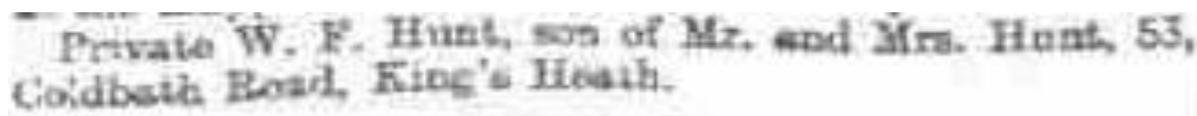


Lance-Sergeant William Frederick Hunt

"I died in hell (They called it Passchendaele)" by Siegfried Sassoon

The name 'W. Hunt' appears on the WW1 memorial for 1917 in St Mary's Church, Moseley, Birmingham. It is one of ten identical names that appear on the Roll of Honour at the Hall of Memory in Birmingham. Finding an association of a 'W. Hunt' to Moseley was helped by two lines in the Birmingham Post which announced on 5th September 1917, that Private W. F. Hunt, son of Mr and Mrs Hunt of 53 Coldbath Road, Kings Heath had been killed in action (see below).ⁱ



The details from the newspaper corresponded with information from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), Soldiers died in the Great War 1914-1919 (SDGW) and the British Army WW1 Medal Index (BAMI) in all aspects but one, his rank.

Name	Address	Rank	Regiment	Number	Record Reference
W F Hunt	53 Coldbath Road, Kings Heath	Lance-Sergeant	Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry 7 th Battalion	14397	CWGC
William Frederick Hunt	Born Kings Heath Residence Moseley	Lance-Sergeant	Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry 7 th Battalion	14397	SDGW
William F Hunt	No address given	Lance-Corporal	Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry	14397	BAMI

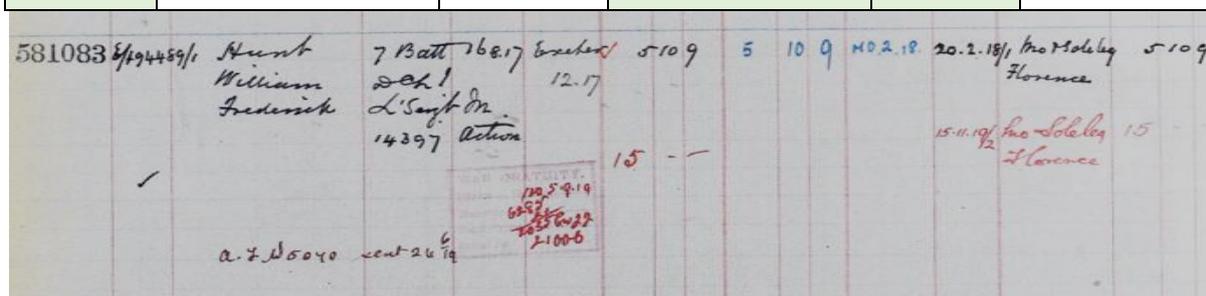


Figure 1: (above) UK Army Register of Soldiers Effects 1901-1929

The register for soldiers' effects confirms William's rank as Lance-Sergeant at the time of his death. William's mother was named as Florence from Moseley. The newspaper report of William's rank would appear to be incorrect. Two other

men from Coldbath Road appear on the St Mary's Church WW1 memorial; Corporal Arthur Plant from No 1 and Private Harry Bunce from No 87.

The Hunt family can trace its origins to Thomas Hunt, born around 1806, who was an agricultural labourer from Tanworth, Warwickshire. On 9th October 1825 he married Sarah Russell in Chesterton, Warwickshireⁱⁱ. In 1841 he was living in Warings Green, Tanworth with his wife Sarah and five children.

Thomas's second child, George, became a besom maker. He married Sarah Grew around 1850.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1861 the couple were still living in Warings Green with their two sons and two daughters as well as Sarah's brother and sister, Samuel and Hannah Grew.

By 1871 Thomas and Sarah had six further children living with them at Rumbush Lane, (near Forshaw Heath) Solihull, Warwickshire. Two other children were born later in 1872 and 1874.

In 1881 the family had moved to Juggins Lane, Forshaw Heath, Solihull where George had become a wood dealer. Five of their children were still living at home including William, the ninth child, born on 25th April 1868^{iv}

At the age of eighteen, William, a labourer, joined the 2nd Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment for Short Service on 18th August 1886 as Private W Hunt, No 1859. His attestation records that he was 5' 4½" tall, with hazel eyes, dark brown hair and a fresh complexion and of 'good character'. After a period of initial training, William was posted, three months later, to Tipperary, where he remained until he was posted to India. William embarked on *HMS Euphrates* on 7th September 1888 and arrived in Bombay nineteen days later on 3rd October.



