

78: James Roscoe

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: James Roscoe

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 1st Bn. South Wales Borderers

Service Number: 42379

Date of Death: 10 November 1917

Age at Death: ?

Buried / Commemorated at: Tyne Cot Memorial, Zonnebeke, Arrondissement Ieper, West Flanders, Belgium

Additional information given by CWGC: None

James Roscoe was one of the last of the children (possibly the 10th) of fisherman William and Mary Ann Roscoe of Little Neston. James was born on 16 April 1890 and he was baptised at St Winefride's RC church in Neston the following day.

William Roscoe of Little Neston, the son of labourer Thomas and Ann Roscoe, was baptised at St Winefride's church on 10 October 1851. He married Mary Ann Murray, the daughter of Richard (deceased) and Mary Murray of Little Neston, at St Winefride's on 19 June 1871. Ann Roscoe died on 1 November 1893 in Neston and Thomas Roscoe died on 28 June 1904 in Poulton-cum-Spital.

In the 1881 census William (29, labourer) and Mary Ann (27), with three children (Mary Ellen, 9; Thomas; 7; John, 4) were living in Little Neston. By 1891, although still in Little Neston, William had become a fisherman and the family had expanded:

[illegible]

1891 census (extract) – Little Neston

William Roscoe	39	fisherman	born Little Neston
Mary Ann	39		born Little Neston
Thomas	17	fisherman	born Little Neston
John	14		born Little Neston
William	8		born Little Neston
Richard	7		born Little Neston
Robert	4		born Little Neston
Joseph	2		born Little Neston
James	11 months		born Little Neston

By 1901 it appears as though William and Mary Ann Roscoe were estranged as they appear separately in the census for that year with Mary Ann, and son James, living at Golden Lion Yard off Neston High Street:

1901 census (extract) – Golden Lion Yard, Neston High Street

Meanwhile, William, and some of the other children, were living in Norman's Cottages on Badger Butt (now Badger Bait) in Little Neston:

1901 census (extract) – Norman's Cottages, Badger Butt, Little Neston

Robert Roscoe, James' older brother, was also to die in WW1 - he was killed at Gallipoli on 22 August 1915 [see entry **79: Robert Roscoe**].

By 1911 James was living with his father and two brothers on Badger Butt:

1911 census (condensed) – Badger Butt, Little Neston

William Roscoe recorded that he had been married for 39 years and, of their 10 children nine were still alive but *two* had died! In fact, at least 12 children had been born.

Below his entry, William has written *wife* and *separated*, both words then crossed through.

Although the Service Record of James Roscoe has not been found it is known that he served initially with the Liverpool Regiment (Service N^o. 43935) transferring to the Labour Corps (Service N^o. 47776) before joining the South Wales Borderers (Service

Number 42379). A brief account of the Labour Corps is included at the end of this account.

It is not possible to reconstruct James's army service as no dates are known.

The only detail known for certain is that James was serving with the 1st Bn. South Wales Borderers when he died in November 1917. The battalion was part of the 3rd Brigade in the 1st Division and landed at Le Havre on 3 August 1914 and the Battalion's situation in late 1917/early 1918 was:

3rd YPRES 1917

In March 1917, when the Germans retired 'according to plan' to the Hindenburg Line, the First Division found itself detailed for a spell of road-making; this was followed in April by a transfer to Flanders and before long by its selection for employment in that descent 1917-18 on the Flanders coast in which it was hoped the Ypres offensive of 1917 would culminate. This involved its seclusion behind the barbed-wire of the 'Hush Hush' camp at Le Clipon, with its rumours of awful epidemics and its training for the descent which never came off. Not till the very end of 1917, when it was employed in the closing stages of "Third Ypres", was the 1 SWB again in action, and then the main difficulty was that of movement, of reaching the Germans rather than of defeating them. Mud foiled the attack of 10th November 1917, along the Goudberg Spur, and in the mud of 'the Salient' the 1st Battalion spent the winter and early spring, moving down to the Givenchy area in April in time to come in for the second of the great German 'pushes' of 1918 and to distinguish itself greatly by its stubborn and highly successful defence of Loigne Chateau on 18th April, another notable achievement of vital importance.

[Extracted from: 1st Battalion South Wales Borderers : World War 1 : Fact Sheet 3-B07-01]

On 6 November 1917 Passchendaele was captured (following The First Battle of Passchendaele on 12 October) but the battle for the high ground to the north of the town was still raging. The Allied forces, including the 1st South Wales Borderers and the Canadian 8th Army had established a defensive line on the Goudberg Spur, a ridge with small farm houses and buildings occupied by the German forces.

