaller.

The 1/10<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Battalion The King's (Liverpool) Regiment had been formed in August 1914 in Bootle and, a Territorial Battalion, was part of the South Lancashire Brigade, West Lancashire Division. It is unclear where Ratcliffe underwent his training but, between 9.30pm on 17 September 1915 and 8.0pm on 21 September he was absent without leave and was confined to barracks for 7 days and fined 7 days' pay and forfeited a further 5 days' pay. On 5 February 1916, now in Blackpool, he was absent from parade and was confined to barracks for 5 days and lost five days' pay. A few days later, on 10 February, he received a further 4 days confinement to barracks for failing to salute a commissioned officer.

On 9 June 1916, having spent 350 days in Britain, Ratcliffe embarked from Southampton and arrived in Le Havre the following day, joining his unit in the field on 20 June. The regiment had now been transferred to the 166<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the newly-formed 55<sup>th</sup> (West Lancashire) Division. They moved to the region of the Somme in late July 1916 taking over a section of front line near the village of Guillemont and were first in action at The Battle of Guillemont - it was on the second day of this engagement that Ratcliffe was killed.

Between 1 - 7 August the 1/10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been in reserve in trenches at Talus Boise, the old British front line. The Battalion War Diary report gives some detail of troop movement and actions between 7 - 10 August:

On the 7<sup>th</sup> orders were received that Battalion would be relieved that night and would proceed to BIVOUACS at GREAT BEAR, where they arrived at about midnight.

During the afternoon of the 8<sup>th</sup> orders were received that the Battn. would be prepared to move at short notice, & ultimately an order was issued by Brigade that Battalion would leave the camp at 8 P.M., & would proceed to trenches in front of GUILLEMONT, where they would attack.

Batt. moved as ordered & ultimately reached this trench about 4 A.M. on the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>.

On the way up to the trench orders were received that the Battalion would take part in an attack on GUILLEMONT at 4.20 A.M.

The Battalion attacked as ordered - four separate attacks being made, & ultimately occupied & ~~re-occupied~~ our original front line trench.

The casualties were very heavy, especially in officers, the Battalion being brought out of action by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt G.D. MORTON, who was acting adjutant.

Hostile machine gun fire proving the worst stumbling block.

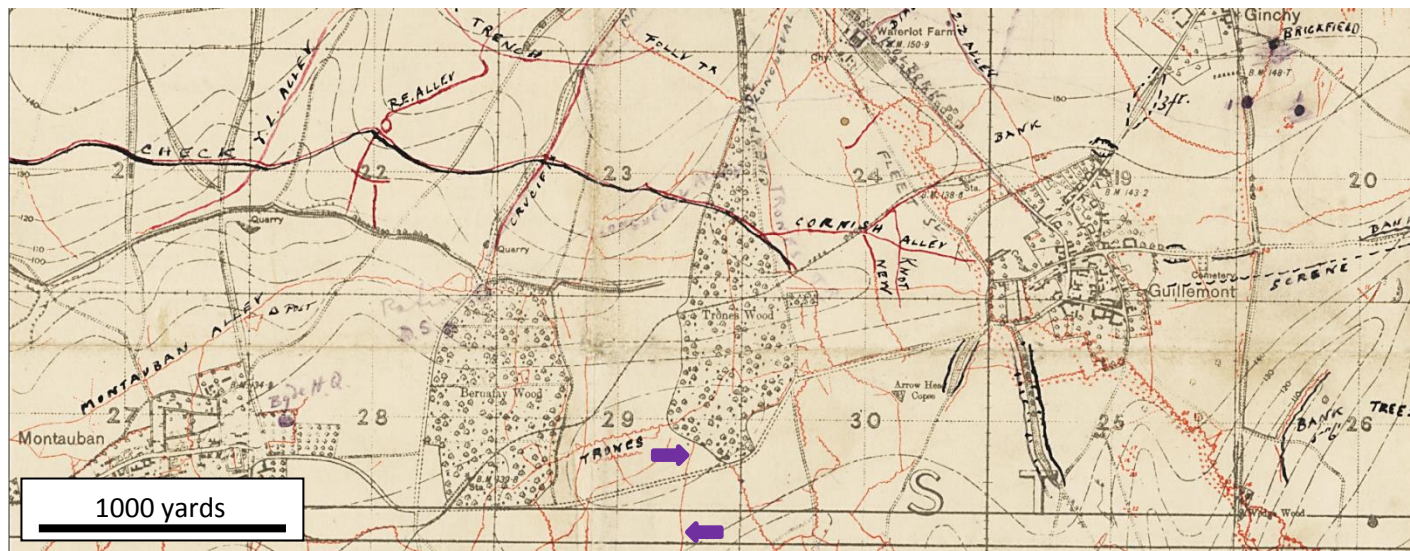
Orders were received that night that Battalion would be relieved by 1<sup>st</sup> LANCASHIRE, & would proceed to LIVERPOOL & LANCASTER trenches.

Major F.W.M. DREW (2<sup>nd</sup> in Command) assumed command vice Lt Col. T.R. DAVIDSON wounded, & a number of Officers & other ranks, who had been left behind to replace casualties in specialists' sections, rejoined the Battalion early in the evening from the transport lines.

Relief was completed at 10.45 P.M.