Figure 2: *HMS Euphrates*

HMS Euphrates was an iron-hulled troopship, designed for the transport of British troops to India, and launched in the River Mersey on 24 November 1866 by Laird Brothers of Birkenhead. She was the fourth and last Royal Navy ship to bear the name.

William had several postings during his time in India including: Jubbulpore from 13th October 1888; Moolton from 5th February 1889, Dalhousie from 25th April 1889, Mooltan again from 26th November 1889; Dalhousie again from 11th April 1891; Jutogh from 19th October 1891 and back to Mooltan from 17th December 1891. Here he remained until the 4th January 1892 when the Regiment was posted to Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, and was based in Colombo and Kandy. On 4th March 1894, William returned home on *HMS Himalaya*

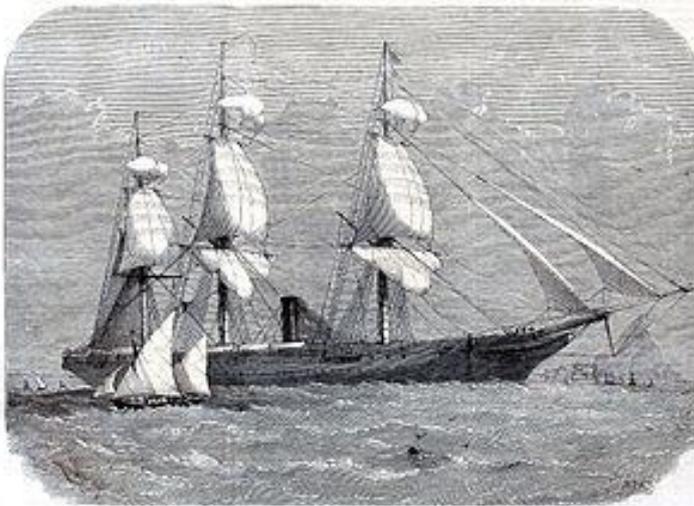


Figure 2: *HMS Himalaya*

William and his regiment were quite likely the last to sail on her as she was moored in Portland Harbour in 1894 to serve as a Navy coal hulk until 1920 when sold off.

William remained with the Regiment until 17th August 1898 when he had completed his 12 year term of service.^v

In 1896 William married. His wife's name was Florence May. In 1901, William, now a builder's labourer was living at Raglan Terrace, Jakeman Road, Balsall Heath, Birmingham with Florence and their two children William Frederick, born in the summer of 1897 and Millicent who was born two years later.

By 1911 the family including five further children were living at 46 Coldbath Road, Kings Heath. William junior, then 14 years old, was an errand boy.

When war was declared on 4th August 1914, both William and his father enlisted. His father joined the 5th Reserve Royal Warwickshire Regiment on 28th January 1915 as Private W Hunt, No 12097 and served out the war in the 264th and 263rd Royal Defence Corps.^{vi} William junior joined the 7th Battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry Regiment (7th DCLI) as Private W F Hunt, No 14397.^{vii} At the time of William senior's enlistment in 1915, the family had moved to Number 53 Coldbath Road.

William junior was due to embark with his regiment for France on the evening of the 23rd July 1915 from Folkestone, but due to bad weather in the channel the departure was delayed in sailing to Boulogne until the 24th.

In France, after a period of training, the 7th DCLI manned the Front Line for the first time on 9th September 1915 at Rouge Debout near Laventie. The battalion losses during the next few months averaged about 15 men a month. The Commanding officer reported that his men had been stoical and generally cheerful despite the deprivations of war until the rum rations had been halved to 1/128 gallon about 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ ounces!

The start of 1916 was spent in the Ypres sector, in and out of the front line, with occasional attacks and the warding off the counterattacks by the Germans. In October and November the battalion saw heavy fighting in Guillemont, Lesboeuifs and the Quadrilateral where they displayed a gallant and fighting spirit. Throughout the winter the battalion held on to one of the wettest and muddiest part of the Front Line. In March and April 1917, the 7th DCLI carried out successful attacks on Neuville, Metz-en-Couture, Tresgault and Bilhelm with great dash.

In April 1917 the 7th DCLI was back in the Ypres sector and were readied to capture the high ground around Langemarck, the first stage of the Third Battle of Ypres or Passchendaele as it is now known.

