

## John George Morley

**A Soldier of the Great War**



*'Once a Green Howard always a Green Howard'*

Ever since I was a small boy I've wanted to know my granddad, wondered who he was, what he looked like, would he want me? I always asked about him, but was told nothing. Now I've filled in the gap with 'pictures and colours' it makes the never knowing him worse. To think of the stories he could have told me, enough to make a young boy's eyes go round.

My granddad, a soldier of the Great War, I wish I'd known you.



**This is his story.....**

Researched and compiled by

*Graham R Morley*

A grandson he never knew.

Maps copied & coloured from originals at National Archives.

## **The War, the bloody War and John George Morley British War Medal, Victory Medal and Silver War Badge.**

C.S.M. W.O.2 200428 John George Morley – 1887 – 1963 RIP

War was declared on Germany on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, the result of Germany invading Belgium, whose territories we were bound in honour and by treaty obligations to protect. From then until 1918 the cream of British youth died in their thousands, many never to be found, sucked down into a quagmire of mud that was Flander's Fields, the Somme and other killing fields. Now known only as a name on the Menin Gate, Tyne Cot and other memorials.



On the 4<sup>th</sup> September 1914 John George enlisted in the 2/4 Battalion of The Princess Alexandra's Own N.Yorkshire Regiment, known latterly as the Green Howards at Northallerton, Yorkshire. He was 27 years old and already in the T.A. (formed in 1908).

From the regiment's War Diaries it can be confirmed that this was the day the battalion was formed. On his enlistment, known more formally as Attestation, he would have been given a four-digit number that would have been unique to him and his battalion. This is unfortunately not recorded anywhere that I can find, in the archives, or research documents.

The 2/4<sup>th</sup> was a second line Territorial Division with primarily at this time home and coastal defence duties. They were also *not obliged* to serve overseas. It was hoped however, that men from these battalions would take up the imperial service obligation and go to the Front and join the regular army. (It was not until 1916 that conscription was introduced and by default service at the Front.) The men were trained in all the skills of war and were billeted around the UK depending on orders received.

John George was a Company Sergeant Major and would have had various responsibilities, which would have encompassed training men in all manner of war preparation.

Slowly as the men were trained and elected to be sent to front, drafts of men and equipment left the 2/4<sup>th</sup> to join the 1/4<sup>th</sup> in the first line of the Northumberland Infantry Brigade, part of what was known officially as 50<sup>th</sup> Division, 150<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade.

From the War Diaries of the 2/4<sup>th</sup> battalion the following can be seen:

*Jan 1915. Cranlington, Northumberland*

20<sup>th</sup>. 50 men plus 4 NCO's to 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks overseas.

25<sup>th</sup>. Another 41.

29<sup>th</sup>. Another 71.

*Oct 1915. Long Benton, Newcastle upon Tyne*

6<sup>th</sup>. Another 190 men drafted overseas.

*July 1916 – Retford Camp. S. Yorks/Nottinghamshire*

17<sup>th</sup>. 252 other ranks proceeded overseas to join the 1<sup>st</sup> line of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Yorkshires in France.

*Aug 1916 - Hipswell Camp - Catterick*

13<sup>th</sup>. 16 other ranks proceeded overseas via Folkestone.

*June 1917 Chelmsford*

7<sup>th</sup>. Departure of first draft (125 men) to France to 1/4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires.

12<sup>th</sup>. Another 125 to 1/4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires.

15<sup>th</sup>. Another 25 to 1/4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires.

18<sup>th</sup>. Another 40 to 1/4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires.

27<sup>th</sup>. Another 300 to 1/4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires.

*July 1917 Chelmsford*

7<sup>th</sup>. Another 20 to 1/4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires.

The battalion was disbanded in November 1917. The above represents most of the men that were sent to the Front after initial training or refresher courses and more importantly, the ones that had taken up their imperial service obligation to fight overseas.



From January 1917 all regiments were issued with new six digit numbers for their men and the block allocated to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Yorkshires was from 200001 to 240000 (appendix 11). From the information recorded on John George's Medal Index Card and the Regimental Medal Rolls (appendix 1, 4 & 5 respectively) we can tell (more or less) when he was sent overseas.

For example, he did not receive the 1914 Star or the 1914 -1915 Star (sometimes wrongly called the Mons Star) as the space for the Roll entry against the Star is blank. Therefore we know he didn't serve overseas in 1914 or 1915. In addition, when he initially joined in 1914 he would have been issued with as mentioned earlier, a four-digit number.

If he had been sent overseas before 1917 he would have been sent with this [original number](#). Therefore, recorded on his Index Card and on the Medal Roll would have been both numbers as for example:

[2456.200428](#) CSM J.G.Morley

In John George's case he has only the six-digit number so we can be more or less sure that he didn't serve overseas until 1917 and that he would have been amongst those men listed in the June & July 1917 overseas drafts above. This would have been in line with the action on the ground at this time and in particular the Arras Offensive 09/04/17 - 16/06/17, The Battle of Messines 07/06/17 - 11/07/17 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ypres (Passchendaele) 31/07/17 - 10/11/17.

There is a War Diary entry for the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion July 18th 1917: Sergeant E.Grey promoted Colour Sergeant and appointed [C.S.M.](#) Could this be because John George had left for the Front?

Whilst there have been some attachments to other divisions, we know from John George's Medal Index Card and Medal Rolls that he was in the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires, which was attached to the 50<sup>th</sup> Division which took part in the following actions.

