

News / 100 years on: Remembering Ypres

Passchendaele, and the Jews who fell

Historians this week reflected on the contribution of Jewish soldiers to the First World War effort, as Britain marked the 100-year anniversary of the bloody battle of Passchendaele, writes Jack Mendel.

At least 240 British Jewish men are thought to have been killed during the Third Battle of Ypres in Belgium, with combatants at Passchendaele ranging from privates such as Harry Vigdofsky to leading Australian general, John Monash.

The battle lasted from 31 July to 10 November 1917. Hundreds died on the first day with some, such as Lionel Ernest Schloss, sustaining fatal wounds and dying just 10 days before the end of the fighting.

Part of Nottingham's Jewish community, the Polish-born 2nd lieutenant in the Machine Gun Corps became a naturalised citizen in 1900.

According to London Jews in the First World War (LJFWW), he aspired to follow in father Alexander's footsteps and become a rabbi but "unfortunately he was killed in Ypres before he could achieve his vocation".

While Schloss lasted for almost the whole of the battle, thousands were not so lucky. Lance Corporal John Isaac Cohen of Silver Street in north London was killed in action

on the first day. He served in the 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment, was a former member of the teaching staff at London County Council and is buried at the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial.

Also caught in the first wave of attacks on 31 July was Private Harry Vigdofsky, 23, of the South Wales Borderers. He perished near a monument known as Iron Cross and is also remembered on the Menin Gate.

His parents, Rachael and Solomon, of Jane Street off London's Commercial Road, never got to visit their son's grave or see his name on the memorial.

A century after thousands of British and Commonwealth troops went "over the top", Princes Charles and William, the Duchess of Cambridge and Prime Minister Theresa May on Monday at Tyne Cot joined the King and Queen of Belgium to mark the anniversary with some 4,000 descendants of those who fought.

Another to fall on the opening day was Henry George Raphael of the 7th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment. Born in 1894, he was listed by LJFWW as working in the 'Optical Establishment'. He is also buried at Menin Gate, leaving behind his mother and sister Elizabeth and Kate of Belsize Park.

Some half a million men on both sides were killed, injured or went



First World War soldiers at the front: Passchendaele was one of the conflict's most horrific battles

missing during the battle and efforts are underway to digitise their memory.

LJFWW is dedicated to creating a permanent digital archive to preserve the surviving evidence of Jewish experiences for future generations.

The project's historian and manager, Paula Kitching, said the work is vital, showing how events 100 years ago impacted on us all today.

"Our research and ongoing engagement with the community is uncovering stories of the significant number of Jewish men who died in First World War battles fighting for this country and how the war affected British Jewish lives on the Home Front."

She added: "Anglo Jewry can be



Prince Charles leads VIPs at Monday's ceremony; battle victim John Isaac Cohen and, below, his war papers

proud of its participation in the British war effort, reminding our community and the wider British community of our contribution and sacrifice."

◆ See www.jewsffww.london