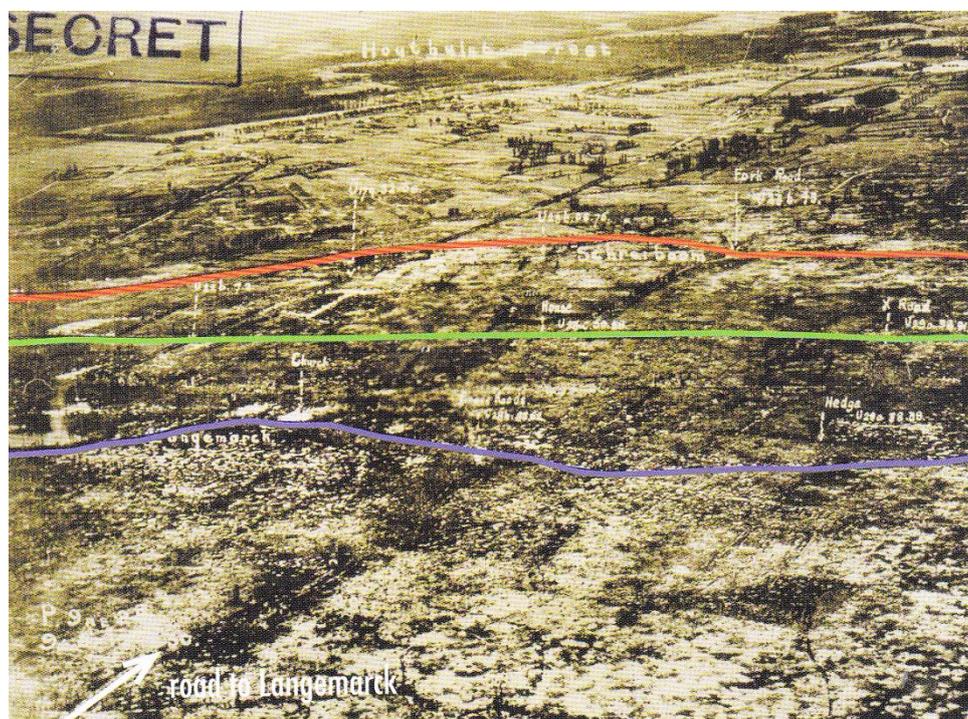


Figure 3: An aerial view of the ground around Langemarck(left of purple line) and the objective lines

On the night of the 15th August the 7th DCLI fell into single file on the west bank of the Yser Canal. At midnight the men were ordered to rest for forty five minutes before picking their way by trench boards and mule tracks to cross the Pilckern-Languemarck road. In the darkness, the mud and occasional shelling had caused several casualties and some companies had temporarily lost their bearings. The Steenbeek was crossed successfully and at zero hour, 4.45 am, the advance began. The ground was appalling and in places men waded up to their knees in mud but by 5 am the battalion was in position only a few minutes late. 'A' Coy by moving east of the river had suffered heavy casualties owing to machine gun fire but the other companies had been sheltered by the fall of a disused railway.



Figure 4: White tape is laid across the battlefield to mark the path between shell holes

The advance was held up by a German stronghold near Reitres Farm but resistance collapsed soon after. Streams of German prisoners were making their own way to the British lines, unescorted. At 7.20 am, the remainder of the battalion advanced to the third objective under a creeping barrage and took the German trenches, immediately reversing the fire step to the other side with entrenching tools in case of a counter attack. As night approached the firing subsided and the moans of the wounded could be heard. Across the battle field the bodies of the wounded who were dying and the dead would sink out of sight in the morass of mud. Despite all haste, the stretcher bearers evacuating the wounded found it was an impossible task in the in the swamp that engulfed them.^{viii}