#### [History of the 50<sup>th</sup> \(Northumbrian\) Division.](#)

The Division was a formation created by the establishment of the Territorial Force in 1908. It moved to France 16th April 1915, and served with distinction on the Western Front throughout the war. The Division took part in the following engagements:

The Second Battle of Ypres

The Battle of Flers-Courcelette (sixth phase of the Battle of the Somme 1916)

The Battle of Morval (seventh phase of the Battle of the Somme 1916)

The Battle of Le Transloy (eighth) phase of the Battle of the Somme 1916)

The First Battle of the Scarpe (first phase of the Arras Offensive) 9/14<sup>th</sup> Apr 1917

In the above action, the Division captured the Wancourt Ridge.

The Second Battle of the Scarpe (second phase of the Arras Offensive) 23/24<sup>th</sup> Apr 1917

The Second Battle of Passchendaele (eighth phase of the Third Battle of Ypres) 26<sup>th</sup> Oct – 11<sup>th</sup> Nov 1917

The Battle of St Quentin (first phase of the First Battles of the Somme 1918)

The Actions at the Somme Crossings (first phase of the First Battles of the Somme 1918)

The Battle of Rosieres (third phase of the First Battles of the Somme 1918)

The Battle of Estaires (first phase of the Battles of the Lys)

The Battle of Hazebrouck (third phase of the Battles of the Lys)

Following a most trying time on the Somme and Lys battlefields, the Division was withdrawn and sent to IX Corps, then on the Aisne, believed to be a much quieter area. This was unfortunately not the case, as the Division was hit hard by a surprise enemy attack.

The Battle of the Aisne 1918 – 27<sup>th</sup> May – 6<sup>th</sup> June 1918

After suffering particularly heavy casualties while on the Aisne, the Division was substantially reorganised.

The Battle of the St Quentin Canal (fourth phase of the Battles of the Hindenburg Line)

The Battle of Beaurevoir (fifth phase of the Battles of the Hindenburg Line)

The Battle of Cambrai 1918 (sixth phase of the Battles of the Hindenburg Line)

The Pursuit to the Selle

The Battle of the Selle

The Battle of the Sambre

**--End of History of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division--**

From family stories, Passchendaele was where he was rumoured to have been wounded which took place from the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1917 – 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 1917. Grandad was talked about as being in the Third Battle of the Somme but whilst there was such a thing (technically it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Somme - The Battle of Delville Wood 15th July – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept 1916 – see [\(appendix 15\)](#) he couldn't have taken part because:

- a) It was before 1917 and his 4-digit number would have been recorded on his Medal Index Card and Medal Rolls.
- b) He only has 6-digit number issued January 1917 onward.
- c) The family story was that he was wounded at Passchendaele so it has to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Ypres.

The family story is that John George was wounded in the head by machine gun fire whilst defending a sunken road in the Passchendaele conflict. Now as Passchendaele is the accepted generic name for the all the action from 31<sup>st</sup> July to the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1917 he could have been wounded at any time during this period. However, as the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. were in Arras up to the end of September he couldn't have been wounded yet. Therefore, as the Passchendaele campaign officially ended on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1917 it only left the months of October and November when it could have happened. I've always wanted to visit the Battlefields and if I could find out exactly where grandad was it would make the visit the more personal, as now I would have good reason to go, far more than just interest.



I approached the Green Howard's Museum to corroborate the basic facts and they told me that according to official records, the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. weren't in action during Passchendaele at all. I then entered into email correspondence with "Friends of the Green Howards" and again I was told that the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. were not involved in any action. The book the "Official History of the Green Howards 1914 – 1918" by Col. H.C.Wyly was researched and again it bypasses Passchendaele, no action is recorded at all.

This obviously didn't make any sense, could the family be wrong? Could he have been wounded somewhere else and time has mixed memories and places?

I then decided I must continue my own research and hopefully I would be able to confirm the family story of grandad's wounding at Passchendaele, in particular, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Passchendaele October 26<sup>th</sup> 1917. It had to be in this action as this was the only Passchendaele action engaged by 50<sup>th</sup> Divn. to whom the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. were attached. (See [history of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division pages 6 and 7](#))

Having already researched the War Diary of the 2/4<sup>th</sup> N.Yorks. and produced the movement table on page 3. I coupled this with my other research knowledge of army numbering ([appendix 11](#)) and narrowed the period to June/July 1917 as a starting point for drafts from the UK to the Front. I started my detailed research in the War Diaries of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Yorkshires 50<sup>th</sup> Brigade, June through to November 1917 entries ([appendix 22](#)).

Now in the June through September entries there is mention of a sunken road near Avenue Trench and Rotten Row. However, I really needed a battle Trench Map of the area to find out exactly where they were and what the map references given referred to. The place on the June entry is Bayencourt and this is the Arras area of France and more particularly, the Fontaine le Croisilles, Cherisy and Henim section which was the scene of much heavy fighting ending with the taking of Wancourt Ridge by grandad's 50<sup>th</sup> Divn in April 1917. This area continued to be thereafter the scene of constant fighting, gassing and losses. Please read ([appendix 22](#)).

On more investigation I found a Trench Map ([appendix 6](#)) in the War Diaries of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Yorkshires, you will see Avenue Trench and Rotten Row, and running through the middle looks like a road of some sort. According to the map references this is the sunken road referred to in the diary entries.

To read the Trench Map positions you need to know that the map is divided into alphabetical areas subdivided into large squares of 1000 yards. These are further subdivided by dotted lines into 4 smaller squares with a number in the middle. You would then refer to these four smaller squares as, for example, 31a, 31b, 31c and 31d, always from left to right. Then each of these small squares is measured off in tenths along its X and Y-axis, the starting point always being the bottom left hand corner of each square. Always making the first plot in an easterly direction from the starting point and then northerly, known respectively as Eastings and Northings.