The report notes that the 1/10<sup>th</sup> Battalion took eight hours on the approach march to reach the assembly trenches in front of Guillemont, arriving there just 20 minutes before Zero Hour. Although the officers knew these trenches, the troops did not know the ground and it was not possible for the orders to be given until the very last moment. To compound the problem the trenches were still full of men of various regiments who had been involved in the fighting of the previous day. In fact, at 4.20am (Zero Hour) only the 1/10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, under J R Davidson, were ready to attack. However, supported by the 5<sup>th</sup> South Lancashire Regiment, waves of men moved forward under an artillery barrage only to find that the enemy's barbed-wire defences were intact.

*The 55<sup>th</sup> Division attacked at 4:20am on 8 August, into an easterly wind which with mist, dust and smoke from a German counter-barrage, made visual signalling impossible and delayed reports to the 55<sup>th</sup> Division headquarters until after 6:00am. Next to the French, a reinforced battalion of the 165<sup>th</sup> Brigade, advanced over the spur south of Guillemont and was then stopped by German defensive fire and driven under cover in shell-holes.....The left-hand*



Trench map of 5 August 1916 showing the situation around Trones Wood and the village of Guillemont four days before Ratcliffe Handley died. The War Diary notes that the troops moved to Liverpool and Lancaster Trenches on 8 August; although not named on this map these are known to be in the area south of Trones Wood and Liverpool Trench has been indicated by the purple arrows.

The trenches and fortifications on this map are shown in red; this indicates that, at this time (or immediately before) the area was held by the Germans.

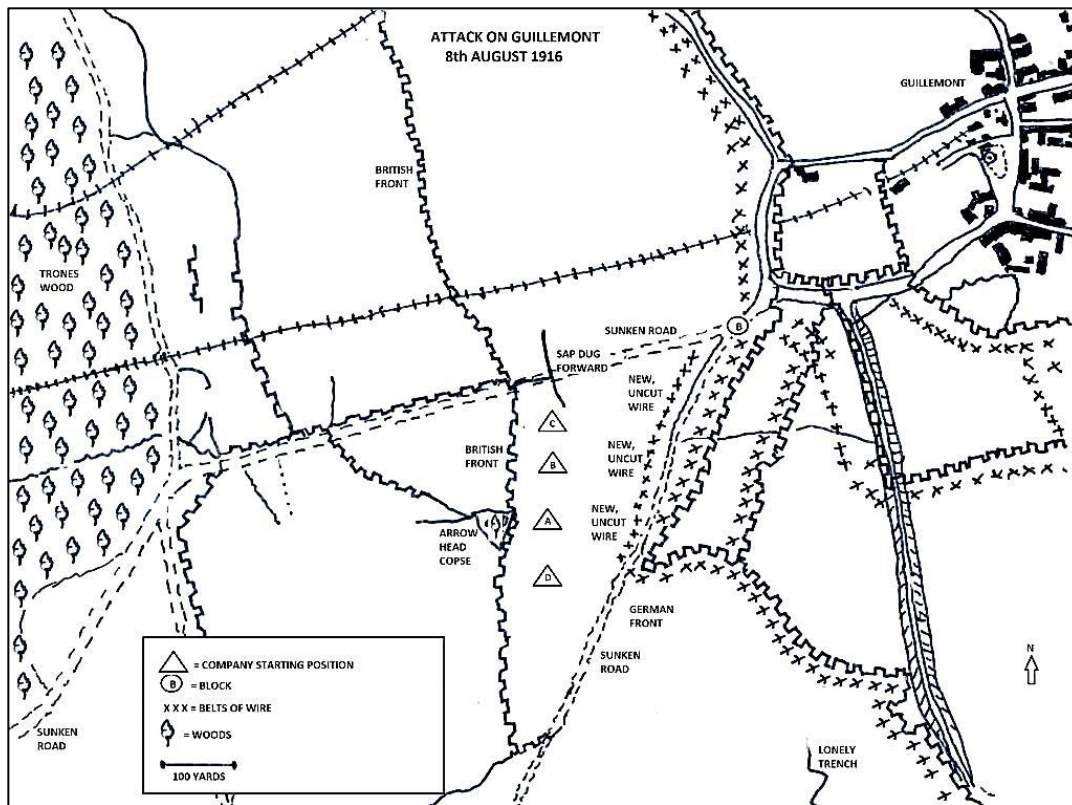
[Source : <http://digitalarchive.mcmaster.ca/islandora/object/macrepo%3A73316>]

*battalion broke through, either side of the quarry at the west side of Guillemont and entered the village but reinforcements sent to hold the captured front line behind them, were bombed out by a German counter-attack from the south. German machine-guns began to sweep no-man's-land and isolated the British troops in the village.....Despite all efforts communication broke down again during the morning, smoke and dust blocked the view of aircraft observers, no messages were received from Guillemont, the trenches east of Trônes Wood were congested with troops and bombarded by German artillery in the afternoon, which made it impossible for the British to attack again. The 55<sup>th</sup> Division commander Major-General H. Jeudwine, ordered the 164<sup>th</sup> Brigade to send more troops into the village after dark and Lieutenant-General Congreve, the XIII Corps commander and the Fourth Army headquarters, ordered another attack at 4:20am on 9 August.*

