

Ernest PROUT

Private 16077, 7th Battalion, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry
Died November 21st 1917, aged 24

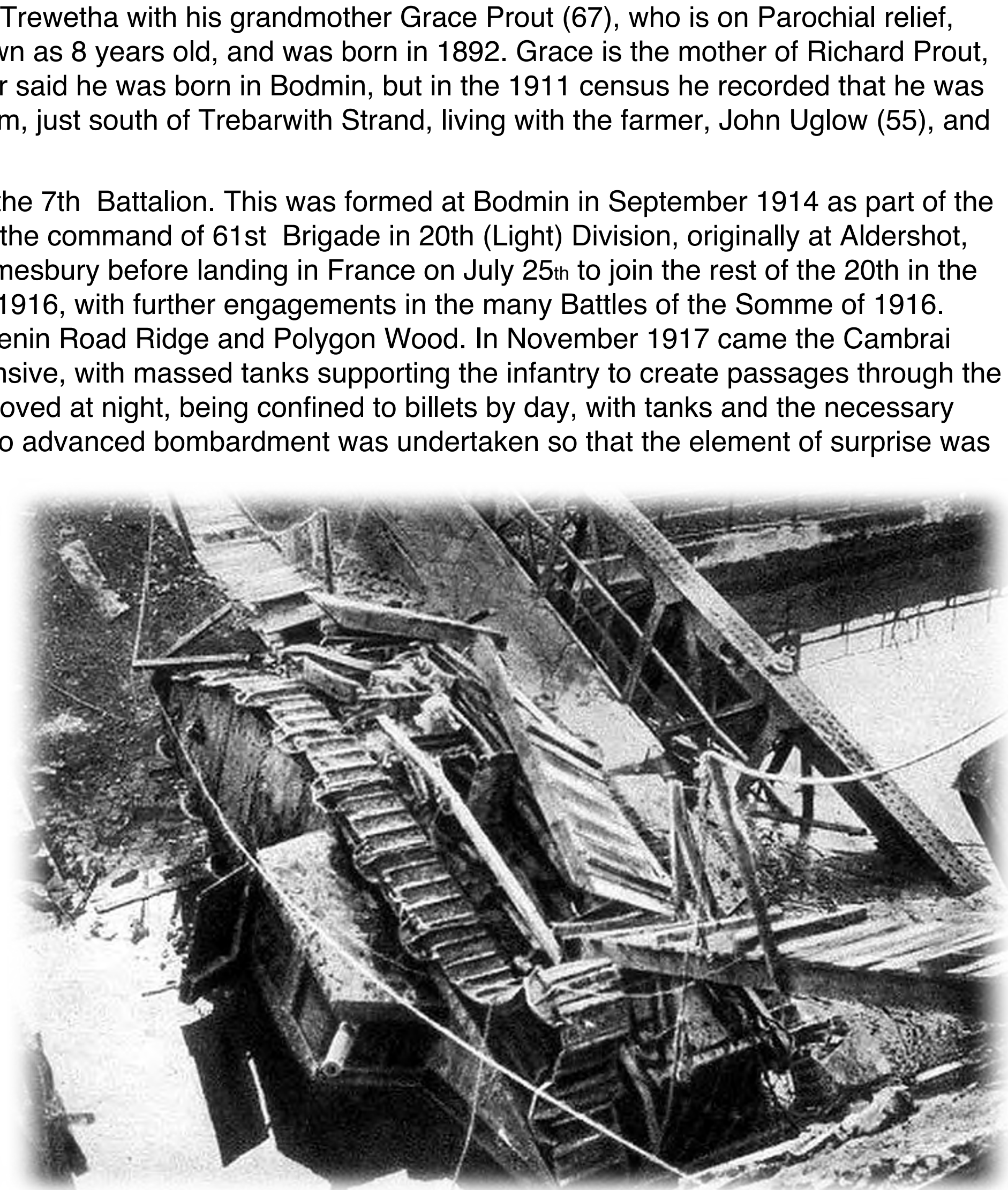
Commemorated on Cambrai Memorial, Louverval, Doignies, France.

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).