Therefore, map reference N (section N of the map) 36 (square 36) b (square b) 5 (5 tenths east) 5 (5 tenths north) would give you the intersection of Cuckoo trench with the sunken road to 2 figs. of accuracy and so on. To be more accurate you could use 4 figs. as O31 c 8.5 2.5 but one or the other only.



It further gives their initial holding position to be Marsuin, east of the Yser Canal. This I found to be south east of Pilckem and is shown on the Trench Map of the rear positions. (appendix 27).

The War Diary entries of the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. are brief and not detailed for the month of October/November, however they do say some very important things:-

“25<sup>th</sup> Oct. Relieved the 6<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers and then went into reserve to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

26<sup>th</sup> Oct. Moved into support in the morning and into the line at night”

The last diary entry for October reads – “Strength and casualties unknown at present”

(all appendix 22 page 13)

1<sup>st</sup> Nov. Relieved by 8<sup>th</sup> D.L.I. after a very trying time of 6 days in shell holes and mud. (appendix 22 page 14)

To me, these remarks are very significant and typical understatement for what was obviously a ‘bloody mess’. I then decided to research 149<sup>th</sup> Brigades history and its Battalions and the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade and its Battalions and find out what the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. were doing and exactly where they were?

This particular action was called the **Battle of Houthulst Forest** and was part of the overall 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Passchendaele. The whole front line in Flanders was being driven forward in a big offensive and this part of the line was the responsibility of 50<sup>th</sup> Division that included the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. in 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade. This particular area was however very difficult, covered in part by numerous beek’s or brooks that spread across the landscape like a web. These were to contribute to the overall disaster when due to incessant rain and the creeping artillery barrage destroying their banks and runnels, they flooded the surrounding areas filling shell hole after shell hole until the whole area looked like a black lake. If you were injured and fell, chances are you were gone. To the troops, they never knew whether the next step would be 6 inches deep or 6 feet. There were no trenches for them to take cover in, only shell holes full of water to fall into.

From the Houthulst Forest trench map “A” (appendix 28) all the positions are clearly shown with the 4<sup>th</sup>. Yorks. and 6<sup>th</sup>. N.F. in reserve at Pascal Farm and the 7<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> N.F.’s ready to go forward and take their respective coloured areas.

As at 10.45am on the morning of the big attack (26<sup>th</sup>) some 5 hours after zero hour you can see exactly the positions reached by each battalion on Map C (appendix 30)

The barrage was moving up the battle front at a rate of 100 yards every 8 minutes, see Barrage Map “D” (appendix 29) and it left the infantry way behind as they struggled against appalling ground conditions.

The battle itself was a disaster in terms of losses and it was soon evident that it was almost impossible to make any quick headway through the mud, swamp and water. Consequently the men were caught in the mud, exposed and cut to pieces by machine gun fire.

This was the only battle in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Passchendaele campaign that the 50<sup>th</sup> Divn. took part in and 149<sup>th</sup>, 150<sup>th</sup> and 151<sup>st</sup> Brigades suffered heavy losses for very small ground gained.

I needed the other battalions to verify the taking part by the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. and in particular, being in the front line with them to corroborate the family story and grandad J.G. taking part.



The East Yorks. 150<sup>th</sup> Divn. who were relieved by the 6<sup>th</sup> D.L.I on the 31<sup>st</sup> October  
H.Q. Egypt House.

The Veteran – Margaret Postgate Cole.

We came across him sitting in the sun,  
Blinded by war, and left. And past the fence  
There came young soldiers from the Hand and Flower,  
Asking advice of his experience.

And he said this, and that, and told them tales,  
And all the nightmares of each empty head  
Blew into the air; then, hearing us beside,  
'Poor chaps, how'd they know what it's like?'

And we stood there, and watched him as he sat,  
Turning his sockets where they went away,  
Until it came to one of us to ask  
'And you're – how old?'  
'Nineteen, 3<sup>rd</sup> of May'

I started with the War Diary of Major Anderson D.S.O. M.C. Brigade Major of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade whom the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade relieved and the records of the 6<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry –151<sup>st</sup> Brigade. These give some idea of the appalling conditions and losses and I set out these accounts here.

### **Attack by the 50th Division on the Houthulst Forest. 26th October 1917**

#### **From the War Diary of Major W. Anderson, D.S.O M.C. Brigade Major of the 149th Inf Bde.**

Speaking generally, the brigade was ordered to attack in a north-eastern direction between the southern border of the Houthulst Forest and the Broembeek on a frontage running in an irregular manner through Aden House, and the principal objectives included "Hill 23," "Colbert Crossroads" and the groups of huts about seven hundred yards south-west of Schaap Balie. Aeroplane photographs were unfortunately not very clear, but they revealed an area that was capable of an obstinate defence, and one that might be rendered impassable by heavy rain. The chief obstacles were a double row of concrete huts or "pill-boxes," and ground that was already dangerously full of water- holes.

If you check [appendices 25 and 26](#) you will see that Brigade Major Anderson signed them both

#### **From the War Diary of C.O. of the 4th Northumberland Fusiliers. The C.O's report gives first-hand evidence of the difficult nature of the attack:**

"From reports received from the 11th Suffolks," the right of my Battalion front is a swamp. Even if it is possible to assemble the right company, I do not consider they would be able to advance, but would have to be dug out. I propose with your permission to attack with two companies. (subsequently changed to one company) only in the front line, one in support, and to keep the fourth company in reserve. Conditions on rest of the front are such that if a man steps off a firm piece of ground into the slightest hollow he has to be dug out. There are very few firm pieces of ground away from the railway and roads.

