



Henry Brough Till (known as Brough Till)

1st Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment

Born: ABT 1891, Gentleshaw, England

Died: 26th October 1917, Belgium

“They went forward, under the worst conditions of mud and fire and would not give up until they died or stuck in the mud - no soldier can do *more*.”

General Shoubridge on 26th October 1917 attack.

“Forlorn Hope”

“The Seventh Division 1914 - 1918” on 26th October 1917 attack.



Produced by: David Sylvester

Date: April 2014

Relationship: Great Uncle

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The detail presented in this document is largely based on official civil and army records. Sadly the opportunity to record personal information, with the exception of a small number of photographs, has been lost.
- 1.2. The main period covered is from the beginning of October 1917 up to Henry Brough Till's death on the morning of 26th October 1917. Brough was rank and file, achieving promotion to Lance Corporal. Consequently it is impossible to identify Brough's exact role in the South Staffordshire's war efforts.
- 1.3. The Nuneaton and North Warwickshire Family History Society (NNWFHS), "Discovering Your Roots in and around North Warwickshire", talks about "Immigrants to Warwickshire", specifically "you may find your ancestors hopped over the county border from neighbouring Staffordshire". It is therefore hoped that this narrative will enable descendants of men who served in the WWI conflict to better understand and take pride in the contribution made by their relatives.
- 1.4. Special thanks are extended to the Museum of the South Staffordshire Regiment, Lichfield and the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917, Zonnebeke, Belgium for providing invaluable research documents, not least of which being the War diaries of the 1st Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment and extracts from the book "The Seventh Division 1914 - 1918" by C T Atkinson.
- 1.5. Researching and producing this document has taken place over a number of years. The end product has helped the author to achieve a degree of recognition of the sacrifice, pain and suffering endured by Brough and his family. May this document help others.

2. Early Life

- 2.1. Henry Brough Till was the eighth child of nine born to Thomas and Caroline Till. Throughout his life he lived in coal mining areas; first of all in Gentleshaw, a small community near Lichfield, Staffordshire and then in Bedworth, Warwickshire. One assumes the family moved to seek better employment opportunities and improved quality of life.
- 2.2. On the 1901 Census the family lived at Malt House Row, Gentleshaw. Brough was a Scholar and 9 years old. His father was a coal miner. On the 1911 Census the family had moved to 5 Newtown Road, Bedworth. At this time Brough was 19 years of age and employed as a Blacksmith's Striker in a local colliery. He must have been very fit. The father had found employment as a coal miner, hewer, cutting coal on the face.
- 2.3. At the time of Brough's death, his parents were living at 54 Leicester Road, Bedworth.
- 2.4. Brough did not marry and does not have any direct descendants. As for his siblings and this research:
 - there has been no contact with Nathaniel Thomas Till's descendants;
 - most of the descendants of Rose Annie Till are aware of this research;
 - Susanna Till does have descendants, but nothing is known of them;
 - Olive Jane Till does have descendants, but nothing is known of them;
 - Ethel Emma Till did not marry and had no children;
 - John William Till did marry and emigrated to the USA. Attempts to contact his family have been unsuccessful;
 - sadly Ada Till's daughter has recently died and did not marry;
 - nothing is known of Arthur J Till.

