

From the Newspaper Archives

West Cumberland at War

July 1916

The Somme, 1916

After nearly two years the reporting of the Great War in the pages of the *Whitehaven News* seemed to have become stale. News of casualties was beginning to appear in the “districts” news rather than on the main news pages, and the 70-point “THE WAR” headline had been dropped

months before.

Then came the event which hindsight informs us was one of the bloodiest of World War One – the Battle of the Somme. Fighting raged from July to November. During that time the British Army suffered 420,000 casualties, nearly 60,000 on the first day

alone. France lost 200,000 men and Germany nearly 500,000.

On 3 July 1916 *The Times* told the world: “Everything has gone well – our troops have successfully carried out their missions, all counter-attacks have been repulsed and large numbers of prisoners taken.”



LANCE.-CORPL. I. COLLIS
(OF WHITEHAVEN),
KILLED IN ACTION.

(Photograph by B. Scott & Son, Carlisle.)

On Thursday, Mr. W. Collis, watchmaker and jeweller, Lowther Street, Whitehaven, received from the front a letter written by a chaplain of the forces, in which he said it grieved him sadly to have to write and tell him that his dear boy was killed in action during the great attack last week. He did his duty bravely and they might well be proud of him. He was reverently buried near the trenches, and he could promise that his grave would be lovingly cared for.

This was Isaac, the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Collis, who have the heartfelt sympathy of a large circle of friends and acquaintances, as they will have that of the general public, on their grievous loss. Educated at Ghyll Bank School, after two years at Southport, he joined his father in his business, where he became a great favourite with their patrons. On the outbreak of the war he was rejected by Army doctors, having been injured at football the previous year. His own doctor having informed him that an operation might possibly fit him for service, he made arrangements for it at a nursing home (where he had earlier in the same year undergone another operation) before telling his parents what he had done. This was in September, 1914, when the “Pal” Movement was running strongly. In November, 1914, he joined the Lonsdale Battalion, at Carlisle; and after a year's strenuous training he went with that battalion to France, in November, 1915. He was 27 years of age.

20 July 1916

* Isaac Collis is buried at Blighty Valley Cemetery, Authuille Wood, France



**CAPT. R. R. BLAIR, D.S.O.,
KILLED IN ACTION.**

There had been from time to time various rumours that Capt. Blair was first of all wounded and afterwards that he was killed. So when the latest report got out it was hoped that this might have been another of the same. But it was soon recognized that the report this time was too definite to leave much room for doubt. It was in a letter received from Quarter-Master-Sergeant McConnell, A Company, 5th Battalion, Border Regiment—Capt. Blair's own Company. The letter, received on Monday morning was addressed to the Quarter-Master's wife, who lives on Bransty, and said he was sorry to tell her that Capt. Blair had been killed. In the evening there was official confirmation of the sad news received by Mrs. Blair, Capt. Blair's mother.

Each of the casualties that arrive are of course equally distressing for relatives, and evoke public sympathy more or less widespread. But from the position which Capt. Blair held at Whitehaven and his past record, it is safe to say that there is none that has occurred or that may yet occur which has moved the town and district to so general a deep regret for the fallen and of sympathy for the bereaved as this of Capt. Blair.

27 July 1916

* Robert Blair is buried at Dranoutre Military Cemetery, Belgium

The *Whitehaven News* of 6 July 1916 carried details of very few casualties. But by the issue of 20 July the ongoing reports of dead and wounded local soldiers was taking space normally devoted to sports reports.

The issue of 27 July carried two pages of photographs of dead and injured - 15 in total. Most weeks there were 3 to 5.