A final British offensive was planned for 10 November 1917. At 5.00am the 1st Battalion South Wales Borderers moved north from Valour Farm after British artillery had attacked the German positions but the troops found the conditions difficult as the land was covered with mud-filled bomb craters and water-filled trenches. Orientation across this terrain was difficult as the earlier shelling had removed many landmarks and the positions of the German entrenchments were impossible to locate accurately. In one instance the 'A' Company was shelled by their own artillery and, as the German counter attacks strengthened, the operation became bogged down. It was during this offensive, on 10 November 1917, that James Roscoe died.

The actions on 9 & 10 November are detailed in the War Diaries of the 1st Battalion South Wales Borderers:

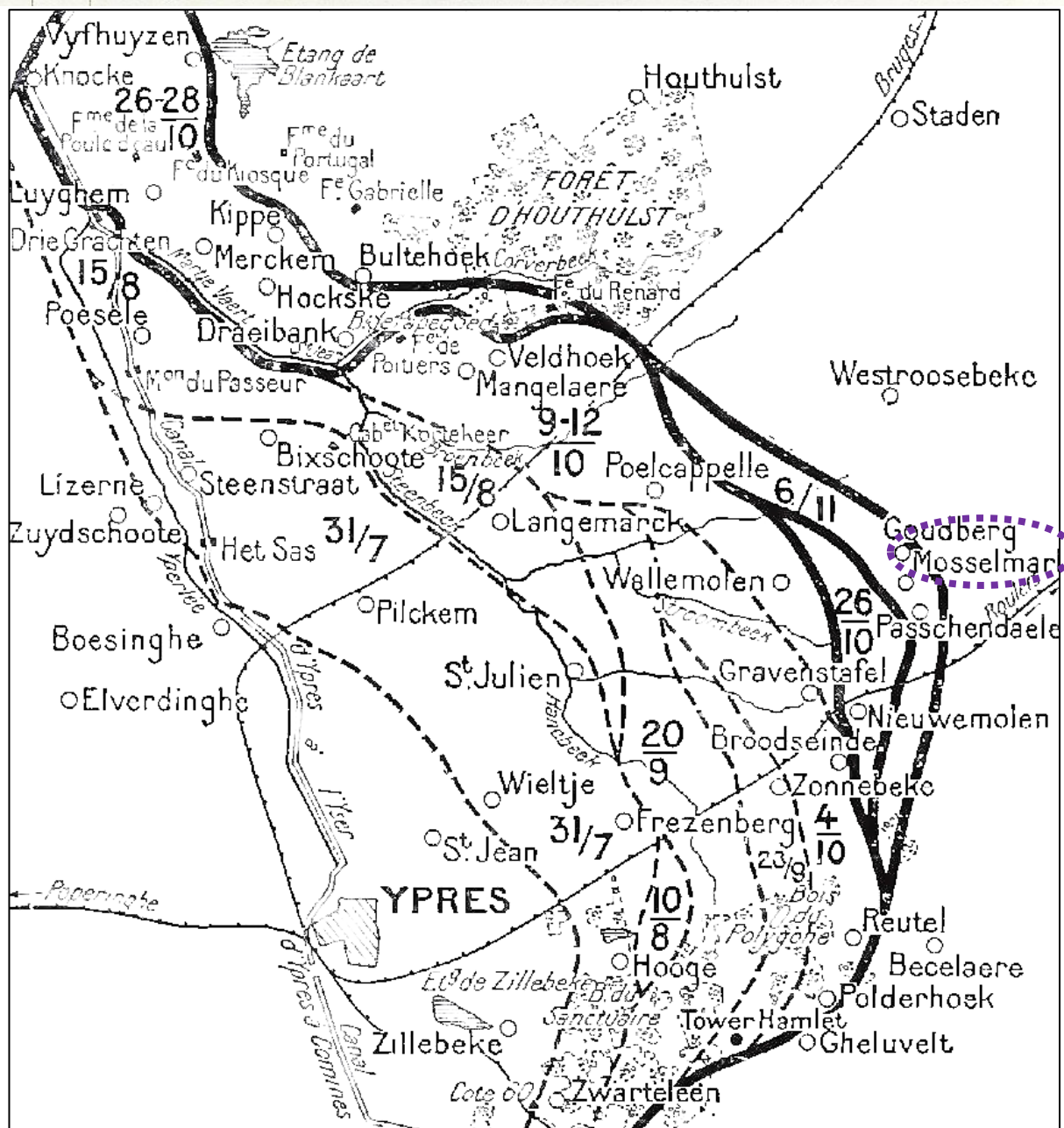
Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II, and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.