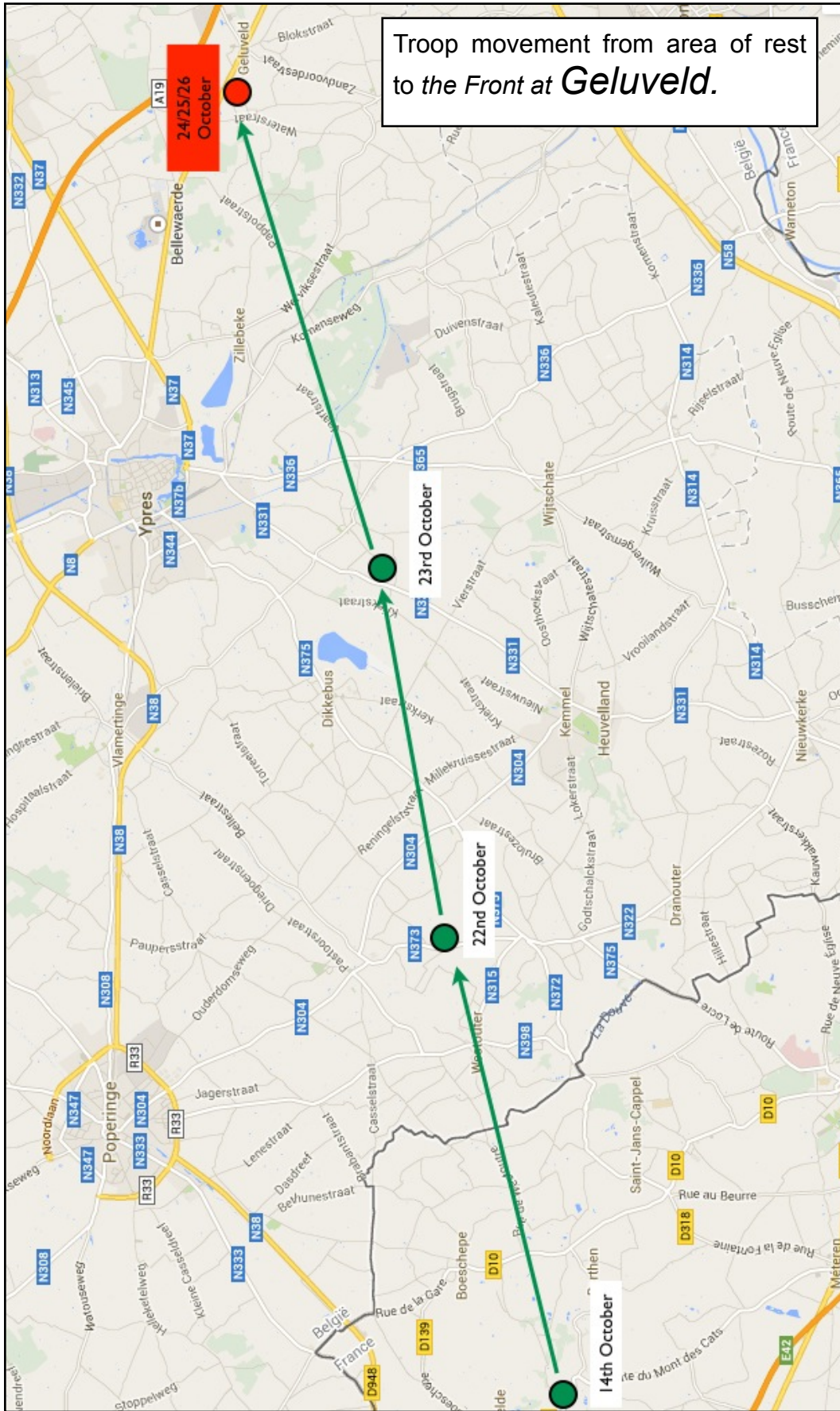
The family is depicted in the photograph shown in Appendix A. Given that all of Brough's siblings and his parents lived to advanced years, it must be assumed that Brough was taken from this world far too soon.

3. Army Service

- 3.1. The curator of the South Staffordshire Regiment Museum has suggested that Brough's service number indicates that he joined as a volunteer. It is interesting to note that Brough was born in Staffordshire but had moved to Warwickshire, with his parents and siblings, before WWI. The assumption is he still had an affinity with his County of Birth as he chose to sign up, in Nuneaton, for the South Staffordshire Regiment, ultimately serving in the 1st Battalion. When he went to the recruiting office, did he go along with friends? Were they jovial? Were they looking to fight for a good cause? Maybe this document will lead to people coming forward and identifying the group of chums.
- 3.2. Brough's older brother, John William, on the other hand, was conscripted a little later and joined a Warwickshire regiment.
- 3.3. Appendix C, "South Staffs 1st Battalion Summary", précis the Battalion's service record. It is not known at what point Brough joined the Regiment, but given the date of his death, it must be fair to assume that he was killed during "the unsuccessful assault south of the Menin Road on 26th October [1917]". This involved an attack by the Seventh Division's 91st Brigade, of which the 1st Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment was a part.
- 3.4. At the beginning of October 1917 the 1st Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment took part in a major offensive to secure the main line of the ridge east of Zonnebeke. The Seventh Division's objective was to establish itself just east of Broodseinde - Becelaere road. The outcome was successful, but the South Staffs' casualties were 30 men killed, 33 missing and 291 wounded. Following this the battalion was given 10 days out of the line to recuperate and incorporate replacement troops.