EGREMONT SOLIDER'S EXPERIENCE

Private Wm. H. Lindsay has written to his wife at Swan Lane, Egremont, informing her that he is wounded. He says he received a shell wound in the left knee, and a bullet wound in the calf of his left leg, besides being hit on the face with a German bomb, but he is now progressing favourably in hospital at Birkenhead. The lads (the letter continues) were cut down like grass with the machine guns, but as soon as we get into their trenches and see the bayonets they yell out for mercy. We go at it for all we are worth. I accounted for about seven Germans myself. I cannot tell you anything about the Egremont lads. I know that they all did their duty bravely. I was hit in a German trench, and had to crawl half-a-mile through dead and wounded to the R.A.M.C. dressing station. It is hardly possible to describe the battle. It was one continual roar of guns and whistling of shells.

WHITEHAVEN CASUALTIES.

In a letter Corporal Corkish, D.C.M. of Whitehaven, reports that Sergeant Joseph Telford, Borders, has been killed in action. Sergeant Telford, who formerly worked at William Pit, Whitehaven, was a reservist, and rejoined his battalion shortly after the outbreak of war, since which time he has been promoted on two or three occasions. During a short leave, over twelve months ago, he came home to be married, and has not been back since then, though he was expecting to obtain leave soon to visit his wife and child. Sergeant Telford was well known at Hogarth Mission, and used to play in the Mission Band. He was also a member of 171 Loyal Orange Lodge.

13 July 1916

BAREPOT SOLDIER KILLED.

On Saturday there was the regrettable tidings that Private Osborne Lewis, the second son of the late Councillor D. Lewis and Mrs. Lewis, Glenfield House, Barepot, Workington, of the local battalion, had died in the hospital at the base of wounds received at the front on the 1st inst. He was 24 years of age and single. He enlisted in the battalion in October, 1914.

Other men belonged to the battalion reported wounded on Saturday were:—

Lance-Corporal John Mounsey, son of Inspector Mounsey, Peter-street, Workington, who is doing well; Private Stanley Smith, brother of Miss Smith, Jane-street, Workington; and Private Thomas Campbell, single man, Devonshire-street, Workington.

Lance-Corporal Jack Turnbull, son of Mr. Christopher Turnbull, Berwick-street, Workington. Word was received on Monday morning that he was lying in a hospital at Birmingham. His left eye has been shot out, and part of his face has been shot away.

13 July 1916

The special war correspondent of the "Daily News" on Wednesday included the Borders amongst the regiments that have distinguished themselves in France during the past few days.

6 July 1916



**LANCE-CORP. F. DOWNES
(EGREMONT), THE BORDER REG.,
KILLED IN ACTION.**

(Photograph by The Romney Studio, 34,
King Street, Whitehaven.)

27 July 1916



**LIEUT. L. R. GUNSON,
KILLED IN ACTION.**

Another of the casualties that are cutting off a number of well-known Whitehaven young fellows from a promising career, is that of the death of Lieut. Leslie R. Gunson, Royal Garrison Artillery. A letter was received on Tuesday morning, by his parents, from the Major of his Battery, stating that he was killed on the 18th. He was out on observation duty, and as he was returning a bullet caught him in the back. A man who was with him offered to bind the wound, but he replied, "It's no use. I am done"; and he only lived for ten minutes.

27 July 1916

* Leslie Gunson is buried at Quarry Cemetery,
Montauban, France

* Fred Downes has no known grave and is
remembered at the Thiepval Memorial, France, the
memorial to the missing of the Somme

ST. BEES OFFICERS KILLED.



CAPT. S. KENWORTHY,
17TH MANCHESTER REGIMENT.

(Photograph by P. Guttenberg, Manchester.)

The death of Captain Stanley Kenworthy, the elder son of Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Kenworthy, of Sea Croft, St. Bees, who was killed in action on July 1st, the first day of the British advance in France, was telegraphed to Mr. Kenworthy on Friday. After the outbreak of war Captain Kenworthy was one of the first to offer his services, and having been accepted, he was shortly afterwards gazetted as second-lieutenant in the 17th City Battalion, Manchester Regiment. He soon proved himself to be a very capable and smart officer, and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant, and then to that of captain. Since he had been in France he had seen a good deal of fighting, and his name appeared in Sir Douglas Haig's list of those who had distinguished themselves in the field, which was published on June 16th last.

