

Ernest PROUT

Private 16077, 7th Battalion, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry

Died November 21st 1917, aged 24

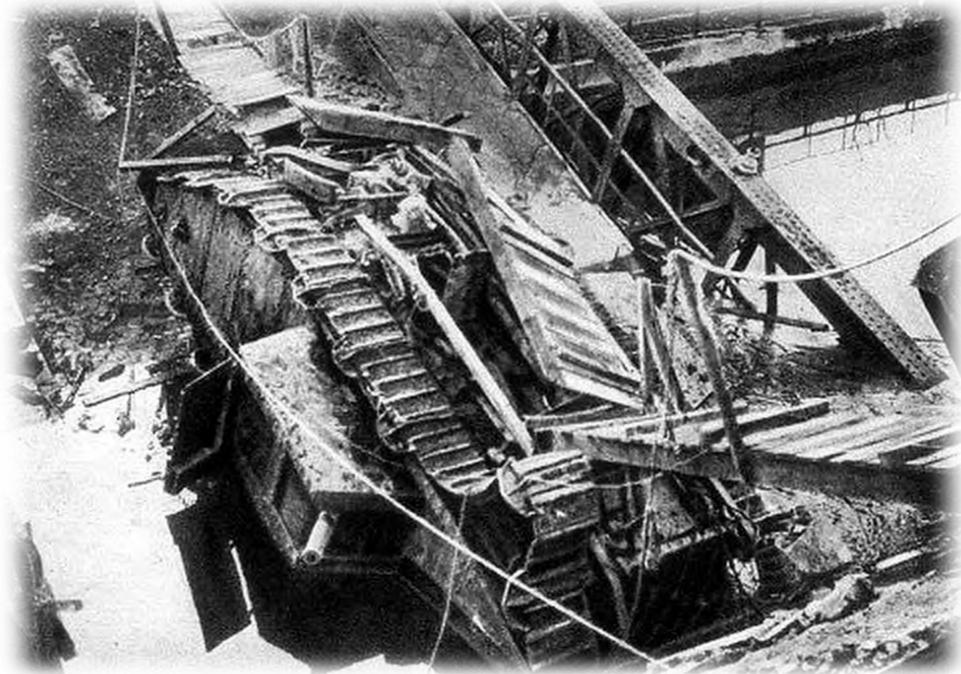
Commemorated on Cambrai Memorial, Louveral, Doignies, France.

The first census record we have of Ernest Prout is in 1901, where he is living in Trewetha with his grandmother Grace Prout (67), who is on Parochial relief, together with his 22 year old uncle, Thomas, a farm horseman. Ernest was shown as 8 years old, and was born in 1892. Grace is the mother of Richard Prout, so Ernest is a cousin to Cyril Richard Prout. In the 1901 census his grandmother said he was born in Bodmin, but in the 1911 census he recorded that he was born in Trewetha. In that year 18 year old Ernest is a waggoner at Trecarne Farm, just south of Trebarwith Strand, living with the farmer, John Uglow (55), and his family, together with a domestic servant Edith Burnard (17).

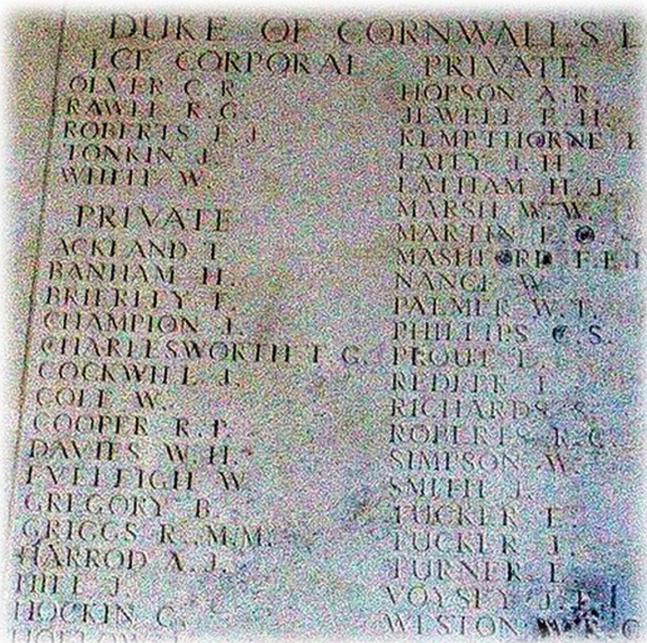
Ernest joined the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry at Bodmin, where he was in the 7th Battalion. This was formed at Bodmin in September 1914 as part of the second wave of Earl Kitchener's New Army (K2). The 7th Battalion came under the command of 61st Brigade in 20th (Light) Division, originally at Aldershot, then Woking and then Pirbright. In February 1915 they moved to Witley, then Amesbury before landing in France on July 25th to join the rest of the 20th in the Saint-Omer area. Their first major battle was the Battle of Mount Sorrel in June 1916, with further engagements in the many Battles of the Somme of 1916. August and September 1917 saw them fighting in the Battles of Langemarck, Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood. In November 1917 came the Cambrai Operations to smash the German Hindenburg Line. This was to be a major offensive, with massed tanks supporting the infantry to create passages through the barbed wire. Preparations were to be carried out in total secrecy. Troops only moved at night, being confined to billets by day, with tanks and the necessary artillery marshalled in secrecy using the thickly wooded countryside for cover. No advanced bombardment was undertaken so that the element of surprise was maintained.