*By zero hour, some of the attacking battalions were in position and were met by massed machine-gun fire, when they advanced after a hurried bombardment. Disorganisation hampered the attack on the left, where the 166<sup>th</sup> Brigade was replacing the 164<sup>th</sup> Brigade. One battalion hugged the barrage and reached the German wire, where it had many casualties attempting to press on. The left-hand battalion was delayed, began its advance after the British barrage had lifted and was quickly forced under cover by German small-arms fire. Later in the day, an attack by the 165<sup>th</sup> Brigade, from the positions captured on 8 August also failed. To the north, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division attacked again with a battalion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade, south of the railway line, which was repulsed and an attack from Waterlot Farm also failed. The parties from the 55<sup>th</sup> Division, which had got into Guillemont either side of the quarry on 8 August and that of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, which had bombed its way along ZZ Trench, into the north end of the village amid much smoke and confusion, were quickly counter-attacked by German local reserves, until two more German battalions arrived and overwhelmed them. Isolated groups held out for a while at the quarry and more held out at the station, until overrun late on 9 August, being seen from the British lines moving towards Ginchy under German escort.*

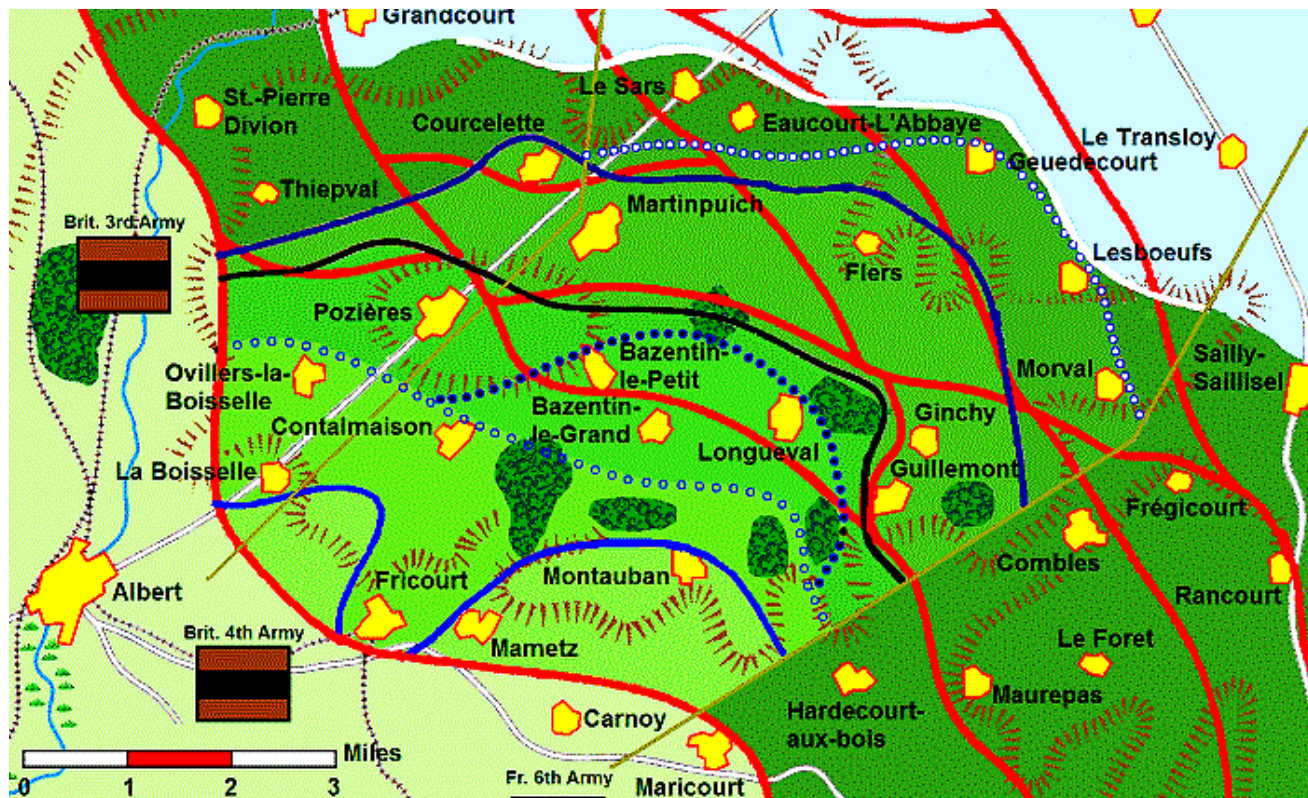
*Rawlinson met the XIII Corps commander and those of the 55<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> divisions on 9 August and suspended attacks, until much more thorough preparations had been made.*

[Adapted from Wikipedia]

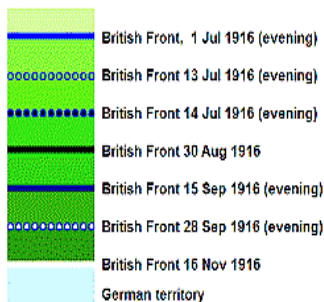


Sketch map showing the area of attack on 8 August and the position of the front line midway between Trones Wood (west side of map) and Guillemont (NE corner of map).