(Erase heading not required.)

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information
In the Field.	9th Nov/17 (Contd)		A fine day, every-one in great spirits. Great aerial activity and six bombs each unloaded one bomb into the camp, wounding 15 ranks, of which one died of wounds. very busy day completing details for the "show". All the Divisional Staff came to see us, including the Major-General, all very cheery and high hopes of success. The day passed slowly and at last, 6 p.m., we moved off guided by officers from the 6th Welsh via NO.6 track - SPRIET FARM - KANSAS CROSS - BELLEUE, very tiring under foot and large loads to carry, however it all comes in the day's work. No trouble up to point of assembly except near BELLEUE. "B" Company lost a few men and "C" Company a Lewis Gunner complete with gun, which was found by Lieut Robertson next morning.
	10/Nov/17.		OVER TOP. For account of operations see the following sheet. One item I alone can add and that is that one time in the afternoon Bn H.Q. during a hostile counter-attack had to turn out and form a strong point. weather was appalling. All ranks did splendidly, hostile fire was very, very heavy and was directed from three sides. It shows the discipline of the Regiment by saying "everyone stuck to it" and the stretcher bearers deserve all praise for their gallant work; which shows that they had been ably trained and prepared by Capt Campbell.
In the Field.	10/11/17.		Report on operations on the 10th & 11th November 1917 by the 1st Battalion South Wales Borderers. Battalion left Irish Farm Camp at 8.50 p.m. on the 9th Nov and proceeded up to AALOUR FARM to form up at the "jumping off" tape on the left of the Canadians. There were few casualties on the march up until the Battalion reached VALOUR FARM when "A" Company lost one platoon all except 5 men and "B" Company had about 17 casualties. This caused an alteration of the disposition of platoons, which took place on the tape without any interference. The Bn was in a position of readiness on the tape soon after 3 a.m. the 10th inst and were not molested by the enemy. from 4 a.m. till zero the Hun had a fairly heavy barrage on the front line and the rear of the forward area. Touch was gained with the Canadians before moving off.. At zero the Bn moved forward but before they had gone 30 yards got amongst our own barrag which caused a number of casualties and forced the Bn off to the right behind the Canadian barrage, which was very thick. Our own barrage (enfilade) was very hard to follow and seemed very ragged. As a result of this and the Bn moving to the right behind the Canadian barrage the ground between VOCATION and VIRILE was not covered. VENTURE FARM and VIRTUE were not occupied by the enemy. The troops on the right managed to get right up to the ⁵² contour on the left of the Canadians where they dug in.
In the Field	10/11/17. (Continued)		A few men managed to form a post just SOUTH of VOCATION FARM. The counter-attack Company took up its position just SOUTH of VIRTUE FARM. From zero onwards the Hun brought his barrage back and distributed it between our original front line and VOCATION FARM; this barrage was very heavy. On the attack approaching VOCATION and VOX FARMS the enemy sent up a flare breaking into two green or blue lights whereupon his barrage came down very thickly round these farms. Machine gun fire was experienced from VIRILE and VOX FARMS also from the trench running between these farms, also a good deal of sniping. The enemy's first counter-attack developed about 7.15 a.m. and came from the direction of MALLETT COPSE due South towards GOUDBERG COPSE and VOX FARM and also upon the Canadian front. This was successfully dealt with by the Lewis Guns from "D" Coy and the post near VOCATION, though a number of the enemy managed to get down to the trench near VIRILE and also into GOUDBERG COPSE. The counter-attack seems to have forced back the Canadian left. A number of hostile E.A. flew over our line and fired at our posts and brought hostile artillery fire to bear on them. Between 12 noon and 1 p.m. the enemy again came forward and got down through VOX and VIRILE and about 1.30 p.m. the post at VOCATION had to withdraw owing to the enemy getting round their left rear. About 4 p.m. the line was