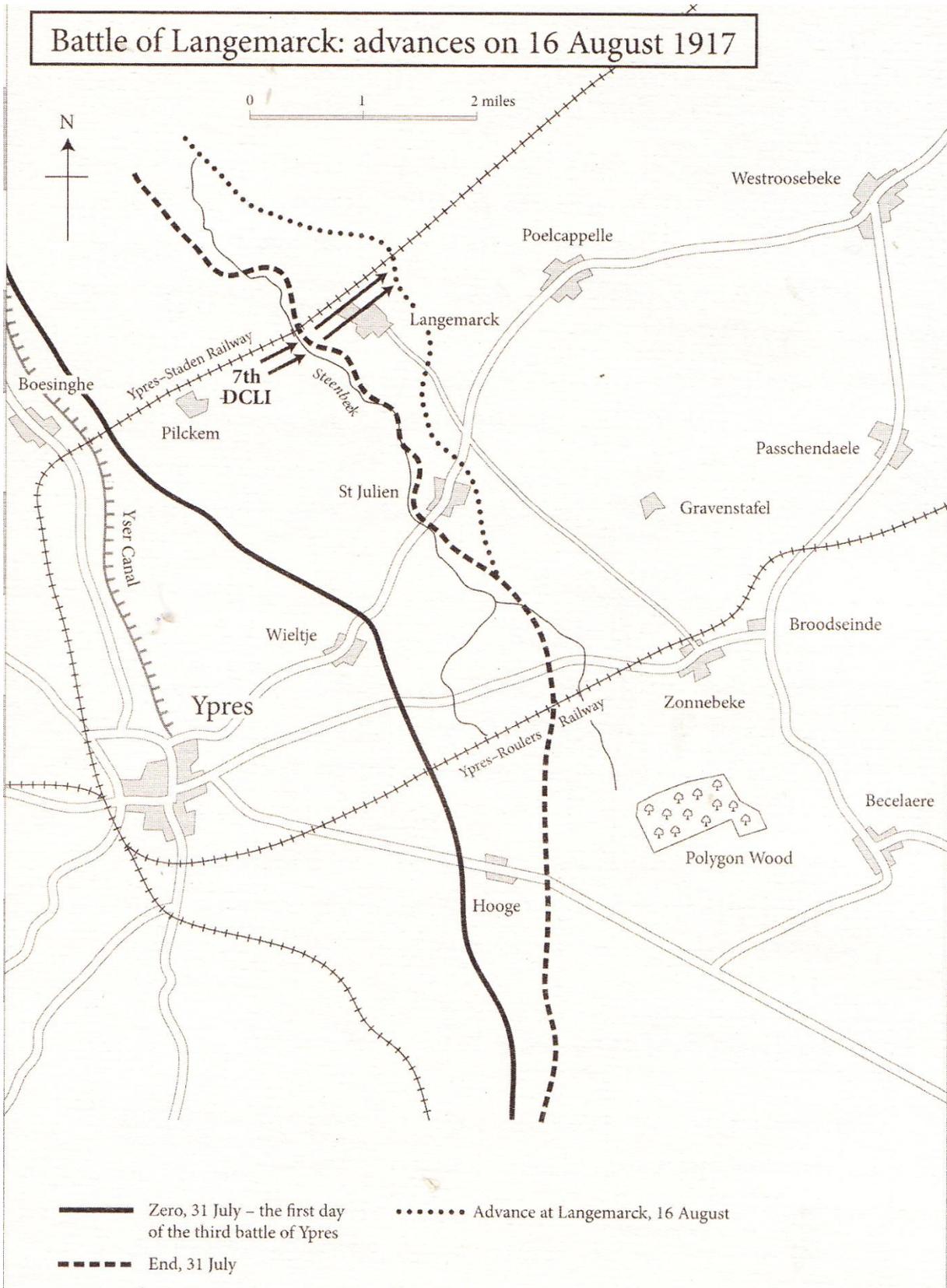


Figure 5: Map showing the advance of the 7th Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry on 16th August 1917

William was reported as wounded in the Regimental Diary on 16th August, but he did not make it back to the British lines. He is one of some 35,000 men with no known grave, whose names appear on the memorial at Tyne Cot, Belgium.

William is also commemorated at St Mary's Church, Moseley and on the Roll of Honour at the Hall of Memory in Birmingham. He was 20 years old when he died.



Figure 6
(Above left) Tyne Cot Cemetery



(Right) St Mary's Church, Moseley

Written and researched by Edwina Rees

Moseley Society History Group

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Endnotes

- i *Birmingham Mail*, 4th September 1917
- ii Warwickshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1910
Warwickshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1910 for 9.10.1825
- iii The 1861 census documents Sarah's unmarried brother and sister, Samuel and Hannah Grew living with her
- iv 1939 Register
- v British Army Service Record
Military history sheet from Service Record
Stations of British Army troops in India
<http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/CGSC/carl/nafziger/888CAD.pdf>
- vi British Army Service Record for William Hunt
- vii Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- viii British Army War Diaries for 7th Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Regiment, pp 5 -296
Patch, Harry with Elmden, Richard Van. 2007. *The Last Fighting Tommy*.
Bloomsbury Publishing plc. London, pp 85-102

Illustrations

- Figure 1 UK Army Register of Soldiers Effects 1901-1929 for William Frederick Hunt
- Figure 2 *HMS Euphrates* (1866)
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Euphrates_\(1866\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Euphrates_(1866))
- Figure 3 *HMS Himalaya* (1854)
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Himalaya_\(1854\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Himalaya_(1854))
- Figure 4 British Army War Diaries for 7th Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Regiment,, p 299
- Figure 5 Patch, Harry with Elmden, Richard Van. 2007. *The Last Fighting Tommy*.
Bloomsbury Publishing plc. London
- Figure 6 See Figure 5