[Source: <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index>]



[Source: [www.canadiansoldiers.com](http://www.canadiansoldiers.com)]



Main German Positions

Allied Army Boundaries

The map shows the eastward movement of the Allied forces from the evening of 1 July to 16 November 1916. The Fourth Army had advanced close to Guillemont (south-east sector of this map) during The Battle of Bazentin Ridge (14 - 17 July) and the fall of Trones Wood on 14 July exposed the village to attack and British heavy artillery shells.

By 20 July, the shelling had smashed road surfaces and cratered adjacent fields but Guillemont offered serious resistance and, initially, the movement of British forces here was restricted. Indeed, the defence of Guillemont was judged by some observers to be the best performance of the war by the German army on the Western Front. When Guillemont finally fell to the Allies on 3 September 1916, and was secured by 6 September, the German commanders, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, ended the policy of defending ground at all costs and ordered the construction of the Siegfriedstellung (Hindenburg Line) 20 miles to the east.

At the time that Ratcliffe Handley was killed he was facing 6 months' imprisonment with hard labour, imposed by a Field General Court Martial for Ratcliffe's accidental discharge of his rifle in his dug-out which resulted in the wounding of three men, one of whom died subsequently of his wounds. Although no details of the offence are contained within the Service Record it is known that Ratcliffe's platoon had, before dawn (and before 4am) on the morning of Saturday 8 July, had the customary Stand To<sup>1</sup> before the troops returned to their dug-outs where the accidental discharge of the rifle occurred.



A destroyed German machine-gun post at Guillemont. [Source : <http://www.army.mod.uk/firstworldwarresources/somme-1916/german-dead-on-the-somme-6-september-1916>]



RAMC (Royal Army Medical Corps) men searching the packs of the dead for letters and effects to be sent to relatives after the Battle of Guillemont. [Source: <http://www.ww1cemeteries.com/ww1frenchextension/guillemontroad.htm>]

<sup>1</sup> Stand To was an abbreviation of Stand-to-Arms. The process of Stand To was observed in the morning and evening by both sides of the war in the trenches, most notably on the Western Front. Each man would be expected to stand on

An account of the enquiry is contained within the Service Record of Private Edward James Still <sup>2</sup> of the 1<sup>st</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Battalion The King's (Liverpool Regiment), the man who was injured severely and died shortly afterwards:

*Proceedings of Court of Enquiry assembled at: in the field 8 July 1916 under authority of the Officer Commanding (Lt. Colonel J. R. Davidson) 1/10<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Bn. The King's L'pool Regiment for the purpose of enquiring into the circumstances leading to the wounding of No. 5867 Pt. C. Duxbury <sup>3</sup>, 5870 Pt. R. Harrison and 6035 Pt. E. H. Still of this unit.*

*The court will record their opinion as to whether the wounding was purely accidental or due to negligence and if the latter they will record their opinion as to whether any person connected either directly or indirectly with the accident was in any way to blame.*

*The court will also record their opinion as to whether proper steps have been taken to bring 111<sup>rd</sup>. Army Routine Order No. 457 dated 1-7-16 <sup>4</sup> to the notice of all ranks.*

*Members*

*Cpt. A. G. Davidson*

*Lieut. L. B. Mill <sup>5</sup>*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. L. A. N. Slocock <sup>6</sup>*

} *1/10 Liverpool Rgt.*

*In attendance*

*The court having assembled proceed (sic) to take evidence.*

*1<sup>st</sup> Witness: Captain A K R Jaeger Liverpool Scottish states as follows:-*

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the trench fire step, rifle loaded, bayonet fixed. Stand-To lasted between half an hour and an hour, after which each man would be ordered to Stand Down; breakfast would follow in the morning.

Most enemy attacks were mounted either before dawn or shortly after dusk under cover of darkness. Consequently both sides took care to ensure adequate preparation at such times, manning the fire step an hour before dawn and dusk. [Adapted from <http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/standto.htm>]

<sup>2</sup> Edward was the son of William and Louisa Still, of "Fernlea," 10, Romsey Road, Shirley, Southampton. However, it is believed that Edward lived at Broadbelt Road, Walton, Liverpool. He was a timekeeper, aged 23 years 5 months when he attested. His army record notes that he 'Died of Wounds – Accidentally Killed'.

<sup>3</sup> This may have been misrecorded – he may have been Private W. R. Duxbury (Service Numbers 5847 and 357080) who was killed the following month, on 9 August 1916, and is buried at Guillemont Road Cemetery

<sup>4</sup> Another document states: *Extract from 111 Army Routine Orders 1-7-16 No. 457 **Discipline** Before cleaning any part of a rifle the magazine will invariably be removed and the bolt opened. Please take steps to ensure that all ranks are warned of this order.* (Syd.) B. Arkle Capt. 1/10 (Scottish) Bn. KLR To all OSC Coys & all specialists.

<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant Leonard Binning Mill died on 9 August 1916 - the same day that Ratcliffe Handley and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. L. A. N. Slocock died (see footnote 6) - aged 25. He was recorded as the son of A. J. Mill, of 4A, Sandringham Drive, Sefton Park, Liverpool, and the late Lawrence Mill. He is commemorated, as is Ratcliffe Handley, on the Thiepval Memorial.