In the Field	10-11/11/17	<p>established from VENTURE to VALOUR FARM. Just after dark one Company of the Gloucesters arrived at VALOUR and were put in on the left to try and get in touch with the troops on the left. This they failed to do as the distance was too great. The night of the 10/11th was uneventful except for hostile shelling. Hostile aircraft were very active over our lines on the 11th and continually fired at our men.</p> <p>"A" and "B" Company of the Gloucesters were in support at Bn H.Q. and on the 11th "B" Company of that Regiment was pushed up to occupy VAPOUR and VANITY FARMS and VINE COTTAGES and to get in touch with the left at SOURCE and the right at VALOUR. This they did, and on the afternoon of the 11th the whole line was in touch. The night of the 11th/12th the Battalion was relieved by the LOYAL NORTH LANCES, relief being completed about daylight on the 12th instant.</p> <p>At the commencement of the operations the going was fairly good, but directly rain fell the ground got in a very bad state and made movement in the crater area very difficult.</p>
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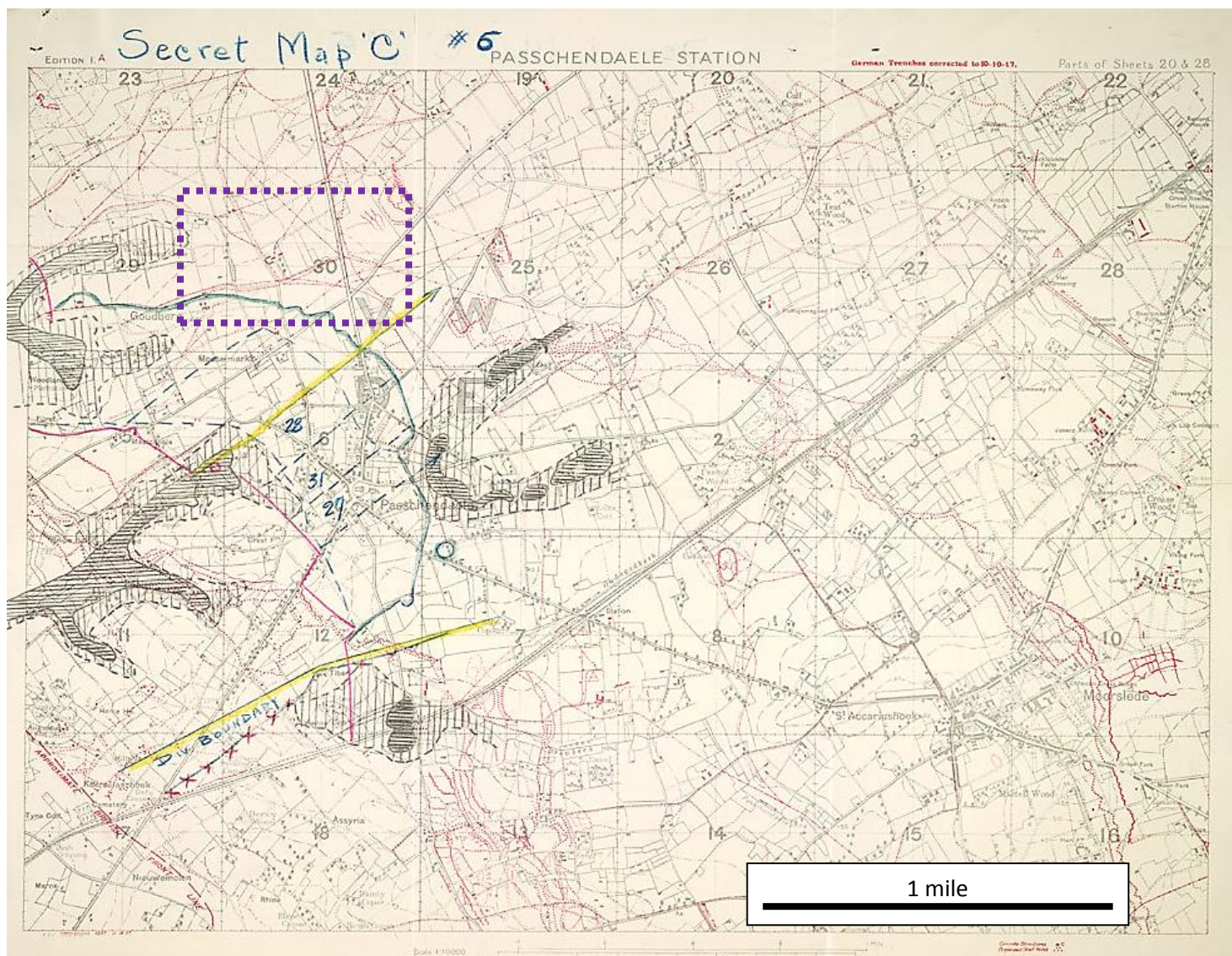


Allied advances, 22 October - 6 November 1917

The area of Goudberg (mentioned in the War Diaries extract) and Passchendaele lie on the eastern side of this map. Goudberg has been encircled in purple.

Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Battle_of_Passchendaele#/media/File:Front_line_22_October_-_6_November.jpg



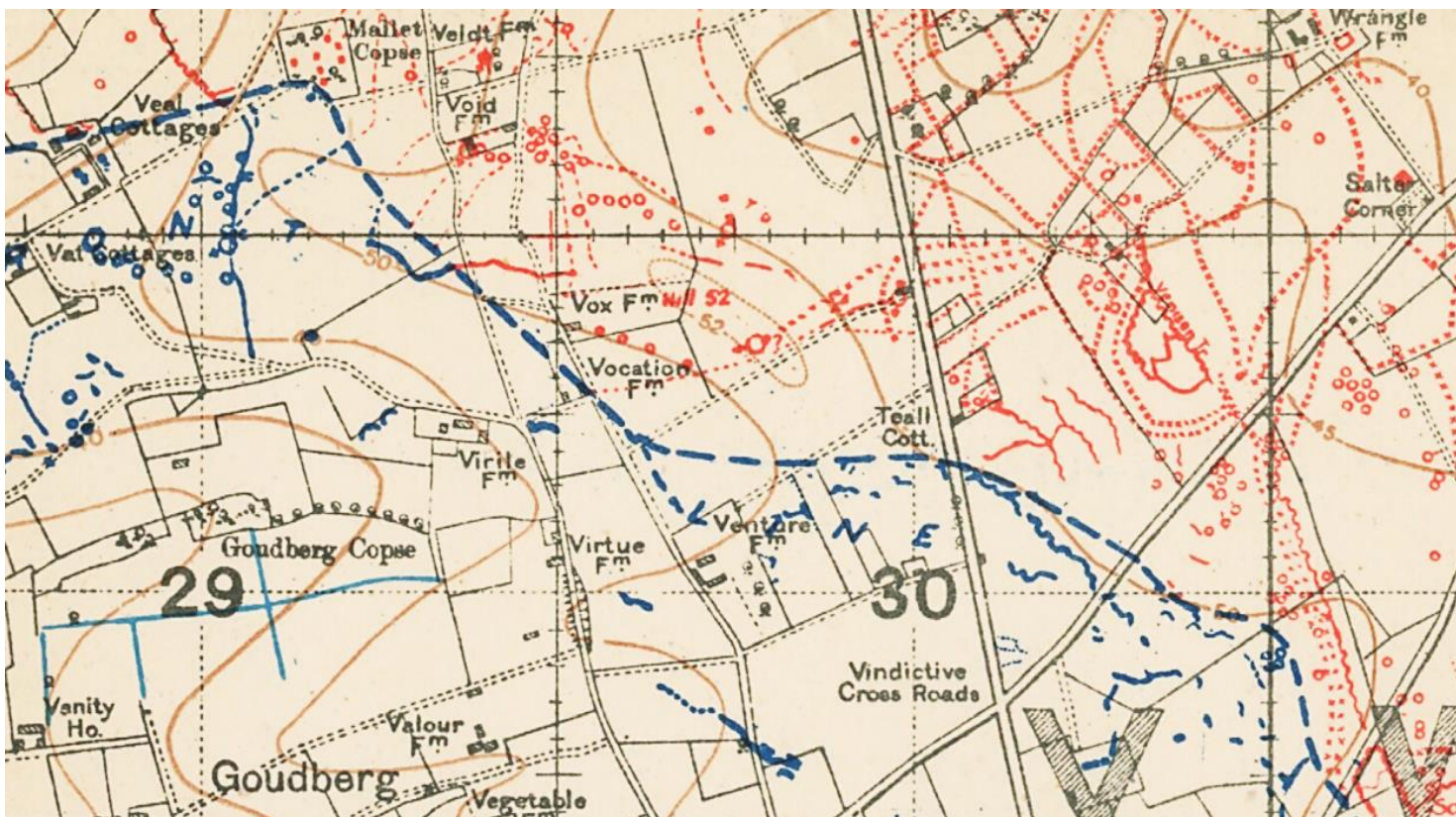
Third stage planning map of the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

The 1st Battalion South Wales Borderers were in close proximity to the Canadian forces during the conflict. The area of conflict involving the 1st Battalion South Wales Borderers, and where James Roscoe died, is enclosed by the purple rectangle. This area is shown in more detail on the trench map on the following page. The small settlement of Passchendaele lies a short distance to the south.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Battle_of_Passchendaele#/media/File:Front_line_22_October_-_6_November.jpg