#### **First hand account by Captain J.M. Affleck M.C. 7th Northumberland Fusiliers.**

At zero (5.40 a.m.) we pushed off; my greatest anxiety was in stretching the sections out to the right to get in touch with "B" company. Our barrage was a hopeless failure; only shrapnel was used, and instead of bursting overhead as we expected, it burst at least 400 yards in front of us and behind the line of German machine gun posts. It was worse than useless, as it simply served to give the alarm. Until then, everything was perfectly quiet, but immediately our guns started, the Boches sent up coloured lights and their barrage came down. This barrage came down within two minutes of zero, and although it did very small damage to "D" company's three attacking platoons, it practically wiped out Doucet's platoon, which was in support and digging in on the tape. The Boche machine guns started almost on zero, a single gun started over on

our left and traversed toward our right, and was very soon joined by guns all along the line. Most of the fire we noticed came from the rising ground on our left, and from machine guns fired from the tops of the pill-boxes.

**Summary**

***Right Battalion- 4th Northumberland Fusiliers.***

Two companies went forward and made progress until held up about one hundred and fifty yards west of the huts by severe machine-gun fire from the huts, which appeared to be full of machine-guns and undamaged by artillery fire. Although the barrage travelled at eight minutes to one hundred yards, owing to swampy ground, which was much cut up by shell-fire, the troops were unable to keep up with it. And owing also to the swamp on the right of the huts, no attempt could be made to outflank them from the right. The advanced positions gained were eventually abandoned after dark under orders.

***Centre Battalion- 5th Northumberland fusiliers.***

Two companies went forward, but the right company was held up about seventy yards from the assembly positions by heavy machine-gun fire from the huts. The left company succeeded in gaining a footing on Hill 23, but could not move about there owing to heavy machine-gun fire from the woods on the left. The two reserve companies were badly cut up by shell and machine-gun fire. Eventually about 3 p.m. this battalion was compelled by heavy losses to fall back on their original position.

***Left Battalion- 7th Northumberland fusiliers.***

The attack proceeded satisfactorily for a time, especially on the right; and eventually the left company was reported to be on its final objective with its flanks in the air. Casualties from sniping became so serious that it was impossible to consolidate, and the battalion was ordered to fall back on its original position, which was done.

**Total casualties, killed, wounded and missing:-**

	<b>Officers</b>	<b>Men</b>
<b>4th N.F.</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>5th N.F.</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>439</b>
<b>6th N.F.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>7th N.F.</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>303</b>
<b>149th M.G.C.</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>149th T.M.B.</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>149th B.H.Q.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>1,080</b>

-----End of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade and Battalions account-----

## THE STORY OF THE 6th BATTALION THE DURHAM LIGHT INFANTRY 50<sup>th</sup> Division 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade

The third battle of Ypres was still in progress at this time, and Passchendaele had not yet been taken. On the front between the railway and Houthulst Forest, due north of Poelcapelle, the 149th Infantry Brigade had attacked and advanced the line slightly. **A further attack by battalions of the 150th Brigade** (inc. 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks.) had partially failed and we were to assist the attack around the 31<sup>st</sup> October.

The journey up to the front line was far from pleasant. After crossing the canal it consisted of a six-mile walk along a duck-board track across one of the most devastated areas on the whole front, and to add to the difficulties, the enemy's artillery was very active. Owing to lack of roads for the transport, each man carried four days' rations. The position consisted of a series of water-logged shell holes, which were troubled considerably by low-flying aeroplanes. Battalion headquarters were in a pill-box known as Egypt House, which received very assiduous attention from the Boche gunners.

31<sup>st</sup> Oct. Battalion moved to front line and relieved 4<sup>th</sup> East Yorks. (150<sup>th</sup> Brigade) (appendix 24)

1<sup>st</sup> Nov. The battalion moved up to occupy the left sector of the line which was just inside the forest. Position **U6 central-V1c 3 4 – V1d 1 3** excluding railway. **4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshire Regt. on right**, 15<sup>th</sup> Notts. –Derby on left. (appendix 24)

As it had been decided to make no further attack on this sector, though an improved position was desired, the nights were spent in pushing forward the posts as far as possible under cover of darkness. This was done very successfully, and the battalion line was advanced during the tour by 200 yards to **U6 b 6 3- U6 d 8 8 –V1 c 1 7 – V1 c 5 8 – V1c 9 6 – V1 d 0 3½** with very few casualties. Several decorations were obtained for this work including the Bar to the Military Cross to Capt. J.F.G. Aubin, M.C., commanding Y Company; and the Military Cross to Capt. P.H.B. Lyon, commanding X Company. Sergts. Britton and Cruddace were awarded Bars to the Military Medal.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Nov. The 8<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry relieved 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. Regiment on right.** (appendix 24)

After four days in the line, orders were received to move back to the neighbourhood of the canal for two days and then return. In view of the dangerous nature of reliefs however, an alteration was asked for and obtained, and the Battalion completed its tour of six days. On relief by the 9th Battalion, it moved to Marsouin Farm Camp, near Pilckem, and spent a very unpleasant morning under fire from high velocity shells. Fortunately there were no casualties, and in the afternoon after the relief it again moved to camp at Elverdinghe for a few nights.

-----**End of 6<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry Account**-----

The 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. diary entry for the 26<sup>th</sup> Oct. reads, “ Moved into support in the morning and into the line at night”. What section and who did they relieve?