3.5. The following table has been extracted from the War Diaries of the 1st Battalion, South Staffs, and gives a brief account of the days between that earlier attack and the offensive on 26th October 1917. There are entries mentioning Training, Parade and Routine that typified army life. Would it have been unsettling thinking about the conflict that had just happened, the gradual movement towards the battle front, the sound and site of guns firing, injured men coming the other way, carnage on the road side? How did they accept their possible fate?

| October 1917 | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 10 th | The Battalion moved to camp in St. Hubertshoek. |
| 11 th | Kit inspections and training was continued in camp as above. No special occurrence. |
| 12 th | The Battalion moved to Thieushoek area, and billeted in Mont-Des-Cats. |
| 13 th | Day spent in cleaning up. No special occurrence. |
| 14 th | Sunday. In billets at Mont-Des-Cats. |
| 15 th to 18 th | In billets as above. Usual routine and training continued. Reinforced (18 th) by 2/Lieut. W.H.Nokes and 164 other |
| 19 th | Training continued. Tactical Exercise carried out on Brigade Theatres. |
| 20 th | Usual routine. Day spent in bathing. No special occurrence. |
| 21 st | Battalion paraded for Tactical Exercise. Usual routine. |
| 22 nd | The Battalion moved by march route via Berthen - Kokerelle and Westoutre to camp in (No. 9 Area) |
| 23 rd | The Battalion of the 39 th division in camp at Voormezele (N.11.b.3.4.). |
| 24 th and 25 th | The Battalion relieved the 17 th Bn. K.R.R. in the front night 24/25 th . |
| 26 th | The Battalion took part in operations at Geluveld. |



Does this depict the march towards that fateful morning?



- 3.6. Words of advice from a senior officer prior to going into battle, from the South Staffs War Diaries; designed to encourage, motivate and warn.

Some points to remember for the attack.

1. Always keep within 50 yards of the barrage line. Remember the barrage is your best friend and protection.
2. Set out absolutely determined to get forward at all costs. If you are being fired on, work from shell hole to shell hole by quick rushes.
3. D'ont worry about what is happening on your flanks. Your only job is to get forward. If your comrades on the right or left are held up, you can help them best by getting forward.
4. D'ont waste food, water, or ammunition. You never know how long they will have to last you. Above all, d'ont throw anything away to lighten your load. " A man who does so is a coward and a traitor.
5. Finally, remember the Battalion you belong to - the finest in the British Army. Live up to its traditions and there can be no doubt as to the result of the attack.

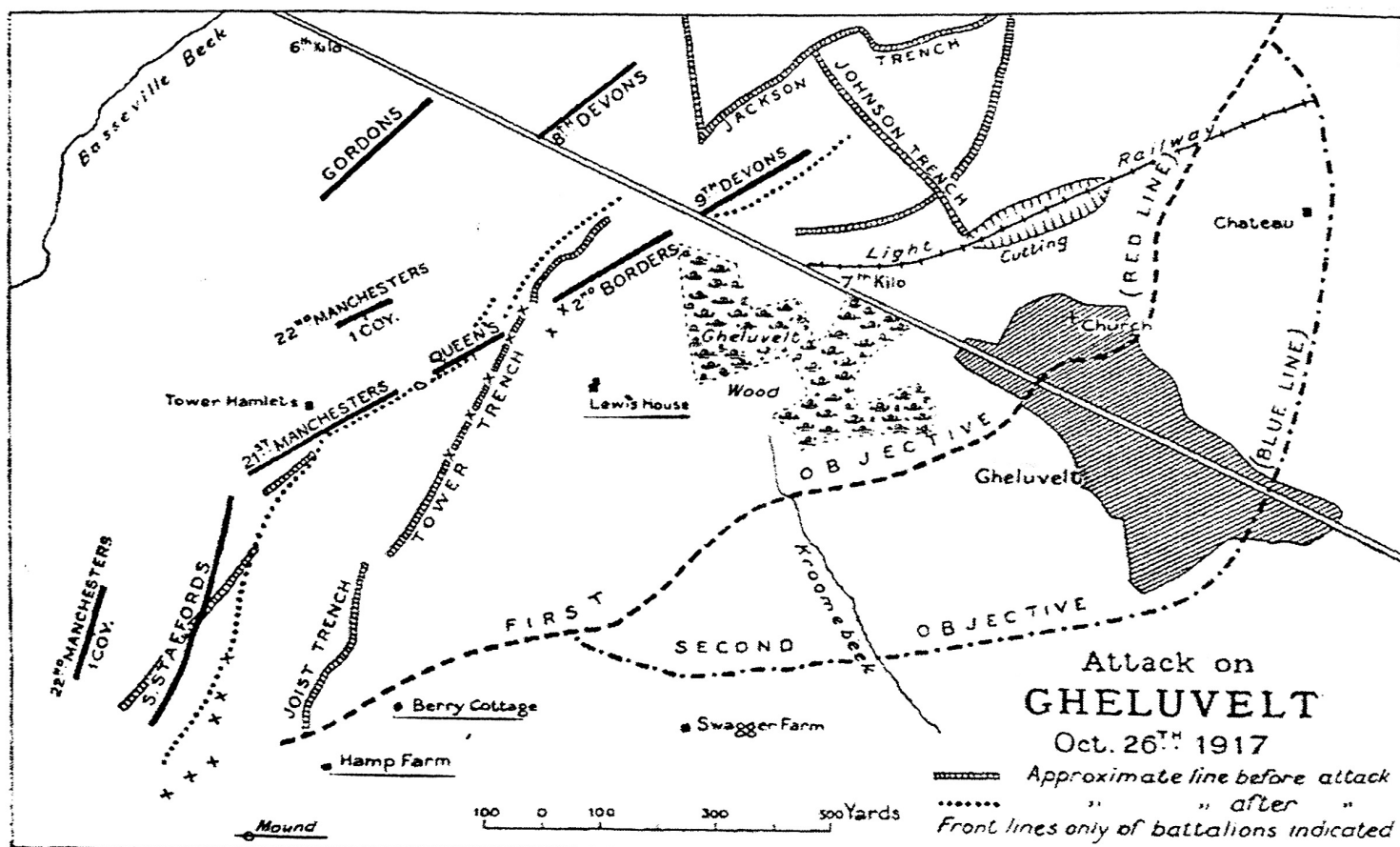
1st. October 1917.