The deepest public sympathy with Mr. and Mrs. Kenworthy is everywhere expressed, with sorrow, for they, with so many others, have suffered the bitterest loss that war can inflict on parents—that of the eldest born.

13 July 1916



PVT. ARTHUR GIBSON,
SANTON BRIDGE,
KILLED IN ACTION.

(Photograph by H. Bentley, Day and Electric Studio, Barrow-in-Furness.)

On Wednesday, last week, word was received of the death of Pvt. Arthur Gibson, of Santon Bridge, who had been shot by a sniper, whilst returning from the trenches, on the 5th inst. As a youth Private Gibson was employed on the Furness Railway, but ill health and consumption developed, and for several years he lived and dieted on the outdoor system for consumptives, and was also given a long sea voyage on one of Messrs. Brocklebank's steamers. After a brave and patient fight, he ultimately recovered, and assisted his aunt Miss Turner in the management of the Santon Bridge post-office. Ever since the war began he talked of joining the Colours, and last November he offered himself, and was accepted for active service. He was trained at Barrow-in-Furness with the Border Regiment, and in May last, was drafted to active service. He was a keen fisherman and follower of the Eskdale foxhounds.

20 & 27 July 1916

- * Stanley Kenworthy is buried at Dantzig Alley British Cemetery, Mametz, France
- * Arthur Gibson is buried at Ridge Wood Military Cemetery, Belgium

HARRINGTON MEN WOUNDED

Word has been received of a few Harrington men who have been wounded in the big push in France. Included among these are Privates Hugh Templeton, Llewelyn Douglas, Robert Dian and Gordon.

20 July 1916

A WHITEHAVEN SOLDIER IN THE ADVANCE

A Whitehaven soldier writes home: "At last we are out of it. We went into the worst trenches on earth on Wednesday night under shell-fire, stayed on the front line until Friday morning, and at eight am went over the parapet and took three lines of German trenches. It was a magnificent battle, and no doubt it would be in the papers. The bombardment before we charged was simple nerve-racking. The best sight was when the Germans ran away before our bayonets; when our machine guns mowed them down.

I rather pitied the Huns, because our artillery killed hundreds in their dug-outs - it gave them an awful time. When we got to their second line our bombers threw bombs into their dug-outs, where they hid, setting the places on fire. What Germans got out were bayoneted. The others were burnt or buried. After a short stand in their second line we rushed the third, killing many Huns with our machine-guns as they retired. Well thank God I am one of the lucky ones, I have seen the horrors of war. I know what it is to be hungry and thirsty and have to work without an ounce of strength in me.

Great excitement prevailed during the advance, one sergeant shouting at the top of his voice "Come on lads; let's all be in the kill!" Then everybody ran faster. It was a sight worth seeing when all the Brigade rushed after the retiring Hun, and shells dropped everywhere." 20 July 1916

These articles are taken from the *Whitehaven News*, held on microfilm at Whitehaven Archive and Local Studies Centre, and indexed by volunteers.

The issues covering the time of the Great War have been indexed by a group of volunteers in an eighteen-month long project undertaken to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of war, and to act as a lasting memorial to all whose lives were touched by the events.



Pvt. TOM SCURR BORDER REGIMENT, WOUNDED FOR THE SECOND TIME.

(Photograph by W. Gibson, Tangier Buildings, Whitehaven.)

Information has been received by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. George Scurr, of Church Street, Whitehaven, that their son, Private Tom Scurr, formerly of the linotype department of "The Whitehaven News," Ltd., had been wounded for the second time. They have received the following letters:—

"Clearing Hospital, Eastleigh, Hants.
July 7, 1916.

"Dear Mother.—I write these few lines to let you know that I am back in dear old England once again. I got wounded on the afternoon of July 1st at the battle of the Somme, but am pleased to tell you that it is not very much, and I am mending more every day. I got to the German fourth line before they managed to knock me over, and I can tell you that the German who did knock me over won't knock anyone else over, because he is under the daisies now. It was a terrible battle, and I don't know how Tom Grundell came on in it. . . . I am being transferred from this hospital to Newcastle, and hope to be home for August Monday at least. I am hit in the hands, but won't lose any fingers, so you see I am lucky."