As the 7<sup>th</sup>. - 5<sup>th</sup> - & 4<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers made up the attacking battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade I then checked War Diary records for these and found that it was the 5<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers who were relieved by the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. at 11pm on the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> Oct. (appendix 23) The 5<sup>th</sup> N.F. were in the centre of the attack and had an exceptionally bad time. (appendix 23)

Machine gun fire from inside and on top of the many pill-boxes, and huts just cut them to pieces. Machine guns at positions V1 d 70 65 and V1 b 9 0 were particularly bad and took a heavy toll.



It was in this section where the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. had relieved the 5<sup>th</sup> N.Fusiliers that grandad John George would have received his wounds. This quote from the account by the 5<sup>th</sup> N.F's gives an idea of the situation, “One company were held up after about 75 yds by heavy machine gun fire from the huts. The two reserve companies were badly cut up by shell and machine gun fire and due to heavy losses were compelled to fall back to their original position”

Provision was made in Order of Battle 217 to have the wounded first taken to Pascal Farm, thence relayed on to Japan House, Reiters Farm, Pig & Whistle and finally the major dressing station at Cement House. See (appendix 27) for the traced out route.

## Passchendaele

Mud, horrible stinking drowning mud. Caused by incessant and inordinate heavy rain on top of the allies creeping rolling barrage and mines, secretly laid under the German defences which destroyed the natural water drainage of the land and cost the lives of thousands, missing- drowned in their agony.

In Flander's Fields – John McCrae

In Flanders Fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead, Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved and we lie  
In Flanders Fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders Fields.



*Killed or missing*     250,000 – 300,000

The 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. after being relieved by the 8<sup>th</sup> D.L.I. on the 1<sup>st</sup> November ([appendix 22 page 14](#)) were then ordered back to Watten and Tournehem for rest and re-equipping. They were to remain at Tournehem until the end of November and take no further part in the Passchendaele offensive.

Therefore it is clearly evident that the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. had taken part in this Passchendaele 'bloody offensive' and it is undisputable. There it was, faithfully recorded by 3 different battalions but not acknowledged in the official history and records until now.

Then in the spring of 1918 the Germans began their Spring Offensive and the Allies decided to shorten the line and Passchendaele was *given up!!*

As only Officers wounded in action are recorded in the War Diary, I still needed to confirm grandad's wounding and subsequent capture in this offensive.

Every POW record that I checked drew a blank and in the end I decided to request information from the International Committee of the Red Cross, in the hope their archives would hold some clues. Eventually their reply came and I opened it hoping against hope it wouldn't be blank!

There it was in black and white, grandad J.G's details, where he was captured, the date and the prison camps he was in. (see appendix 33) Now we have the facts and can now confirm that grandad survived his part in the bloody carnage of Passchendaele only to be faced with a very determined German Offensive in the spring of 1918. Starting with the Battle of St.Quentin and ending with the Battle of the Aisne.(see page 6 & 7 –history of 50<sup>th</sup> Divn)

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### **After Passchendaele, the 4<sup>th</sup>.Yorkshires and Grandad J.G. the story continues....**

**December 1917** - the Battalion were still in Flanders at Toronto Camp, Branhoek east of Ypres near Poperinge. Whilst there the Battalion moved into support and the transport and QM stores at Potijze were bombed and heavy losses inflicted on QM personnel.

**January 1918** - the Battalion initially moved into support and working parties at Potijze before being moved on to Winnezele almost due east of Ypres where rest and Christmas dinners were organised. Left here on the 16<sup>th</sup> for Esquerdes, near Wizernes on the French/Belgian border not far from the coast where they stayed until 28<sup>th</sup>. (Wizernes was a V2 launch site in WW2) Returned to Ypres for month end.

**February 1918** - was spent in yet more support work but blessed with exceptionally fine weather and a lot was done in strengthening our position. By the 21<sup>st</sup> we had completed 24 days in the forward area without the loss of a single life. Shows how much the Passchendaele area has quietened down. Returned to Esquerdes at month end to warm welcome from villagers, apparently they had never had the same battalion back twice., "Tres rare"

**March 1918** - Left our comfortable billets at Esquerdes for Cayeaux and Ignaucourt and spent till the 19<sup>th</sup> in more training before being shunted off again to Brie on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

### **Battle of St.Quentin 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> March – 1<sup>st</sup> Phase of the Battles of the Somme 1918**

On the 21<sup>st</sup> marched for 6 hours to Hancourt where the front line was established. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> we fought a rear guard action covering the retirement of the 4<sup>th</sup>.E.Yorks and 5<sup>th</sup>.Yorks all the way back to Le Mesnil-Bruntel. On reaching the Somme the ground was held until all our troops had cleared Brie and after which the Somme was crossed. The enemy was held until most of the bridges were blown bar one across which the defending company withdrew. When they had crossed, this bridge was also immediately destroyed.

All then rendezvoused at Villers-Carbonal except the last defending company who rested at the Transport Lines at Belloy En Santerre.

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### **The Actions of the Somme Crossings –24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> March 1<sup>st</sup> Phase of the Battles of the Somme 1918**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> we were ordered to Marchepot where we rested up. On the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> we were ordered to attack the enemy who had managed to cross the Somme by St.Christ Bridge. Our attack was supposed to be supported by French troops, a tank, armoured cars and an artillery barrage. Well, we didn't see any of this support and Zero hour was continually postponed until in the end at about 10am the enemy attacked us! We managed to hold the line until our flanks were breached. One of the companies fought on until they were surrounded. The remainder fell back and managed to hold some old trench positions for seven hours. Eventually contact was re-established with 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade and we were ordered to rendezvous at Ablaincourt arriving there about midnight.