<sup>6</sup> Second Lieutenant Lancelot Andrew Noel Slocock died, aged 29, on 9 August 1916 - the same day as Lieut. L. B. Mill (see footnote 5) and Ratcliffe Handley. Like Mill and Handley, he is also commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial. Slocock was recorded as being the son of Judith Emily Slocock, of North Lodge, Maidenhead, Berks, and the late Rev. F. H. Slocock. Educated at Marlborough College Slocock was an English International Rugby Footballer and the husband of Lena Slocock. His brother Captain Cyprian Henry Benson Noel Slocock also died in WW1 (3 April 1918, aged 21, Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry.

*I am in command of 'V' Company, to which Privates Handley, Duxbury, Harrison and Still belong.*

*I instructed each platoon sergeant to read to their respective platoons 111<sup>rd</sup>. Army Routine Order No. 457 dated 1-7-1916. The sergeants reported that this order had been brought to the notice of all ranks. It is the custom of the Company for the platoon sergeants to inspect their respective platoons' rifles at Stand Down in the morning and Stand To at night. On hearing of the accident I ordered that Pte. Handley be put under arrest.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Witness (The prisoner): Pte. H. R. Handley <sup>7</sup>, No. 4916 Liverpool Scottish states as follows:-*

*I had cleaned my rifle during Stand To and had carried out the instructions of 111<sup>rd</sup>. Army Routine Order No. 457 dated 1-7-1916 which had been read out to me. Contrary to the usual custom my rifle was not inspected at the word Stand Down. As the night had been a very wet one and it was raining very hard during Stand To I wiped my rifle over with an oily rag and reaching the shelter of my dug-out unconsciously I must have opened the cut-off <sup>8</sup> and drawn back the bolt and closed it again.*

*Continuing to use the oily rag I must have pressed the trigger causing the accident. I am certain that the cut-off was in and no cartridge in the chamber when I left the firing bay to go to my dug-out.*

This page and following - Ratcliffe Handley's statement to the Court of Enquiry, 8 July 1916

*2<sup>nd</sup> Witness. Pte Handley be put under arrest.  
(The Prisoner) Private H. R. Handley no 4916. Liverpool Scottish states as follows:-  
I had cleaned my rifle during Stand To and had carried out the instructions of 111<sup>rd</sup> Army Routine Order no 457 dated 1-7-1916 which had been read out to me.  
Contrary to the usual custom my rifle was not inspected at the word Stand down.  
As the night had been a very wet one and it was raining very hard during*

<sup>7</sup> It is not clear why, through this document, Ratcliffe is named as H. R. Handley - no other reference is known from other sources or documents to him having a first name other than Ratcliffe.

<sup>8</sup> An interesting feature of many late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century bolt-action rifles was the magazine cut-off, sometimes called a feed interrupter. This was a mechanical device that prevented the rifle from loading a round from the magazine, requiring the shooter to manually load each individual round as he fired, saving the rounds in the magazine for short periods of rapid fire when ordered to use them. Most military authorities that specified them assumed that their riflemen would waste ammunition indiscriminately if allowed to load from the magazine all the time.[23] By the middle of World War I, most manufacturers deleted this feature to save costs and manufacturing time; it is also likely that battlefield experience had proven the futility of this philosophy.  
[[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magazine\\_\(firearms\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magazine_(firearms))]

2<sup>nd</sup> Witness. Stand To, I wiped my rifle over with an oily rag on reaching the shelter of my dug-out.  
Unconsciously I must have opened the cut-off and drawn back the bolt and closed it again.  
Continuing to use the oily rag I must have pressed the trigger, causing the accident.  
I am certain that the cut-off was in and no cartridge in the chamber when I left the firing bay to go to my dug-out.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Witness : Private R. C. Potter, No. 5553, Liverpool Scottish states as follows:-*

*I was in the dug-out when the accident happened. I had just hung up my rifle when I heard a loud report and found that Private Still was badly hit. In addition, two other men were wounded. I bound up Private Still and sent for stretchers bearers. I had had the 111<sup>rd</sup>. Army Routine Order No. 457 dated 1-7-1916 read out to me. This was the first morning that my rifle had not been inspected at Stand Down <sup>9</sup>.*

*4<sup>th</sup> Witness: Private R. O. Jones <sup>10</sup>, No. 6314, Liverpool Scottish states as follows:-  
I was in the dug-out when the accident happened. I saw Pte. Handley wiping his rifle, and clearly heard him open and close the bolt.  
Immediately afterwards there was a shot fired, and I saw that Pte. Still was hit and went to his assistance. As soon as Stand Down was ordered I went to my dug-out acting on orders and without my rifle being inspected.*

*5<sup>th</sup> Witness: Sergt. Runciman, No. 4164, Liverpool Scottish states as follows:-  
I am platoon sergeant of No.4 Platoon 'V' Company. I am personally responsible to my O.C. Company <sup>11</sup> that rifles are inspected at Stand Down and Stand To.  
They were not inspected this morning on account of the heavy rain. I had had no orders from an officer that rifles were not to be inspected but I used my own judgment and dismissed the men to their dug-outs as soon as Stand Down was passed along from the right. I intended to inspect all rifles later.*

<sup>9</sup> Throughout this enquiry great importance was given to the lack of inspection of the men's rifles after Stand Down and before they returned to their dug-outs although this was not seen to contribute to the accident.