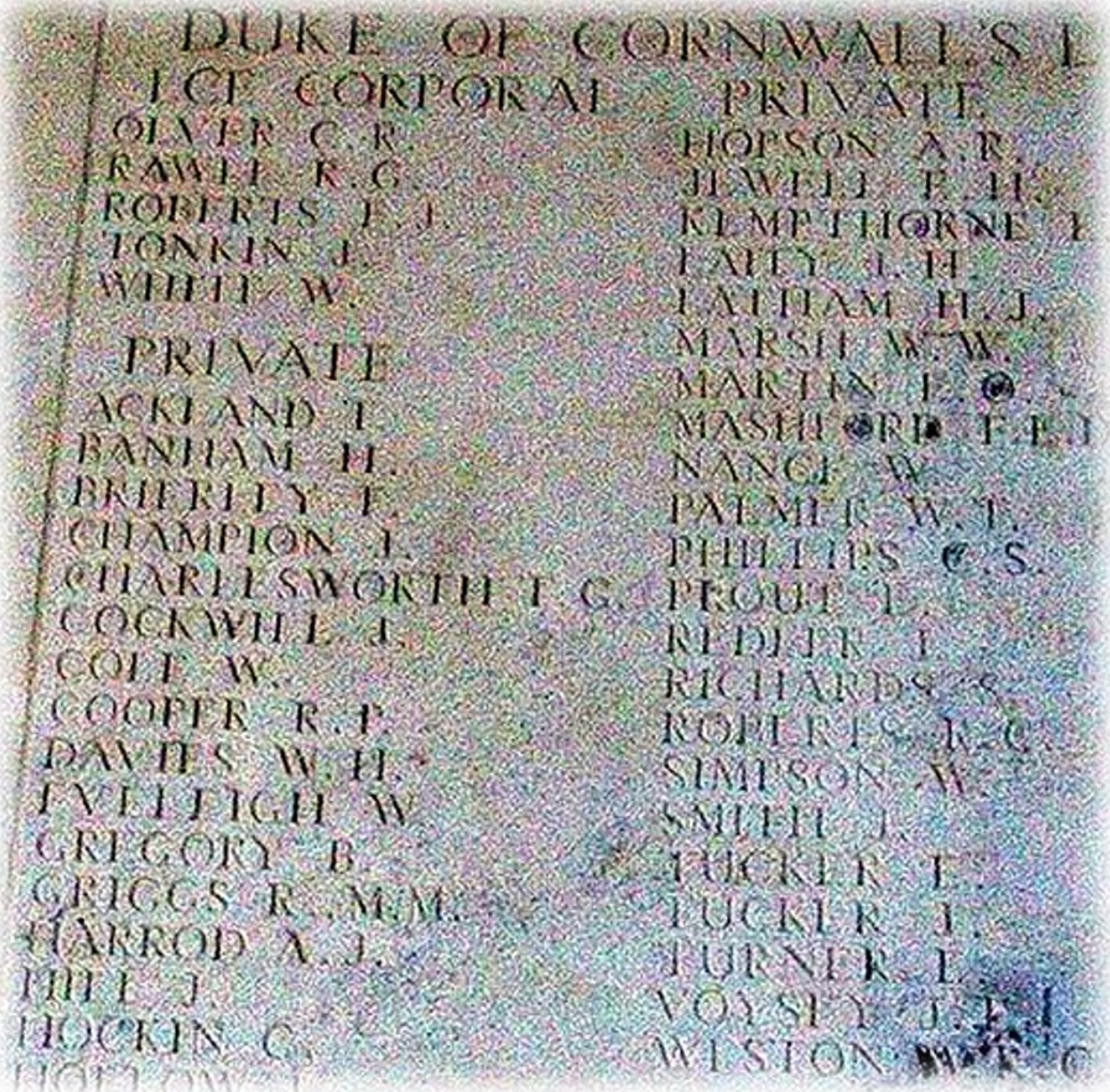
Ernest joined the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry at Bodmin, where he was in the 7th Battalion. This was formed at Bodmin in September 1914 as part of the second wave of Earl Kitchener's New Army (K2). The 7th Battalion came under the command of 61st Brigade in 20th (Light) Division, originally at 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 Gonnelieu, 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.