The Passchendaele landscape in November 1917



½ mile

Trench map of the area in which James Roscoe was killed showing many of the locations recorded in the War Diary extract. This map, with the trenches corrected to 17 December 1917 (German trench positions are in red, Allied in blue) shows the front line (dashed blue line) and indicates that the Allies had gained some ground to the north and east of Goudberg but that the Germans had extensive trenches and fortifications to the east. [Source: <http://maps.nls.uk/view/101464870>]

Australian gunners on a duckboard track in Château Wood near Hooze, 29 October 1917. Photo by Frank Hurley. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Passchendaele



Two French soldiers beside a muddy cemetery on the Passchendaele battlefield.

Source: <http://www.army.mod.uk/firstworldwarresources/passchendaele-3rd-ypres-1917/graveyard-at-passchendaele-1917>

THE THRILL OF VICTORY.

BRITAIN'S GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT.

Australian and N.Z. Cable Association.

LONDON, November 7.

(Received Nov. 7, at 11.40 p.m.)

Mr Philip Gibbs writes: With thankfulness I can record to-day what I believe will prove the capture of the Passchendaele Crest—the crown of the ridge which made a great barrier around the Ypres salient, hemming us in flats and swamps. The Canadians, after heroically attacking in the morning, fought their way through the ruins of Passchendaele into the ground beyond. If their gains be held, it will set the seal to the most terrific achievement in war ever attempted and carried through by British arms. Only we who are out here can know the valour and sacrifices which carried waves of our men up the slopes in the battles of the campaign commencing at Messines and culminating at Passchendaele. Only we can understand the meaning of to-day's battle and thrill because it means victory.

(Received Nov. 8, at 1.10 a.m.)

Mr Gibbs concludes: "Over this ground the young manhood of Germany spent itself. It was not worthless ground, upon which they suffered agonies, fought desperately, came on again in massed counter-attacks, and were swept to pieces by our fire. Passchendaele must be held at all costs. If lost, it must be regained at all costs. It seems likely that the enemy have definitely lost Passchendaele. The Canadians had more luck than the British, Australians, and New Zealanders, who fought up the slope in a heroic endeavour. Nobody begrudges the Canadians the honour they have gained, not easily, but at the usual price of victory—some men's death, and many men's pain."

Neston Soldier Reported Missing.

Mr. William Roscoe, Little Neston, has received official intimation that his youngest son, Pte. James Roscoe, is missing. No further details are available. He is very well known, especially among the fishing community, as were also his brothers, Pte. Robert Roscoe, who was killed during the earlier days of the war, and Pte. Richard Roscoe, who was captured at the battle of Mons, and since then has been a prisoner of war in Germany. It is a remarkable fact that although many hundreds of Neston men have joined the colours, only two have been captured. Pte. Roscoe and Pte. John Davies, also of the Cheshires. As Pte. Davies was recently repatriated, Pte. Roscoe is now the only prisoner. His younger brother has shared a similar fate.

Birkenhead News – Saturday 26 January 1918

Otago Daily Times, Issue 17156, 8 November 1917,
Page 5

It is understood that William Roscoe, James' father, died on 26 August 1935 when he was living at Lynton Cottage, Sandy Lane, Helsby. It is believed that Mary Ann Roscoe died on 24 April 1942 in the Runcorn area.

Of the children of William and Mary Ann Roscoe - all born in Little Neston and baptised at St Winefride's - it is known that:

Mary Ellen, the eldest child in the family, was born on 26 May 1872 and baptised on 16 June.

In late 1892 Mary Ellen Roscoe, the eldest child of William and Mary Ann, married coal miner Edward Jellicoe (born 8 April 1870) of Ness at a Civil Marriage on Wirral. In 1901 they were living on Pritchard's Row, Little Neston, with their five children. In 1911, now with 10 children, they were living at 6 Eldon Terrace; Edward was still a coal miner as was their 16-year old son, George.

At the time of the 1939 Register (29 September) the family was living at 4 Eldon Terrace and, other than Edward - now a labourer for the Urban District Council - consisted of:

Ann	born 14 November 1902	single	general domestic servant
Florence	born 29 January 1909	single	general domestic servant
Margaret	born 24 January 1911	single	general domestic servant
Margaret married Robert B Jellico, on Wirral, in mid-1942			
Jessie	born 18 January 1920	single	general domestic servant
Jessie married James Herbert Peers, at Neston Parish Church, in late 1939			
Charles	born 21 November 1909	single	farm labourer
William	born 17 May 1913	single	slaughter man
Richard	born 20 May 1915	single	factory worker, margarine works

It is believed that Mary Ellen died on 26 November 1940 at Chester Road, Helsby.

