

# Passchendaele and the Jews who fell

As Britain marks 100-years since the bloody First World War battle, Anglo Jewry can be 'proud' of its participation in the war effort

BY JACK MENDEL | August 2, 2017, 4:27 pm |

**H**istorians this week reflected on the contribution of Jewish soldiers to the First World War effort, as Britain marks the 100-year anniversary of the bloody battle of Passchendaele.

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 one of the leading Australian Generals, John Monash.

Lasting from 31 July to 10 November, hundreds died on the first day of the battle, including Lionel Ernest Schloss sustaining fatal wounds.

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 had aspirations to follow in father Alexander's footsteps, AND become a rabbi. But said: "Unfortunately he was killed in Ypres before he could achieve his vocation."

Whilst Lionel lasted almost the entirety of the battle, thousands were not so lucky.

Lance Corporal John Isaac Cohen of Silver Street north London was killed in action on the first day.

He served in the Wiltshire Regiment 2nd Battalion, was a former member of the teaching staff at London County Council. As one of 54,000 men who have no burial site, Cohen is remembered at the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial.

Also caught in the first wave of attacks at Passchendaele on 31 July was Private Harry Vigdofsky, 23, of the South Wales Borderers, 23.

He perished near a monument known as Iron Cross and is also remembered on the Menin Gate.

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 joined the King and Queen of Belgium and some 4,000 descendants of those who fought to mark the anniversary at Tyne Cot on Monday.

Unfortunately, Private Harry Vigdofsky's parents Rachael and Solomon of 42 Jane Street, Commercial Road, London, never got to visit their son's grave or see his name on the memorial.

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

During the battle of Passchendaele around half a million men were killed, injured or went missing on both sides, but efforts are underway to digitise their memory.

'London Jews in the First World War' is project dedicated to creating a permanent digital archive to preserve the surviving evidence of Jewish experiences for future generations.

Paula Kitching, the project's historian and manager told Jewish News that the work is vital, because it “shows that events a hundred years ago still impact us on 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 proud of its participation in British war effort, reminding both our own community and the wider British community of our contribution and sacrifice.”

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