The 20th Division was on the line between the villages of Villers-Plouich and Gonnelleu, about eight miles SSW of Cambrai. On November 20th at 6.20am, they moved forward and took the village of La Vacquerie, then advanced more than three miles down the Vacquerie Valley and were able to capture the key bridge across the St Quentin Canal at Masnieres. In support behind them was 29th Division, who were to leave 20th Division to consolidate their success and quickly move through to secure a bridgehead on the far side. Unfortunately, one of the tanks of the 20th Division had already tried to cross the bridge, which could not take its weight and collapsed with the tank wedged between the two ends, thus blocking the planned rapid build-up of the 29th Division on the far side.

It fell to 7th Division to take the village of La Vaquerie and surrounding German trenches, and their war diaries show that machine gun fire caused considerable casualties, with some from shellfire. It would have been around La Vaquerie that Private Ernest Prout was killed on November 21st 1917, although the war diary states he was only wounded. He has no known grave, so a body was never found, and it seems that the understandable confusion of battle meant the war diary was in error.

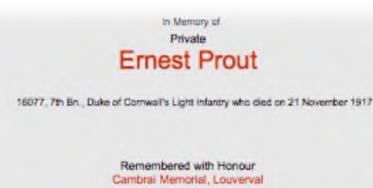


The vital bridge at Masnieres collapsed and blocked by the 20th Division's tank



Private Ernest Prout on the Cambrai Memorial

Along with more than 7,000 other servicemen killed in this sector during November and December 1917 who have no known grave, he is commemorated on the Cambrai Memorial at Louveral, France.



APPENDIX D.

NARRATIVE OF OPERATIONS 20th NOV. 1917.
REF MAP. GOUZEAUCURT SHEET. 1/20,000.

The Battalion formed up in R.14.d. just E. of our support line, between WELSE and VILLAGE ROADS and 1500 yards S.W. of LA VACQUERIE at 4.30 a.m. on 20th November, according to plan.

Platoons were distributed to Tanks with the help of officers of the Tank Corps - the men then lay down and mostly went to sleep, until 6 a.m. when all were ready to start. At 6.10 a.m. the first wave, including "A" and "B" Companies moved off; at 6.20 a.m. the 2nd wave, including "C" and "D" Companies, moved off, and our barrage began.

One of "B" Coys. Tanks broke down, otherwise there was no hitch in the advance; the enemy shelled the LA VACQUERIE-FAUX SAUVIN valley to a certain extent, but this was on the flank of the advance and only caused two or three casualties - there was a considerable amount of machine gun fire as the leading lines reached the enemy wire and this caused about 25 casualties.

Generally speaking there was little serious opposition and "A" and "B" Coys. had captured their objectives by 7 a.m.

The second wave with "C" and "D" Coys. then passed through and proceeded to capture the Hindenburg Line. One of "D" Coys. Tanks failed to start, and two of "C" Coys. were ditched in the LA VACQUERIE Line.

Again there was little serious resistance in the actual trenches, though considerable casualties were suffered from machine guns posted in the Hindenburg Support Trench and Hindenburg Support Line - these casualties were the more severe because the enemy on our left had not been dealt with, as the greater part of the 6th Div. & Bucks L.I. lost direction and came across our front instead of dealing with their own objective, and because large parties of the KINGS and R.O.Y.L.I. were mixed up with "C" and "D" Coys. causing much confusion.

"A" and "B" Coys. had meanwhile re-organized in the road running S.E. to N.W. from VACQUERIE valley road about 500 yards north of LA VACQUERIE (R.15.b.7.7).