Thomas was born on 29 March 1874 and baptised on 9 April. In 1891, aged 17, he was a fisherman and living with his parents and siblings in Little Neston but nothing is known of him after this date and he has not been located in the 1939 Register.

John was born on 19 March 1877 and baptised on 8 April. In 1901 and 1911 (when he was 34) he was recorded as a fisherman, still living at home and single.

At the time of the 1939 Register (29 September) he was living at 2 Belmont Terrace, Brook Street, Neston, the home of Robert Cottrell (born 1 October 1906, traction engine driver) and Mary Cottrell (born 1 January 1912). John Roscoe was a fish salesman and, although married, the lines containing the details of his wife and (presumably) two children have been redacted (as of March 2018).

Nothing further is known of John although he may have died in early 1957 aged 79.

Anna (Ann) Roscoe was born on 9 September 1879 and baptised on 20 September. She died on 23 October 1879 aged 6 weeks and was buried on 26 October.

William was born on either 29 October or 15 October 1881¹ and baptised on 4 December. William has not been traced in the 1901 census but he married Sarah Ellen Matthews (born 16 August 1886) at Our Lady & St. Nicholas & St. Anne, the Liverpool Parish Church, in April/June 1902. Sarah was a daughter of John and Ellen Matthews of Bridge Street, Neston; in the 1901 census John Matthews was recorded as being a road man working for the council. When they married William would have been about 20 and Sarah was just 17.

In the 1911 census William, 29, a coal miner / loader working at the Wirral Colliery was living with Sarah Ellen (26) and their three children (Thomas, 8; John Matthew, 6; Ellen, 2 months) on Pennington's Yard, Bridge Street.

In the 1939 Register William (fisherman, own account) and Sarah (fish saleswoman) were living at 1 Pear Tree Crescent, off Bridge Street, Neston with some of their unmarried children: Mary Ann (born 3 October 1915, fish saleswoman) [two lines are then redacted] ; Mabel Bernadette (born 22 October 1925, at school).

Nothing further is known of William.

¹ 29 October is the date in the register of St Winefride's Church and 14 October is the date in the 1939 Register.

Richard was born on 25 September 1880 and baptised on 14 October. He died on 9 November 1880, aged 5 weeks, and was buried on 12 November. The following child to be born was also named Richard.

Richard, the second child to be given this name (the first having been born and died in late 1880), was born on 22 March 1884 and baptised on 20 July. In the 1901 census he was recorded as Dick (17), a general labourer boarding with fisherman Robert Oldred on Chester Road, Neston. In 1911, aged 27, Richard was recorded as a Private stationed with the 2nd Battalion Cheshire Regiment serving at The Ridge, Jubbalpore in the Central Provinces of British India. Richard served in WW1 and was captured at the Battle of Mons (23 August 1914 - the first major action of the British Expeditionary Force) but was repatriated. Nothing further is known of him although it is believed that he died in early 1931 aged 47.

Robert was born on 5 August 1886 and baptised on 22 October. In 1901, aged 14, he was a fisherman living with his father. In the 1911 census he, like Richard Roscoe in 1901, was boarding with Robert Ouldred (now a hawker and living on Liverpool Road, Neston) and his wife Alice. It is known that Robert married (Elizabeth, after 1911) but no record of the marriage has been found. Robert served in WW1 and died at Gallipoli on 22 August (or earlier) 1915 [see following entry [79: Robert Roscoe](#)]

Joseph was born on 25 October 1888 and baptised on 20 January 1889. In 1911, aged 23 and single, he was a fisherman living with his father on Badger Butt (now Badger Bait), Little Neston. In the 1939 Register he was living at 47 Lower Bridge Street, Chester, where he was recorded as a fish dealer's assistant. The nature of the establishment where he was recorded is unclear - there are a total of 57 entries for this dwelling. Nothing further is known of him although he may have died on Wirral in mid-1962 aged 73.

James, the subject of this account, was born on 25 October 1888 and baptised on 20 January 1889. He died near Passchendaele on 10 November 1917.

Margaret was born on 14 May 1891 and baptised 18 October. Nothing for certain is known of her and she has not been located in the 1939 Register.