<sup>10</sup> Private R.O. Jones died, aged 31, on 14 August 1916 – this was five days after Ratcliffe Handley died. Jones was the son of Evan and Bridget Evans of Bryman Gerddi, Llanberis, North Wales. He was buried at Corbie Communal Cemetery.

<sup>11</sup> OC is the abbreviation for Officer Commanding.

6<sup>th</sup> Witness: Captain N. G. Chavasse <sup>12</sup> RAMC att<sup>d</sup>. Liverpool Scottish states as follows:-

On July 8<sup>th</sup> 1916 at about 4.15am I was summoned to the Osiers [?] Trench. There, in a dug-out by the road, were three wounded men:

- 1) Pte. Still, 'V' Company - Bullet wound of the apex of the left lung. This wound was very serious and likely to prove fatal.
- 2) Pte. Harrison, 'V' Company - Wounds of left leg, both arms, head and chest. Slight wound of right leg. These wounds appear to have been made by the casing and splinters of a bullet. The wound of the left leg is serious and likely to incapacitate him for at least three months.
- 3) Pte. Duxbury, 'V' Company - Slight graze of cheek. This wound will not incapacitate him or impair his efficiency as a soldier.

*Finding: It is the opinion of this court that the wounding was due to the negligence of Pte. Handley. The court is fully satisfied that the 111<sup>rd</sup>. Army Routine Order No. 457 dated 1-7-1916 had been brought to the notice of all ranks.*

*Signed*

A. G. Davidson	Capt.
L. B. Mill	Lieut.
L. A. N. Slocock	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieut.

1. Forwarded: I consider that Pte. H. R. HANDLEY was guilty of negligence in that he did not remove the magazine and open the bolt before wiping his rifle.

2. I am also of opinion that Sgt. RUNCIMAN was at fault in not inspecting the rifles of his platoon at Stand Down, but as his omission to do this had no bearing on the cause of the accident I do not consider he was guilty of negligence so far as the accidental wounding is concerned.

3. Private Still was admitted to the Advanced Dressing Station of 1/3 West Lancashire F.A. at Grosville and died there on the morning of July 8<sup>th</sup>.

4. Private Handley has been put under arrest.

5. 111<sup>rd</sup>. Army Routine Order No. 457 dated 1/7/16 will be read out to all ranks again on three successive days and certificates obtained from all OCs Companies and specialists that this has been done.

*Signed*

Lieutenant Col. J. R. Davidson [several words here are unreadable] In the field 9<sup>7</sup>/16

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<sup>12</sup> Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC and Bar, M C, Mentioned in Despatches, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, was killed on 4 August 1917, aged 32. He is one of only three people to be awarded a Victoria Cross twice and is buried at the Brandhoek New Military Cemetery. Noel Chavasse was the son of The Right Rev. The Lord Bishop of Liverpool, of The Palace, 19, Abercromby Square, Liverpool. Born in Oxford, but living most of his life in Liverpool, Noel Chavasse was a natural sportsman, representing Oxford University at athletics and lacrosse. He and his identical twin brother, Christopher, ran for Great Britain at the 1908 Olympics in London: Noel finished third and Christopher second in the 400 metres heats but their times were not fast enough to progress further. His brother, Aidan also died in WW1. [See the text box in entry 93: James Edward Anderson for an account of Noel Godfrey Chavasse]

A following document records that, following the conclusions of the Court of Enquiry, Ratcliffe Handley would be tried at a Court Martial:

A/3/22  
10/7/16

081239/57

Reference my casualty wire 06.30 dtd 9 inst.  
I concur in the findings of the Court -  
Pte Handley will be tried by Court Martial.  
Ptes Duxbury Harrison and Still were  
on duty at the time of the accident and are  
in no way to blame.  
Enquiry is being made whether the platoon commanders  
of the company concerned do not inspect their platoon  
at stand to.

L. Green Wilkinson  
Brig. General  
Com. of 166<sup>th</sup> Inf. Bde.  
9/7/16

A/3/22  
10/7/16

Reference my casualty wire 06.30  
dtd. 9 inst.  
I concur in the findings of the  
Court - Pte. Handley will be tried  
by Court Martial. Ptes. Duxbury,  
Harrison and Still were on duty at  
the time of the accident and are in  
no way to blame.  
Enquiry is being made whether the  
platoon commanders of the  
Company concerned do not  
inspect their platoon at Stand To.

L. Green Wilkinson  
Brig. General  
Com. of 166<sup>th</sup> Inf. Bde.

9/7/16

Private Still died at 12.50pm on 8 July 1916 in 1/3 West Lancashire Field Ambulance from accidental wounds to the chest which penetrated his lungs. He was buried at Bellacourt Military Cemetery. Officially, it was recorded that he had *Died from wounds received in action.*

Despite his arrest and sentence, Ratcliffe Handley continued to serve in the front line and was killed on 9 August 1916, exactly one month after his Court Martial.

92431 - V6420/1555 - 2,000,000 - J. K. & Co., Ltd. - Forms B. 103/1.

Army Form B. 103.

**Casualty Form - Active Service.**

Regiment or Corps 10th (SCOTTISH) INF. BATT. K.L.R.