The Hindenburg Line and Support Trench were cleared by 8 a.m. and at 8.30 a.m. "C" and "D" Coys. were re-organized and beginning to dig in along the sunken road running S.W. and N.W. about 150 yards N.E. of the Hindenburg Support Trench. (through R.10.central)

"A" and "B" Coys. were called up and posted in the Hindenburg Support trench (about R.10.b.95.55, to R.10.b.1.9.). Battalion Hqs. was established at R.10.b.96.98 in a mined dugout at 8.45 a.m.

Consolidation on the line of the Sunken road through R.10.central was complete by 12 noon; this was taken as the BLUE LINE because that shown on the objective map was unsuitable owing to the lie of the ground.

During its advance the Battalion killed about 50 Germans and captured about 150 - Two Heavy Trench Mortars, four light trench mortars, about six machine guns and one light machine gun were captured.

Rations, Water, Ammunition, Lewis Gun magazines, and Grenades arrived at Battn. Hqs. (R.10.central) about 2 p.m. and refitting was completed before dark. Positions were unchanged during the night.

(Sgd) H.G.R. Burges-Short Lt. Col.
Comdg. 7th D.C.L.I.

14.

APPENDIX F.

LIST OF CASUALTIES, 7th D. C. L. I.

16073	Cpl.	Sutcliffe S.	Wounded	21.11.17
				(Acc.)
11449	Pte.	Wilbrey, C.H.	Wounded	" "
12288	L/C.	Thomas, G.	"	20.11.17.
14976	Cpl.	Moore, T.	"	20.11.17.
22764	Pte.	Cyster, C.	"	"
18122		Whitford, S.	"	"
5713	Sgt.	Burchill, T.	"	"
28891	L/C.	Harris, C.	"	21.11.17.
5005	L/C.	Dexter, T.	"	20.11.17.
15886	Pte.	Matthews, H.C.	"	21.11.17.
14886		Moore, R.	"	"
17334	Cpl.	Aspin, W.	Killed.	"
14596.	"	Foulton, I.	"	"
28852	Pte.	Cookwill, J.	"	"
16741		Trevethick, W.	Wounded	"
16077		Prout, E.	Wounded	"
28751	L/C.	Hoard.	Wounded.	20.11.17.
15459		Davey, S.	D. of Wds.	22.11.17.
14821	Sgt.	Paterson, W.	Wounded	20.11.17.
11362	Cpl.	Haynes, J.	D. of Wds.	20.11.17.
34249	L/C.	Hill, E.J.	Wounded.	"
28755		Paul, F.J.	"	21.11.17.
29297		Yeale J.	"	"
28613	Pte.	Thatcher, A.	"	"
260100		Snell R.	"	"
11032		Gray, J.	"	"
12300		Combes, A.W.	"	"
26129		Leith G.	"	"
5733		Knox J.	"	20.11.17.
19418		Kemphorne, V.	"	21.11.17.
28947		Knappan, M.	"	20.11.17.
35000		Voysey, J.	"	21.11.17.
260088		Stoneman, B.	"	20.11.17.
11651.	L/C.	Munns, A.	"	21.11.17.
17623.	Pte.	Witt, F.	"	20.11.17.
202239	Cpl.	Jane, W.R.	"	21.11.17.
27790	Pte.	Lyons, A.	"	22.11.17.
36164	Cpl.	Macdonald	Killed	21.11.17.
9219	Sgt.	Edmunds, S.	Wounded.	"
10493	L/C.	Webb, T.	"	"
11873	L/C.	Healing, F.	"	"
17765	L/C.	Hood, G.C.	"	"
12825	Pte.	Davis, G.	"	"
10875	Pte.	Skellet, H.J.	"	"
28823		Young, H.	"	"
189742		Rundle, J.	"	"
201902		Ford, P.	"	"
5874	Pte.	Barry, J.	"	20.11.17.

7th Battalion War Diary, showing Lt Col H G R Burges-Short's report on operations of November 20th 1917

and the first page (of 5) of the casualty list naming Private Ernest Prout as wounded 21.11.17

Sources

Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry: <http://www.1914-1918.net/dcli.htm>

7th Battalion War Diary: With thanks to the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry archives at Bodmin.

20th (Light) Division: <http://www.1914-1918.net/20div.htm>

Cambrai Operations: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cambrai_\(1917\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cambrai_(1917)) and <http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/hubert.htm>