

## WWW REMEMBERED

# Relatives travelling to honour heroes of Passchendaele 100 years after carnage

The son of a Welsh First World War hero is among those who have been invited to the 100th anniversary commemorations of the Battle of Passchendaele Ridge in Belgium later this year. Tom Houghton reports

**T**HE Third Battle of Ypres, part of the Battle of Passchendaele Ridge, was one of the major campaigns of the First World War.

Fought over several months from July until November 1917, it was a battle in which Wales lost more military personnel per capita than any other nation.

Before the devastating losses took their toll, the encounter initially appeared to provide what the British had wanted since 1914: the chance to attack at Ypres and the breakout of the confines of the salient trenches around it.

It began with encouraging gains, but awful summer weather soon bogged it down.

By August the move was failing and had descended into what has been described as "attritional fighting", with the British moving forward slowly, but at enormous cost.

Further bad weather in October led to the battlefield becoming an impassible quagmire.

Around 70,000 British soldiers, including hundreds from Wales, died in the battle.

This year sees the 100th anniversary of the infamous battle, and survivors and their families have been invited to a ceremony in Belgium in memory of the conflict and those who lost their lives.

One of those attending the ceremony will be Robert Lloyd Rees, chief executive of South Wales-based Cintec International's North American operations. He will be representing his father, Alderman Tom A Lloyd-Rees MC, who bravely fought in the battle aged just 24.

Robert said: "My father was born in 1893 at Eglwysilan Rectory in Abertridwr, near Caerphilly.

"He was one of seven children, and like many other young men at the time, he signed up for service in the First World War. He fought with the Welsh Regiment, serving initially in the Machine Gun Corps and later transferring to the Royal Flying Corps."

Robert's father's exceptional service at The Battle of Passchendaele Ridge led to him being awarded the Military Cross for "...conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He took his four guns to the final objective, dug himself in, and greatly helped the infantry

in breaking up local counter-attacks. "He remained in the captured position for three days under intense shell fire, maintaining communication both to the rear and laterally..."

Robert added: "Following my father's service in the First World War, he received a handwritten telegram from Buckingham Palace to attend an awards ceremony, where he was presented with his medal and honour by King George V.

"After the First World War he joined the Air Ministry's aeronautical inspection department and went on to serve in the Second World War with the 103 Gloucester regiment Rocket, AA Battery Bristol. He was later elected councillor for Redland ward Bristol and made an alderman, serving his constituents faithfully until the formation of Avon County."

The 100th anniversary commemorations will take place on July 30 and 31 at Belgium's Tyne Cot Cemetery, the largest Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in the world. The event will be attended by thousands, including Robert.

The main ceremony will be at the cemetery, where 12,000 British and Commonwealth troops are buried.

There will also be a traditional Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate memorial in Ypres on July 30, and a number of live performances in Ypres Market Square to tell the story.

Both events will be shown on large screens in the centre of Ypres for those who do not get tickets.

Robert said: "It's a real honour to have been selected by the British government to attend these anniversary commemorations. It's heartening to know that my father's efforts in the war, and the sacrifices of those who didn't survive the battle, are still remembered and appreciated today."

He is one of the descendants of British soldiers to be offered free tickets to the commemorations.

The Third Battle of Ypres was the big British push of 1917. The 1980s TV sitcom Blackadder would later mock Field Marshal Haig's plans as "yet another gargantuan effort to move his drinks cabinet six inches closer to Berlin."

According to War History Online, Haig believed these pushes would eventually bring the Allies into Germany.

Soldiers in the trenches during the Battle of Passchendaele on November 1, 1917



His thinking was that by wearing down German troops, he would eventually create a gap in their lines through which fast-moving troops could pour. For him, it was fundamental to the war - but proved hugely costly.

Earlier this year, then culture secretary Karen Bradley said it was important to remember the "horrors" of the Ypres battlefield and honour the memories of those who died.

Ms Bradley said: "Some of World War One's most defining images of futility, mud, gas attacks and trenches

come from these very battlefields.

"As the war recedes into the distance, it is our responsibility to not only mark the years that have gone past, but to keep alive the memories of those who sacrificed so much."

Paul Breyne, the Belgian general commissioner for the commemoration, said his government was committed to supporting the event.

He said: "The Belgian government is deeply committed in bringing support for the commemoration of this historical event of exceptional magnitude.

"It is for the Belgian people and the Belgian government of utmost importance to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom and peace.

"We are looking forward to welcoming those British citizens and visitors from other nations who will travel to Belgium to pay tribute to those who fought with dedication and bravery, a hundred years ago, in this devastating battle."

Peter James, managing director of Newport-based structural engineering company Cintec International,

which has offices across the world, was delighted to welcome his colleague Robert this week on his way to the commemorations in Belgium.

He said: "It's an amazing story of a local Welshman who, along with tens of thousands of other volunteers, put himself forward to serve the country in the First World War.

"The fact that his only surviving son, Robert, has been selected to attend the commemorations is a testimony of the high regard his heroic action had in The Battle of Passchendaele Ridge."

## NEIGHBOURS KILLED ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Our website, WalesOnline, features a powerful tool which enables you to find family members or people who lived in your street who died in World War I. Today, Tom Houghton has searched for fallen servicemen who lived in George Street and Bute Street, Butetown, Cardiff. Here is who he found...