Regimental No. 6035 Rank Private Name Still, Edward James

Enlisted (a) 5.1.16 Terms of Service (a) Duration of War Service reckons from (a) 5.1.1916

Date of promotion } Date of appointment } Numerical position on }  
to present rank } to lance rank } roll of N.C.Os. }

Extended } Re-engaged } Qualification (b) Bombier

Report	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents.
Embarked	Southampton 9/6/16.	Disembarked	Havre 10/6/16.	Joined Unit 20/6/16.
9/7/16	Died in 1/3 West Lancashire Field Ambulance 8.7.16 (at 12.5 P.M.) from "Wound. Chest" (acc) Penetrating Lungs.			Telegram 4 B218

of TERRITORIAL INFANTRY RECORDS (G.H.O.) 3rd ECHOLON

Following Ratcliffe's death the Army Commander suspended the sentence; although the sentence couldn't be imposed it remained on his record.

Army Form W. 3104.

**ARMY (SUSPENSION OF SENTENCES) ACT.**

With reference to the proceedings of a Field General  
Court Martial in the case of No. 4916 P. R. Handley  
110th Kings Liverpool Regt.  
I have directed that he be not committed to prison, and I request that you  
will issue orders as to his disposal.

-Confirming Officer-

I direct that the sentence of 6 months 1-11-16 (which  
I hereby \_\_\_\_\_) be suspended.

I direct that the sentence of \_\_\_\_\_ (which  
Superior Authority under the Act.  
\_\_\_\_\_ be put into execution.

17/5/16 for General Commanding 1st Army

Following Ratcliffe's death his personal effects, amounting to just some photos, a safety razor and a wallet, were returned to his widow, Catherine, at 3 Gorsey Lane, Clock Face, St Helens.

Catherine expressed a number of concerns in a postcard, dated November 20, and addressed to 'Dear Colonel'. The (partly indecipherable) comments she makes refer to items that she has not received and money that she felt was hers: *I received the items but no money. How is it I don't get what belongs to me...will you kindly get it for me as I need it very badly and I would like to get his Will Book. I ought to have that & he did have a nice new watch too but his officer does not mention that. I have lost a good husband and I am heartbroken.*

Dear General,  
I received the items but no money. How is it I don't get what belongs to me...will you kindly get it for me as I need it very badly and I would like to get his Will Book. I ought to have that & he did have a nice new watch too but his officer does not mention that. I have lost a good husband and I am heartbroken.

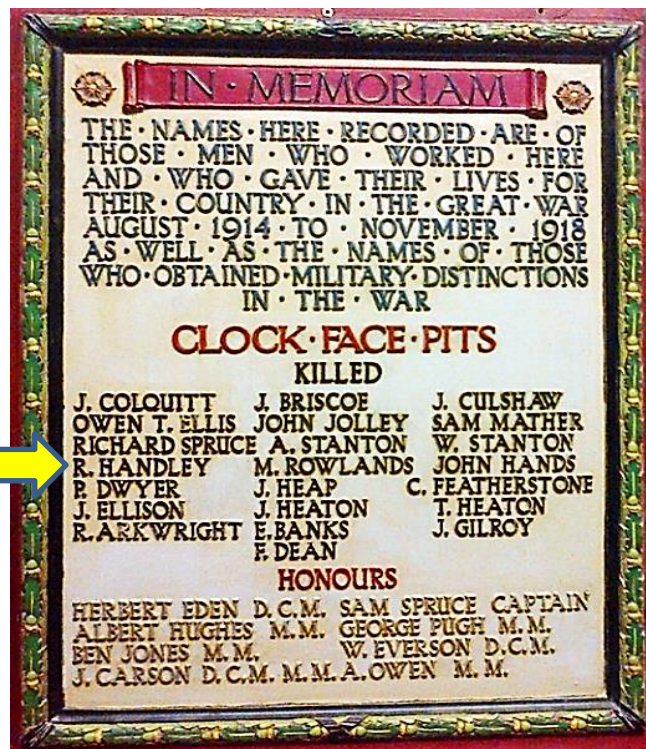
The reverse side of Catherine Handley's postcard to his army unit expressing various concerns. The card is, in part, illegible although the sentiments she expresses are clear.

In 1919 the Minister of Pensions awarded Catherine Handley 21 shillings per week from 19 February for herself and her two children (nothing is known of the second child). Ratcliffe had served for just 62 days in France before he was killed.

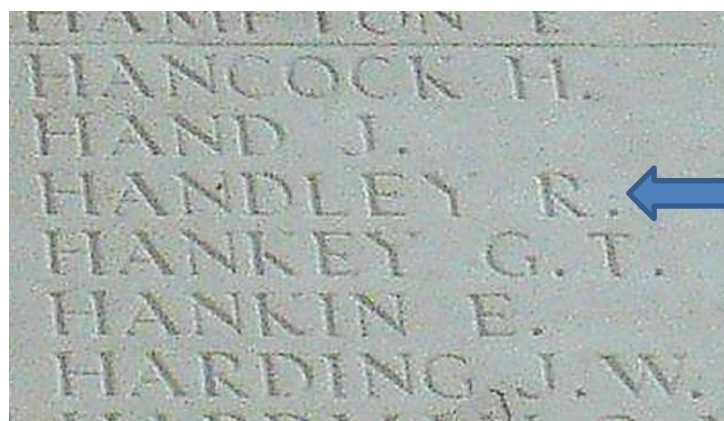
Ratcliffe Handley is commemorated on a family grave at Neston Parish Church, on the Clock Face Colliery Memorial, St Helens and on the St Helens Roll of Honour.