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### **Battle of Rosieres 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> March 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battles of the Somme 1918**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> the Battalion withdrew to Rosieres En Santerre arriving at about 5pm and dug in here and held the line all night. Under constant enemy attack throughout the next day in support with the 4<sup>th</sup> E.Yorks. The 5<sup>th</sup>.Yorks and the 8<sup>th</sup>.D.L.I. were in the front line. In the evening the enemy managed to infiltrated to the north of Rosieres and two platoons were sent to reinforce the line. Of these two platoons, all became casualties except 1 officer and 2 O.R's.

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On the 28<sup>th</sup> the Battalion withdrew and were harried until about noon when again our flanks were breached. Retired again to Jumel where the night was spent. On the 29<sup>th</sup> stragglers etc rejoined and our strength was now 300. The night was spent in the wood, west of Mailly.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> we left for the Transport Lines at Jumel but on arrival found they had moved to Boves. Marched to Boves but they had moved again to Sains En Amienois. Decided to stay the night in Boves!

On the 31<sup>st</sup> left Boves and marched to Saleux where we entrained for Rue and billets at Estrees Le Crecy.

#### Casualties for March 1918

Officers	Killed	7	
	Wounded & Missing	15	
O.R's	Killed	24	
	Wounded	147	
	Wounded & Missing	10	
	Missing	168	<b>Total 371</b>

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**April 1918** – Left our billet at Estrees for Bethune and stayed until the 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Battle of Estaires – 9<sup>th</sup> April – 11<sup>th</sup> April**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Phase of the Battles of the Lys**

Left Bethune to relieve the Portuguese Army in the line and marched to Saily Sur Lys where digging in commenced about 2pm. By 4pm most of the British and Portuguese troops had withdrawn and most of the bridges blown. During this period the enemy had managed to cross the Lys further north and under cover of darkness had formed a line at right angles to ours. We held this position until the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> when under intense pressure we were forced to retire and establish a new position, which we held throughout the night. The morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> brought yet more attacks and we were forced back in much disarray and confusion. Some troops managed to make it to Brigade HQ at Vierhouck; others who were isolated eventually extracted themselves to Arrewage where HQ had now been relocated to.

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**Battle of Hazebrouck – 12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> April**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Phase of the Battles of the Lys**

On the 12<sup>th</sup>, reinforced by stragglers we took up a line with the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Coldstream Guards and remnants of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade but were forced back in complete dis-order about 4pm. The line was reformed and we were eventually relieved and retired to billets in La Motte Au Bois. In the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup>, due to heavy shelling we vacated our billets and marched to La Parc to rendezvous with the 50<sup>th</sup> Division. Stayed here on working party detail until the 15<sup>th</sup>.

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On the 16<sup>th</sup> we marched to La Lacque where time was spent on working parties, re-organising the Battalion and training until the 26<sup>th</sup> when we entrained for Fismes and then marched to Courville, arriving on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Spent the rest of the month in yet more training.

Casualties for April 1918

Officers	Killed	2	
	Wounded & Missing	3	
O.R's	Killed	17	
	Wounded	216	
	Wounded & Missing	1	
	Died of wounds	4	
	Missing	115	<b>Total 358</b>

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**May 1918** –Beginning of month spent in training and left for Beaurieux via Maizy, arriving on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Received orders to relieve the 5<sup>th</sup>.Yorks at Craonne and thankfully had a quiet changeover. We were on the line until the 19<sup>th</sup>, after which we were ourselves relieved by the 5<sup>th</sup>.Yorks and we went back to Beaurieux in reserve until the 26<sup>th</sup>.

### Battle of the Aisne 27<sup>th</sup> May – 6<sup>th</sup> June 1918

The front line was established at The Chemin des Dames, literally, the "Ladies' Way", that runs east and west in the département of Aisne, between in the west, the road N2, (Laon to Soissons) and in the east, the N44 at Corbeny. It is some thirty kilometres long and runs along a ridge between the valleys of the rivers Aisne and Ailette.

It acquired the name in the 18th century, as it was the route taken by the two daughters of Louis XV, Adelaide and Victoire, who were known as the Ladies of France.

At the time it was scarcely a carriage road but it was the most direct route between Paris and the Château de La Bove, near Bouconville-Vauclair, on the far side of the Ailette. The château belonged to Françoise de Châlus, former mistress of Louis XV, Countess of Narbonne-Lara and former lady of honour to Adélaïde, whom the two ladies visited frequently. To make the way easier, the count had the road surfaced and it gained its new name.

The [ridge's strategic importance](#) first became evident in 1814 when Napoleon's young recruits beat an army of Prussians and Russians at the Battle of Craonne.

Late on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1918 the Battalion took up positions around Craonne and La Hutte. The enemy attack called Operation Blütcher-Yorck, was launched on the 27<sup>th</sup>. May at 1am with a ferocious heavy artillery bombardment of 4,000 guns across a 40 km front, against four divisions of IX Corps which included the 4<sup>th</sup>.Yorks. The bombardment was accompanied by a gas attack, designed to disable defensive gun crews, after which 17 divisions of German infantry, under Crown Prince Wilhelm, began their advance through gaps in the Allied line.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. entrenched at Craonne were attacked on the left flank which broke and the enemy then pressed on to Beurieux. The right flank was then attacked with tanks that broke through and also carried on to Beurieux to join up with the other. This left the brigade surrounded in the line and little chance of escape. (see [Aisne Battle Map in detail – appendix 34](#))

The Allied forces were taken entirely by surprise and between Soissons and Reims the Germans broke through eight Allied divisions, four British and four French, reaching the Aisne in under six hours.