27 July 1916

* Tom Scurr went back to the front and lost his life 27 January 1917, but his death was not confirmed until late April 1917. He has no known grave and is remembered at the Thiepval Memorial France, the memorial to the missing of the Somme

A WHITEHAVEN MAN KILLED

During last week it was rumoured in Whitehaven that Private John McCluskey, of the Border Regiment, had been wounded, but his relatives could get no reliable information of the matter until Monday last when they received the official news of his death in action in the "big push", which took place on the 1st of July. Private McCluskey was a tailor with Messrs. Lucas and Cussons, Lowther Street, Whitehaven. He was 23 years of age. The last time he visited Whitehaven was in March last when his father, an old and respected employee of Whitehaven Colliery, met with a fatal accident at William Pit, and on which occasion Private McCluskey obtained leave of absence to attend the funeral.

20 July 1916

DEATH OF PVT. BENTLEY, WHITEHAVEN.

News was received on Wednesday of the death of Private Sidney Victor Bentley, of the King's Own Royal Lancasters, son of Mr. and Mrs. Bentley, of Church Street, Whitehaven. Private Bentley who was only 24 years of age, enlisted on the 15th November, 1915, and after training at Plymouth for three months went to Egypt, and then to the Persian Gulf with the relief party to Townsend. He there contracted dysentery, and was in the Field Hospital for some time, afterwards being sent to the Military Hospital at Bombay. A telegram was received on July 1st, that he was dangerously ill, and on Wednesday night another telegram announced his death. Before joining the Forces Private Bentley had served his time with Mr. A. W. Wilson, Lowther Street, as a dental mechanic, and was later with Mr. Knowles, Tangier Street. He was married on January 22nd this year while on leave.

20 July 1916

THE TONER FAMILY, WHITEHAVEN.



Bom.
JAS. TONER, R.F.A.

Driver
J. TONER, R.F.A.

Private
PETER TONER.

Private
P. F. TONER.

The four Toner brothers are sons of Mr. and Mrs. J. Toner, of 76, Market Place, Whitehaven. Private Peter Toner, Tyneside Irish, 21 years of age, has been killed in action; Private Patrick Francis Toner, who is in the Tyneside Irish, is in a French hospital; Bombardier Jas. Toner, is married, and is in the R.F.A.; Driver John Toner, is also in the R.F.A.

(From a Photograph by W. Gibson, Tangier Buildings, Tangier Street, Whitehaven)

27 July 1916

DISTINGTON SOLDIERS WOUNDED.

Official news has been received by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Hunter, Pica Cottages, that their son, Private Joseph Hunter, had been wounded on July 1st. He is now lying in hospital at Manchester. This is the second time Private Hunter has been wounded.

Word has been received by Mr. and Mrs. H. Thompson, Main Street, Distington, that their son Private William Thompson was wounded in the back and has been brought to a hospital in Liverpool. He is doing nicely.

Mr. and Mrs. G. B. Fee, Pica Cottages, received intimation on Monday that their son Private William B. Fee, has been wounded in the back, in the heavy fighting on or about July 4th. Private Fee joined the army soon after the war broke out, and before enlisting was employed at Walkmill Colliery Moresby.

20 July 1916

FOUR SOLDIERS IN ONE FAMILY.

ONE WHITEHAVEN MAN KILLED AND ANOTHER INJURED.

News has been received by Mr. and Mrs. J. Toner, of 76, Market Place, Whitehaven, of the death of their son, Private Peter Toner, of Tyneside Irish, who was killed on the 1st of July. He was a clog sole maker, and was working for Mr. Carruthers, of Frizington, at the time of his enlistment. His father and mother on Friday received the following letter:—

“Dear Sir,—It is with the deepest regret that I have to inform you of the death on 1st inst. of 1269 Pte. Peter Toner. During his service in this battalion he endeared himself to his fellow soldiers, and his cheerful ready spirit was much appreciated by his Company officers. It may afford his relatives some consolation to know that he died in action during one of the bravest attacks ever made by British soldiers. The cost in precious lives was considerable, but the victory gained was complete.