*Chester Chronicle* - Saturday  
9 September 1916

**NESTON.**  
**MEMORIAL SERVICE.**—A memorial service was held at the Parish Church on Sunday by the Loyal Order of Ancient Shepherds, Victoria Jubilee Lodge, for two members of the society, Bro. Albert Roberts and Bro. Ratcliffe Handley, who had been killed in action. It was arranged that the members should meet at their headquarters, the Town Hall, and from there proceed in procession, carrying their crooks draped with black ribbons, etc., to the church. The curate (the Rev. M. Harris) officiated, and in his sermon specially referred to the death of Mr. Pritchard, of Little Neston, and to the two members of the above society, "who had each nobly laid down his life for his country." Appropriate hymns were chosen, and the Dead March pealed from the organ as the congregation left the church. Over forty members were present; others were prevented from attending through the inclement weather. Noticeable amongst them were Mr. Downes, who during the week had suffered bereavement through the death of his wife, and his brothers-in-law, Messrs. Weaver. After the service they proceeded back to the Town Hall, where the chairman, Mr. J. Cottrell, made a brief address. Amongst those present were the chairman and secretary, Bro. J. Cottrell; Bro. J. Leadbetter, assistant secretary; Bro. J. Anyon, trustee; Bro. W. Smith, Worthy Master; Bro. E. Jones, Deputy Worthy Master; Bro. R. Jones Past Master; and members of the committee.



Clock Face Colliery WW1 Memorial, Bold, St Helens  
[<http://www.sthelensrollsofhonour.co.uk/clockfacecolliery1>]



The inscription on the Thiepval Memorial, Thiepval, Departement de la Somme, Picardie, France

HANDLEY, Pte. Ratcliffe, 4916. 1st/10th Bn. The King's Liverpool Regt. 9th Aug., 1916. Age 28. Son of William and Mary Handley, of 8, Gladstone Rd., Neston, Cheshire; husband of Catherine Handley, of 3, Gorsey Lane, Clock Face, St. Helens, Lancs.

Commonwealth War Graves, 1914-1921

William Robert Handley, the son of Ratcliffe and Catherine, married Phoebe Webster, 28, at St Mary's Church, Great Sankey, on 4 Feb 1942. William, 29, was a Leading Aircraftsman in the RAF and gave his abode as Broad Oak Inn, Great Sankey, and his father was recorded as 'Ratcliffe Handley, Dec., Miner'. Phoebe's father, William Webster (deceased) was a coal merchant. William has not been located in the 1939 Register.

It is unknown whether Catherine Handley, Ratcliffe's widow, remarried, but a Catherine Handley died in the Manchester area in mid-1959 aged 70.

Some details of Maria Handley, Ratcliffe's sister, is given earlier in this account.

Annie Handley, Ratcliffe's sister, married Benjamin James Walker at a Civil Marriage on Wirral in July / September 1914.

Mary Handley, Ratcliffe's mother, died on 1 June 1915 aged 67 and William, his father, died on 16 March 1916 (just 5 months before Ratcliffe) also aged 67.

Ratcliffe Handley is commemorated on the base of a memorial in Neston Parish Churchyard:



Ratcliffe Handley [Source: Ancestry]



The base of the collapsed memorial cross on the Handley /Oxton grave, Neston Parish Churchyard.

The left faces are inscribed:

*W. Handley Died March 16<sup>th</sup> 1916 Aged 67 Years* (This is William Handley, Ratcliffe's father)

*Also P<sup>TE</sup> R. Handley Killed in France August 9<sup>th</sup> 1916 Aged 29 Years*

*Also Frank Oxtan Died 16<sup>th</sup> February 1919 Aged 52 Years*

The right face is inscribed:

*Marie, Dearly Beloved Wife of Harry Oxtan Who Died 1<sup>st</sup> March 1945 Aged 58 Years "At Rest"* (Marie was Maria Handley, Ratcliffe's sister, who had married James Henry Oxtan in 1908).

There are no inscriptions on the other faces of the plinth.

320285	8/15/1914	Handley Ratcliffe	10th Batt Liverpool Reg. Pte. 4916.	9-8-16. Tracer. 9/16. 11/16	Preston - - - - - - 8 0. 14 4	Dr bal on Mfr acc £5/19/6 Further credit of 8-9 Remaining Dr Bal. £ 5.10.9 Further credit 14-4. Final Dr Bal. £.4-16-5 - 14 4 Preston 10-17 R P Co Reel - 14 4 1.4.20. Paid to Catherine 4 - -
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WAR GRATUITY  
 19/20 2/14  
 Regd. Paper 2/10000  
 Serial No. 4834 Sub 2

# 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.

Ratcliffe Handley appears to have accrued a credit of 14s 4d and this was received by his widow Catherine, as sole legatee. Catherine received also the £4 War Gratuity.

The total payment, £4 14s 4d, is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of about £730 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.



8 Gladstone Road, Neston

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
8 HANDLEY Ratcliffe	L'POOL R	Pte	4916
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	M/2/102B <sup>2</sup>	98B	
BRITISH	- - -	- - -	
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920