

George Joseph Castle

Private 267351, 2/1st Bucks Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

George Joseph Castle was born in 1897, the first child of George Castle and Ellen Bird. His parents came from Oxfordshire and were married earlier that year. In the Census of 1911, we see them living in the High Street of Amersham, the fifth cottage from Town Mill. George the father is a shepherd and his 13 year old son is a shepherd boy. George Joseph enlisted at Aylesbury into the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (OBLI) and served with the 2/1st Battalion.

During July and the first half of August 1917, the battalion was in training in northern France around St Omer and on 20 August they crossed the border into Belgium near Ypres. 21 August was spent in preparation for a planned major attack on the German lines the following day.

Taken from a book by Major General J.C. Swann,¹ the following account describes the line-up for what became known as “The Third Battle of Ypres” or more commonly **Passchendaele**:

“On the 15th August the Battalion (2/1st Bucks) moved to Abeelee and on the 18th to Goldfish Chateau Camp near Ypres. On the evening of the 20th they advanced to the support line just forward of Wieltje, having many casualties on the way from shell fire. After dark they went into the line in the Pommern Castle sector, Headquarters at Uhlán Farm, “C” Company on the left, “B” on the right (front line), “D” left support, “A” right support. The next day was spent in preparations for the attack on the 22nd.

Of the 61st Division the 184th Brigade was told off for the attack, having the 44th Infantry Brigade, 15th Division, on their right, and the 143rd Brigade, 48th Division, on their left. The Bucks were to make the attack on the right, the Oxfords on the left of the Brigade, each Battalion taking a frontage of approximately 700 yards.”

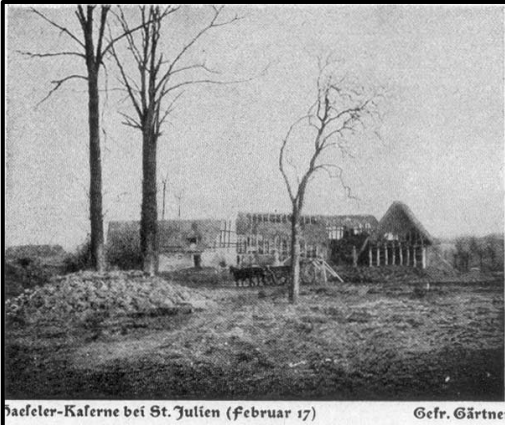


The Bucks and Oxfords were to advance in waves, while eight platoons of the Royal Berks would act as “moppers-up”, while a brigade reserve consisted of the Gloucesters and a battalion of the 183rd Brigade. The objective was the Kansas Cross-Winnipeg Road. Strong posts and dug-outs along the route would be dealt with by the “moppers-up”, allowing the main attack to advance without delay. Once the advance began, the “moppers-up” were to suffer many casualties from machine-gun and rifle fire. Although strong posts at Somme and Aisne Farms were taken, the latter was almost immediately retaken by the enemy and other strong posts remained in enemy possession.

Major General Swann described the subsequent action: *“The position of the advancing waves of the Bucks became more and more serious, but still they pressed on. Some at least reached their objective. They were exposed to fire from front, flanks, and rear, and entirely cut off from all communication. Meanwhile a company of the 2/5th Gloucesters, under Second Lieutenant Johnston, with the few remaining men available consolidated a line of shell-holes for the defence of Somme Farm. It had been won by a platoon of the Berks, only three men of which remained to follow Second Lieutenant St. Leger into the post to deal with the 14 survivors of the garrison. Three*

¹ Swann, Major General J. C. *Citizen Soldiers of Buckinghamshire 1795-1926*. Buckinghamshire T A, 1930

counter-attacks were made on the newly consolidated line, but were caught by the fire of our Artillery, and easily repulsed by the Infantry. The enemy snipers were much in evidence throughout the day, any movement that might suggest a runner with information for Headquarters attracted their special attention; even stretcher-bearers and wounded crawling painfully back were not spared.”



The Oxforde, aided by the 2/5th Gloucesters, finally captured Post Farm, relieving some of the pressure on the Bucks. The party sent to take the gun-pits found that the enemy had left and many wounded from the battalion were sheltering there.

Of the 13 officers and 637 other ranks who went into action, 11 officers and 338 other ranks were reported as casualties. Other men reported missing were later traced as prisoners of war.

That night the 2/7th Worcesters relieved the battalion who returned totally exhausted to their old bivouac at Goldfish

Chateau until the next day when they moved back to Brandhoek. The greatly depleted companies, other than 'A' Company, were now commanded by sergeants.

THE BATTALION WAR DIARY gives a feeling for the time in the way it was written:

“The day for which the whole Battalion has waited and trained incessantly, the day of attack. It is unnecessary to repeat the scheme, for the copy of Battalion orders attached is clear enough for the dullest brain.

...hopelessly depleted by casualties from machine-gun and rifle-fire, and owing to the stubborn resistance met with (the Hun fought well when protected with concrete), were unable to fulfil the task allotted to them...

The enemy snipers had a busy day, not sparing stretcher bearers or the wounded crawling in; such is their idea of warfare and Kulture.

Lists of awards and particulars will be included when to hand. It is hard to feel cheerful when so many of our best and dearest companions are lost to us, but we must always and will always, be thankful that, in the General's own words, the Battalion has been tried and has not been found wanting, remembering especially the share of those who have gone, never again to answer their names in the roll of the Battalion.”

George Castle was one of those “never again to answer their names in the roll of the Battalion”. He died on 22 August 1917 aged just 19, unmarried and with no known descendants. His parents George and Ellen have no English living descendants though there are descendants of a granddaughter who married an American GI at Chesham in 1944 and there is now an American family.

He was awarded the Allied Victory Medal and British War Medal, 1914-1918.

George Joseph Castle is remembered with Honour

Tyne Cot Memorial, Zonnebeke, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium, panel 96 to 98²

He was also listed on the Roll of Honour in Amersham Methodist Church.

² For details of the memorial and engraving, see the chapter on Memorials to the Missing.