“Those who remain deeply mourn his loss and join with me in tendering their heartfelt sympathy to his many sorrowing relatives and friends.—Yours very truly,

J. B. GLASS, Second-Lieut.,

O.C. ‘B’ Company.”

Private Patrick Francis Toner, Tyneside Irish, who is in a hospital in France suffering from shock, is a brother of the above. He worked for Mr. Bayliff, of Workington, prior to enlistment. Mr. Toner has two other sons in the R.F.A.;—a family of four sons given to the service of the country.

20 July 1916



LANCE-CORPORAL SIGNALLER JOHN SEWELL (OF EGREMONT), THE “PALS.” KILLED IN ACTION.

News is to hand that Lance-Corpl. John Sewell, eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Sewell, of Smithfield, Egremont, has been killed in action. In a letter to his parents Private Joshua Sewell (their youngest son, who was wounded in the same battle) writes as follows:—

“Just a few lines to let you know I have landed at the base. When I arrived I was almost struck dumb when a young fellow told me he saw John killed. Poor lad! He got about five machine gun bullets through his head, so he would be killed outright. I can hardly realize it is true. He was hit whilst running out from our first line to the German first line, which we had captured; just before he got into their trench. The chap who told me was also a signaller, and was with him when he was killed.”

Lance-Corpl. John Sewell was only 23 years of age, and joined the Army on the outbreak of hostilities. He received his training at Codford and Boscombe, and proceeded to France with the “Pals.” He was a signaller, and was a great favourite among his pals. Prior to his enlistment he was employed at the Ullcoats Mines, at Egremont, and being of a quiet disposition was held in high esteem by his employers and the men. When home on furlough he looked every inch a soldier, being almost six feet high.

His brother, Pte. Jos. Sewell, is progressing favourably.

27 July 1916

* Peter Toner and John Sewell are remembered at the Thiepval Memorial France, the memorial to the missing of the Somme



Pvt. J. B. RATCLIFFE
(OF GOSFORTH),
DIED OF WOUNDS ON HIS 20TH
BIRTHDAY.

Official news has been received by Mr. and Mrs. Ratcliffe, of Denton Hill, that their son, Private John Braithwaite Ratcliffe, has died of wounds received in action in France on July 5th, that date being his 20th birthday. The deceased joined the "Pals" Battalion early on in the war.

27 July 1916



Pvt. JAMES TWEDDLE
(WHITEHAVEN), BORDER REG.,
KILLED IN ACTION.

Rumours had been rife in the town during last week that Private James Tweddle, 25 years of age, of the Border Regiment, had been killed in action in the recent "great push," but the report was not officially confirmed until Monday, when the official intimation was received by his wife. Pvt. Tweddle previous to marriage with the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Wear, of 164, Queen Street, resided with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Tweddle, at Lowca, where he was employed at No. 9 Colliery, where he was much respected by his fellow-workmen and all who knew him. Private Tweddle joined the Border Regiment on the 1st of November, 1914, and after a full year's training he went into active service. About eight weeks ago he had a short furlough. A wife and one child are left to mourn his loss.

20 July 1916



Pvt. J. NORMAN KELLY
(CLEATOR), 8TH BORDER REGT.,
TWICE WOUNDED.

27 July 1916

- * John Ratcliffe is buried at Puchevillers British Cemetery, France
- * James Tweddle has no known grave and is remembered at the Thiepval Memorial France, the memorial to the missing of the Somme
- * J Norman Kelly wrote a short account of his experiences of the first day of the Battle of the Somme which was published in the Whitehaven News, 27 July 1916

The "Pals" eat
Mackintosh's TOFFEE DE LUXE.

6 July 1916