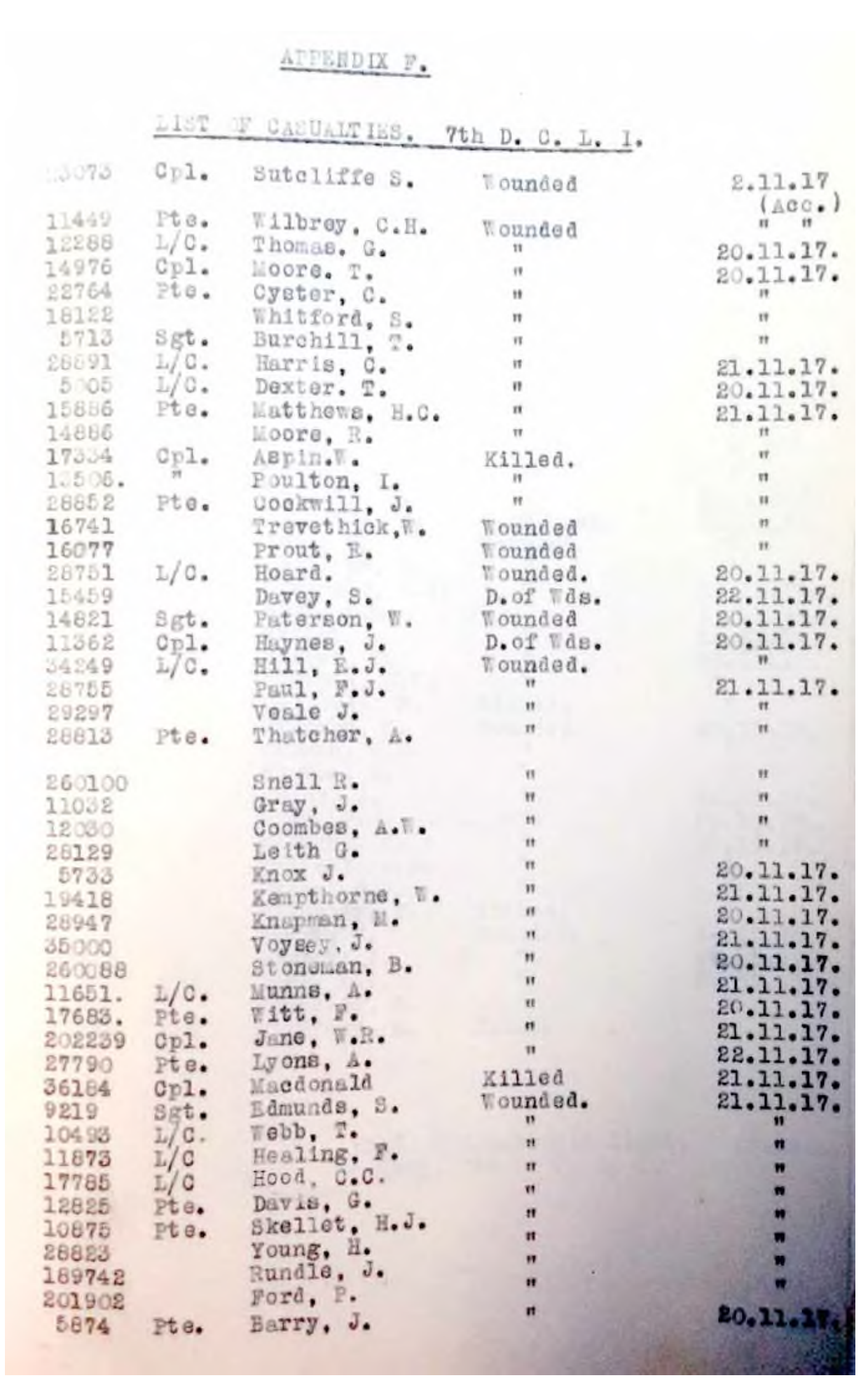
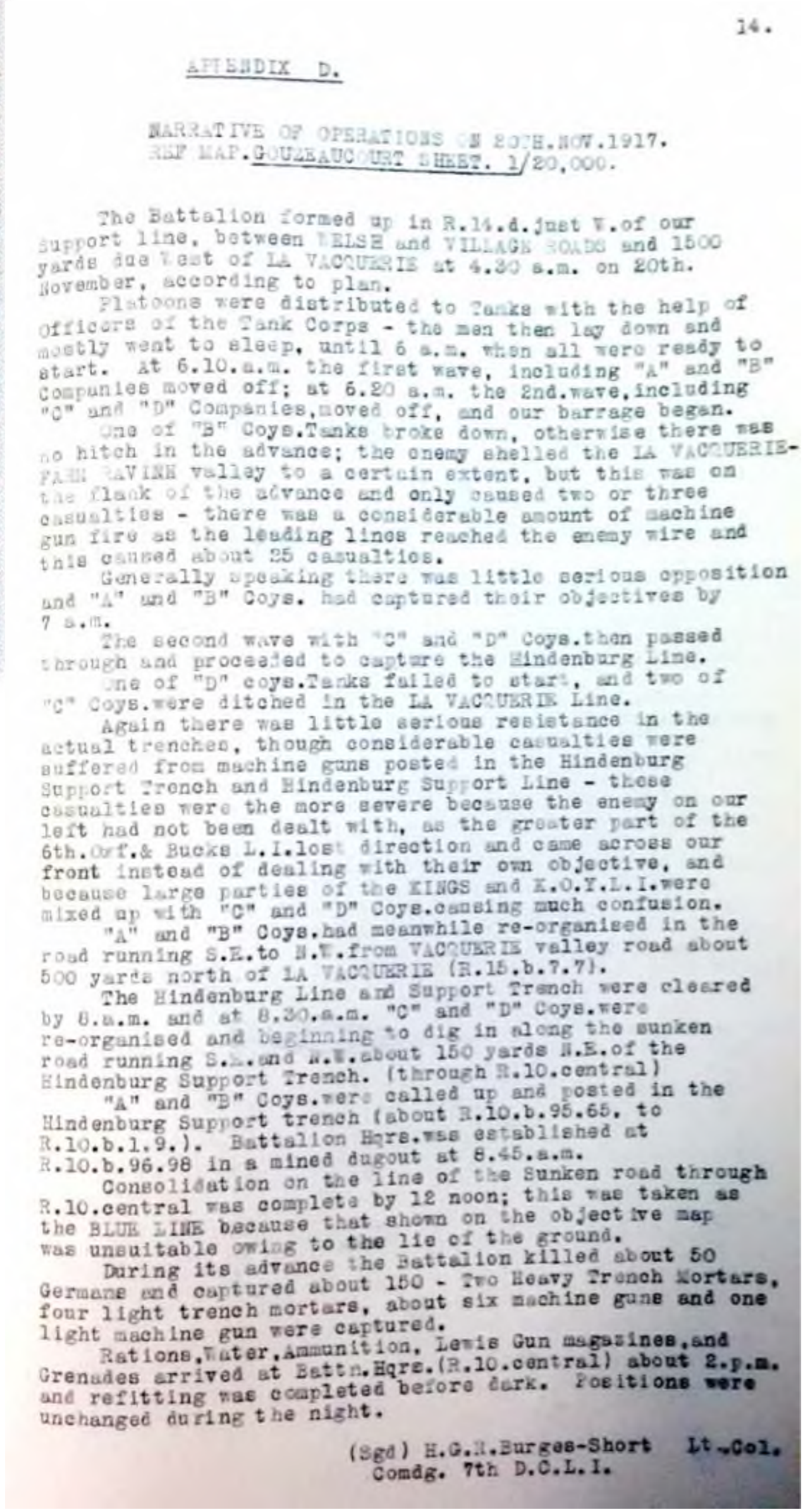
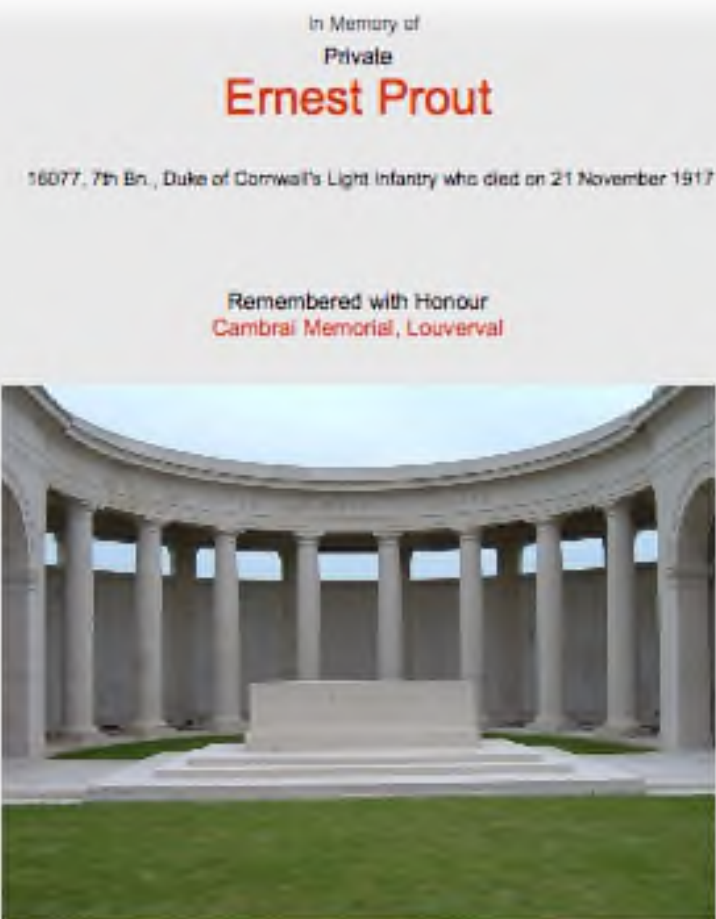


The vital bridge at Masnieres collapsed and blocked by the 20th Division's tank



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 Louverval, France.



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>