Christopher George was born on 20 May 1894 and baptised on 1 July. He died on 7 November 1894 aged 6 months and was buried on 11 November.

James Roscoe is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial indicating that, together with many others, his body was never recovered.

The Tyne Cot Memorial is one of four memorials to the missing in Belgian Flanders which cover the area known as the Ypres Salient. It bears the names of almost 35,000 officers and men whose graves are not known.

782132 9/10/5526/1 Roscoe James Lt Col W. Roscoe on a since the 11/11/17 11-18 5 17 9 24.3.19 To: William S. 17.9. 1.12.19 To: William 6-10 - 11/11/19

A. E. W. 5070 SENT DATE 24 JUL 1919

WAR GRATUITY Effects 19.20 Transfer 6845 2679 Regd Page 68559 Serial No 36453/1050 6 10

See also 559/912171 19/20

Record No.	Registery No.	Soldier's Name	Regiment, Rank, No.	Date and Place of Death	CREDITS			CHARGES			Date of Authority	To whom Authorised	Amount Authorised			No. of List in which advertised
					Account and Date	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.	
912171	605526	Roscoe James	S. Wales Bord. 10-11-17 42379	11-18 1919	✓	5	-	-				1.12.19 To: William	-	5	-	11/11/19

See also 472/782132 19/20

Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In the summer of 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.

Most unusually, two separate records exist for James Roscoe although each entry references the other. Both relate to James' service with the South Wales Borderers.

The first record notes that James Roscoe had accrued a credit of £5 17s 9d which was received by James' father, William. In addition, William received a War Gratuity of £6 10s. The total payment, £12 7s 9d, is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of about £1800 in 2016.

On this record it notes that James was *presumed dead*.

The second record, which notes that James was killed in action in France, indicated a further credit of 5s (around £40 in 2016) which was also paid to his father, William. No additional War Gratuity was payable.

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.

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

Name.	Corps.	Rate	Regtl. No.
ROSCOE James	2nd Pool R S Wales Bord		43955 44776 42379
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	11/11/17	4139	
BRITISH	4	9	
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

K. 1380

The Labour Corps

The Labour Corps was raised in 1915 and disbanded in 1921.

The Corps grew to some 389,900 men (more than 10% of the total size of the Army) by the Armistice. Of this total, around 175,000 were working in the United Kingdom and the rest in the theatres of war. The Corps was manned by officers and other ranks who had been medically rated below the "A1" condition needed for front line service. Many were returned wounded. Labour Corps units were often deployed for work within range of the enemy guns, sometimes for lengthy periods.

In April 1917, a number of Infantry Battalions were transferred to the Corps. The Labour Corps absorbed the 28 ASC Labour Companies between February and June 1917. Labour Corps Area Employment Companies were formed in 1917 for salvage work, absorbing the Divisional Salvage Companies. In the crises of March and April 1918 on the Western Front, Labour Corps Units were used as emergency infantry. It became the 18th -19th Labour Corps in May 1917.

The Corps always suffered from its treatment as something of a second-class organization: for example, the men who died are commemorated under their original Regiment, with Labour Corps being secondary. Researching men of the Corps is made extra difficult by this, as is the fact that few records remain of the daily activities and locations of Corps units. [www.forces-war-records.co.uk/]

Although the army in France and Flanders was able to use some railways, steam engines and tracked vehicles for haulage, the immense effort of building and maintaining the huge network of roads, railways, canals, buildings, camps, stores, dumps, telegraph and telephone systems, etc, and also for moving stores, relied on horse, mule and human. In the Middle Eastern theatres, camels were also used.

In August 1914 there was no formed body of troops specifically designed for these tasks. In the infantry, manual work near the front lines was carried out by the Pioneer Battalions which were added to each Division. Some infantry regiments formed labour companies and works battalions for work on the lines of communication and at home, but the organisation of manpower was haphazard until the formation of the Labour Corps. The labour units expanded hugely and became increasingly well-organised. However, despite adding large numbers of men from India, Egypt, China and elsewhere, there was never enough manpower to do all the labouring work required. The total number of men engaged on work in France and Flanders alone approximated 700,000 at the end of the war, and this was in the labour units alone. In many cases the men of the infantry, artillery and other arms were forced to give up time to hard effort when perhaps training or rest might have been a more effective option.

According to the Official History: "..although some labour units were raised and eventually labourers from various parts of the Empire and China were brought to France, the numbers were never at any period sufficient for the demands of a great army operating in a friendly country"

[The Long, Long Trail <http://www.1914-1918.net/>]