By the end of the first day the Germans had gained 15 km of territory and had reached the River Vesle. The amount of ground they gained so quickly is more reminiscent of the Blitzkrieg tactics, employed so decisively in the Low Countries in WW2.

#### Casualties for May 1918

Officers	Killed	1	
	Wounded & Missing	27	
O.R's	Killed	3	
	Wounded	52	
	Wounded & Missing	?	
	Missing	566	<b>Total 649</b>

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Craonne - where Grandad was wounded and captured

Grandad was wounded in the head as he was rounding up stragglers endeavouring to escape the encircling enemy. Whilst under constant machine gun fire and hurrying them along he swore he saw the sun glinting on the rounds just before they hit him and he went down thinking it was the end.

He was found and taken prisoner by the advancing Germans and taken first to their field hospital where he underwent various patching operations before being transferred to Gottingen Infirmary part of the Gottingen POW camp.



Showing where grandad was held as a POW.

He remembers being marched to the various POW camps and the watching women weeping at the sight of so many walking wounded. What a sight they were, ragged, dishevelled, dirty and crippled. When asked about the food in the camp he would simply say, "they gave us what they had" He also remembers the prison guards, if they were Saxon's they were O.K but if Prussians they were swine's and very arrogant. His first camp was Gottingen Lager in Hannover, then he was moved to Cassel Lager in June 1918. From there he was transferred to Crossen am den Oder Lager in Brandenburg.



Old view of the village Crossen am den Order



Courtesy –Whitehead family

Some of the POW's in Crossen after June 1918 –I don't think grandad's in it.



POW Money from Göttingen and Crossen 1918



Concert Party - Crossen after June 1918

**June 1918** –The remnants of the Battalion were pulled back and formed into 150<sup>th</sup> Composite Battalion and moved to Montagne De Bligny where they saw more action relieving the Welsh Regt. and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. They captured 3 German prisoners from a raiding party and shot down a German plane and captured the pilot. They were relieved by the Italian Brescia Regt. and spent most of the last half of the month in training and refitting at Les Essarts, Moeurs and St.Sophie FME.

**July 1918** – Battalion reduced to Training Cadre and sent to Dieppe area where training of N.C.O's in the use of Lewis guns, Gas, Musketry was started.

End of the 4<sup>th</sup> .Battalions active service

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The war dragged towards the end of 1918 and eventually the Armistice was signed in November 1918. Unfortunately the manner and terms of the surrender and the degree of reparation demanded of the Germans was such that this ultimately sowed the seed for the later war in 1939.

After the Armistice grandad J.G was repatriated but was never the same man. He had spells in various military hospitals, in particular Tooting Grove Military Hospital and Dunston Hill, Gateshead. Tooting Grove Military Hospital was part of MAB (Metropolitan Asylum Board), which gave great community service up until about 1948. (see Appendix 32)

Apart from the physical scars on his face, the entry and exit wounds, he had a deeper psychological condition that was to show itself at various times throughout his life with periods of sickness and what would possibly be termed today as flashbacks and ramblings.



The old Tooting Grove Military Hospital circa 1917

Amongst all this later uncertainty, however, he had flashes of intense lucidity. Once on arrival at the Dunston Hill Hospital (formerly Newcastle War Pensioner Hospital) in the early 1950's after weeks of rambling, the ambulance doors were flung open by the orderly who shouted out "name, rank and number," and grandad responded like he had never left the army all those years before, the only bit of sense he'd made in weeks.

He was never one to glorify war or seek to outwardly demonstrate his participation. He felt that war and its countless dead was not really a reason for celebration and he shunned memorial parades. He wore his Silver War Badge though, but most times in reverse so that the front was under the lapel. However, I believe he was secretly proud to have it.

Despite his problems, he still retained his musical skill and was an accomplished musician. He could lose himself in his music and forget the recent past. He could play the cornet, piano, organ and mandolin and had 3

violins, and was able to enjoy musical evenings with family and friends. He particularly enjoyed his classical records played on the old gramophone fitted with a big green horn and a wooden needle to “improve the tone” as he would say.

I don't seek to blow his trumpet, no pun intended, I know he wouldn't want me to but I feel the 4<sup>th</sup> Yorks. part in the battle of Houthulst Forest which appears to have been overlooked, ought to be recorded officially and therefore by default his pals that didn't make it.

John George was eventually disembodied from the battalion on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1919. His Medal Index Card shows the following entry:  
P.392/XV1/A KRS from this we can tell that he was disembodied under P.392 Kings Regulations XV1/A (appendix 9) which is sickness, brought about as a result of his injuries.

He was awarded a 58% disability pension of £1.8s.4d (just over 140p) per week for himself, wife and (declared) one child. (appendix 10)

Initially he returned to his trade as Boilermaker at Britannia Works but due to his injuries he could not carry on and sought lighter occupations. He thought he would do well opening a modest restaurant, which he did on the corner of Corporation Road and Marton Road, Middlesbrough. The old doctor's house with speaker tube outside for night medical emergency's was just up the road from where the family lived at 115 Marton Road, and being near the docks was deemed as just the place to have a go. It had three large rooms downstairs which were turned into the main part of the restaurant. The upstairs living accommodation wasn't used, as home was just up the road. Unfortunately, it didn't work out and grandad J.G. lost a substantial sum of money in this venture. He went back into industry and became an ambulanceman (part of the on-site medical staff) for the nearby chemical works.

I had hoped to find his army papers but it was a long shot and didn't pay off. I was told it would be difficult and about a 40% chance of success. There are four possible record sets:-

1<sup>st</sup> set - During the Blitz of 1940 a large percentage of soldier's documents were destroyed and those that remained were burnt and water damaged, this is known as the Burnt Series.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> set is known as the Un-Burnt Series and these are the records that luckily were sent to a different storage facility as they were predominantly pension claimants before the 14-18 war ended.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> set is known as the Mis-Sorts and are exactly what they say they are, odd records collated from remnants.