**Gilbert Reece**  
Husband of Florence Reece (formerly Tolcher), of 21 George Street, Born in Bristol.  
Rank: Private  
Regiment: Somerset Light Infantry  
Age: 40  
Date of death: 2-10-1915  
Buried at: Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery

**William John Ward**  
Son of R and AM Ward, of 129 Bute Street.  
Rank: Private  
Regiment: London Regiment  
Age: 20  
Date of death: 6-1-1917  
Buried at: Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery

**William Edward Stone**  
Son of E and Emma Jane Stone, of 16 George Street.  
Rank: Private  
Regiment: Welsh Regiment  
Age: 24  
Date of death: 8-8-1915  
Buried at: Cardiff (Cathays) Cemetery

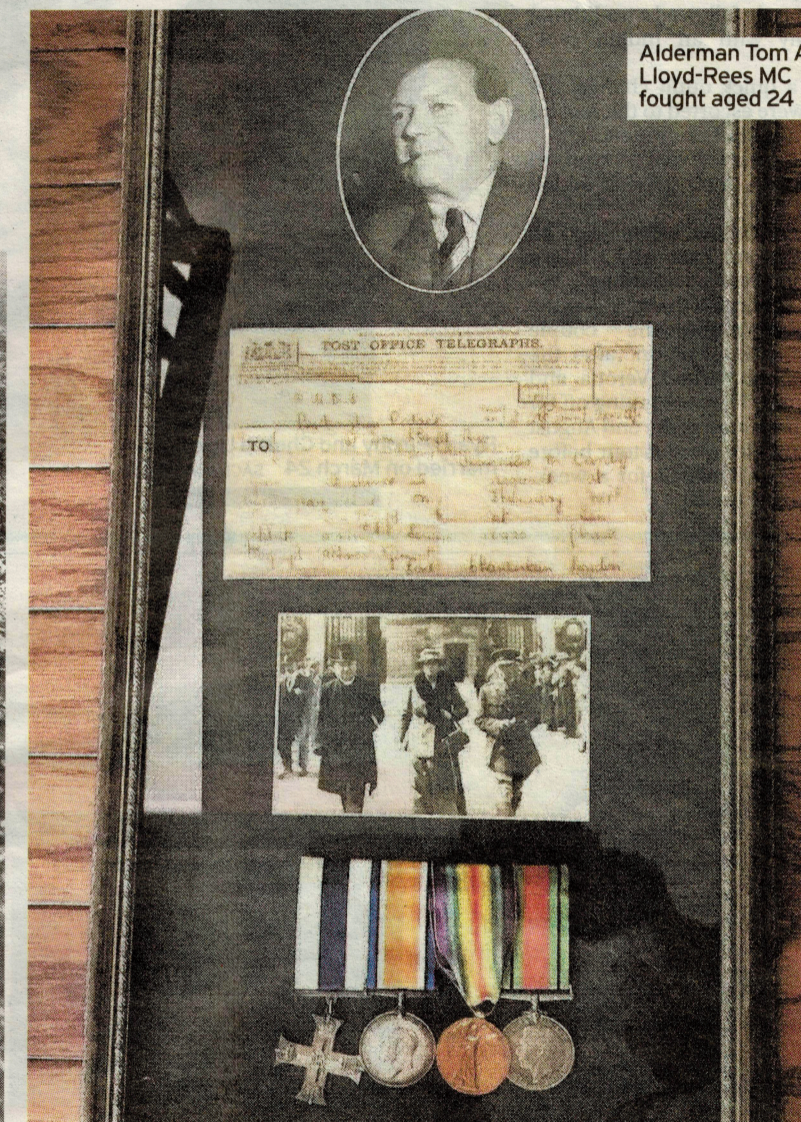
**Bertram Alfred Pollard**  
Son of Mr and Mrs Alfred Pollard, of Penzance; husband of Alice Pollard, of the Bute Dock Hotel, Bute Street.  
Rank: Company Sergeant Major  
Regiment: Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry  
Age: 41  
Date of death: 13-10-1915  
Buried at: Spoilbank Cemetery

**Kuyemon Tanaka**  
Son of Kintaro Tanaka (father); husband of Mato Tanaka (née Miura), of 36 George Street. Born in Japan.  
Rank: Second Mate  
Regiment: Mercantile Marine  
Age: 30  
Date of death: 2-10-1918  
Buried at: Tower Hill Memorial

**JH May**  
Husband of Alice Morse (formerly May), of 276 Workmen's Hotel, Bute Street.  
Rank: Private  
Regiment: Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry  
Date of death: 15-3-1917  
Buried at: Ovillers Military Cemetery

**Pedro Bilbao**  
Son of the late Peter and Locardia Bilbao; husband of Florentina Bilbao (née Begona), of 33 George Street. Born in Liverpool.  
Rank: Third Engineer  
Regiment: Mercantile Marine Reserve  
Age: 36  
Date of death: 19-4-1917  
Buried at: Tower Hill Memorial

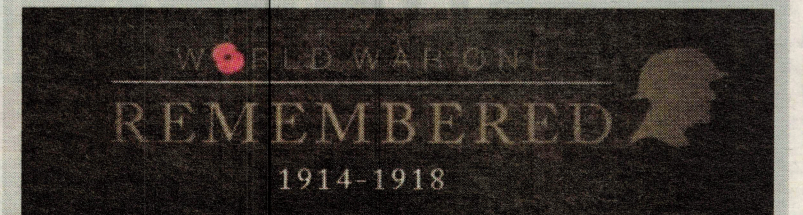
**J Glaze**  
Nephew of Obadiah McCarthy, of 165 Bute Street.  
Rank: Able Seaman  
Regiment: Mercantile Marine Reserve  
Age: 35  
Date of death: 7-12-1917  
Buried at: East Mudros Military Cemetery



Peter James with Robert Lloyd-Rees



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