The 4<sup>th</sup> set is known as PIN26 and were specific case records claiming a pension.

You can't help but feel moved and emotional when you're searching through these names, thousands and thousands, just black and white charred images on modern Micro Film. Husbands, fathers, brothers, sweethearts - most of whom died for the King's Shilling, a promise of "it'll be all over in six months" and us younger ones who came after.

As grandad John George survived the war and didn't receive his pension till later, his records would almost certainly have been amongst the 1<sup>st</sup> set. However, every Morley has been looked at twice in every set and unfortunately none of them contained John George's papers.

He received the British War Medal, the Victory Medal and the Silver War Badge, see (appendix 2 & 3) He died in 1963 at 16 Lawson Street, Stockton on Tees aged 76.



So like every good story there was twist in the tale, from surviving Passchendaele to the final moments on the Aisne we've followed in grandad's footsteps, been where he's been, seen the tanks come rearing up and rolling over the trenches at Craonne.

Passchendaele, the Somme, Rosieres, Estaires, Hazebrouck and the Aisne, does it really matter which one? Grandad went through them all and very nearly made it before being brought down and becoming just another O.R. wounded and missing in action.

What does matter is that when the Country called in 1914 he stepped forward, didn't hesitate, he could also have stayed at home and continued training others but this wasn't his way. A brave and honourable man, I'm so pleased he was my grandad.



I've tried to trace his medals with no luck and unfortunately we're just too late to ask for copies from the War Office as the practice of supplying replacements, or in some cases the originals to the family, has been stopped. They might turn up though you never know. One thing is for sure; they will have his name and number on so we'll will know they belonged to grandad.

I will visit Houthulst Forest, Craonne and the Lys battlefields, I know they have memorial's at the villages especially Craonne. I've always wanted to visit and now I can go out of respect for what my grandad and thousands like him went through for us.

*Graham R Morley*



**Grandad – circa 1936**

*My thanks to all my who helped make this document possible and who gave freely of their time, information and allowed copies of their personal documents.*

*I have tried to list them all on the following page and I apologise to any inadvertently omitted.*

## Research Credits.

My Uncle Bob – John George's younger son

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D C Farr - 3rd Ypres

1914-1918.net

Workhouses.org

FirstWorldWar.com

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The National Archives -Kew

World War 1 Army Record Information

Medal Index Card – WO 372/14

WO363/M2152/3 British Army Records Burnt Series

WO 364/2573/2574 British Army Records Un-Burnt Series

WO 363/MIS-SORTS 60 23 to 52 British Army Records

PIN 26 British Army Records Pension

WO 161 Prisoner of War interviews

WO 329 Medal Rolls - Silver War Badge WO 329/952

WO 372 Medal Rolls – Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal WO 329/3153

War Diaries

WO 95/2836 4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires - 50<sup>th</sup> Division 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade Apr 1915 – Jly 1918

WO 95/2583 4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires – 50<sup>th</sup> Division 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade Aug 1918 – Oct 1918

WO 95/5462 2/4<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires – Sep 1914 – Dec 1917

50<sup>th</sup> Divn – 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade – 5<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers.

50<sup>th</sup> Divn – 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade – 6<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry.

Diary of Major W. Anderson, D.S.O M.C. Brigade Major of the 149th Inf Bde.

International Committee of the Red Cross – Geneva.

## Appendices.

1. John George's Medal Index Card.
2. John George's Decorations.
3. Medal Marking Guide.
4. Medal Roll –Yorkshire Regiment.
5. War Badge Roll – Silver War Badge.
6. Infantry Trench Map – Fontaine le Croisille & Cherisy –Arras area.
7. Map – Arras and area
8. Map - Ypres and area
9. Kings Regulations P.392. XV1/a
10. Pension Entitlement.
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12. 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Formation History.
13. 4th Yorkshires 50<sup>th</sup> Divn. Positions June-Nov 1917
14. Green Howard's Battle Honours.
15. Battle of Delville Wood.
16. 3rd Battle of Ypres – Passchendaele –Overview.
17. Commonwealth War Graves overview and Map – The Ypres salient  
2 pages
18. The Menin Gate Memorial- 3 pages.
19. Tyne Cot Memorial.
20. Issue 1 – The Green Howard's Newsletter – The Great War – 12  
pages
21. Time Line – The 1914 – 1918 War and its battles – 5 pages.
22. War Diary pages of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Yorkshires –June – Nov 1917  
14 pages

23. War Diary of the 5<sup>th</sup> N.Fusiliers October 1917 – 3 pages.
24. War Diary of the 6<sup>th</sup> Durham L. Inf. – November 1917 – 3 pages.
25. Orders of Battle No.216 secret – 2 pages
26. Orders of Battle No.217 secret – 4 pages
27. Trench Map – Bixchote & St.Julien Overview whole area behind the lines showing holding areas Marsuin Camp & Pascal Farm and wounded relay route. Distance to Front 6 plus miles.
28. Trench and Ground attack Map “A” – Houthulst Forest
29. Creeping Barrage Map “D” for the Houthulst Forest battle
30. Map “C” – position at 10.45am 26<sup>th</sup> Oct 1917 – Battle of Houthulst Forest
31. Map – The Battles for Flanders –Final Front Line positions Nov 1917.
32. MAB – Metropolitan Asylum Board
33. International Committee of the Red Cross - 2 pages
34. Aisne Battle Map – A3