(Signed) A. B. BEAUMAN. Lieut-Colonel.

- 3.7. As part of the eighth phase of the Third Battle of Ypres, the Seventh Division received explicit orders to attack on the morning of October 26 1917, and were expected to be successful, even though the conditions, as a result of rain and mud, were worse. The prospect of another attack in the mud and the fact that the drafts did not make good recent losses, this did not encourage the men. Nor was it easy for the officers and troops to understand the logic of continuing the offensive in the face of conditions so absolutely fatal to rapid progress.
- 3.8. The primary objective for the Division that morning, was to capture Geluveld, or rather the knoll on which Geluveld had once stood, and to secure the Tower Hamlets ridge east of the Basseville Brook. Success would greatly improve the situation of the British right and act as an effective diversionary tactic. The main Allied attack was being delivered away to the left in a more northerly direction - Passchendaele. By keeping the Germans occupied at Geluveld, this would prevent them from moving reserves to meet the main attack. The term "Forlorn Hope"¹, as used by the author of "The Seventh Division 1914 - 1918", most sums up the plight of the Seventh Division. By appreciating this planned major contribution by the Seventh Division, the Divisional Commander refrained from protesting to the higher authorities that under the conditions that existed success would be impossible.

¹ Forlorn Hope - a band of soldiers or other combatants chosen to take the leading part in a military operation, such as an assault on a defended position, where the risk of casualties is high.

3.9. The attack started at the first sign of dawn. The German's responded immediately by putting down a barrage. Fortunately it fell behind the attacking battalions. On the 91st Brigade's right, the South Staffs at first fared quite well against most of the machine guns, being shielded by higher ground. The right company, "B", reached its objective - a strongly held mound S.W. of Hamp Farm. A savage conflict followed; the company's two officers were killed and all the senior NCOs, but the men fought on. In the end the survivors, commanded by a corporal, found themselves in possession of the mound. They had captured a machine gun and had caused heavy casualties on the Germans, but they were rather isolated. "D" Company in the centre, which was attacking Hamp Farm, had been mown down wholesale by a crossfire of machine guns, while the left company, "C", when within 50 yards of its objective, Berry Cotts, had caught the stream of machine gun bullets from the flank and its few survivors sheltered in shell-holes and waited for a chance to get back.



- 3.10. When all the surviving units had indicated that they were back on their original line, the Allied artillery was ordered to put down a protective barrage, to discourage the Germans from counter-attacking. But the Germans would not have fared well anyway because of the mud and rain.
- 3.11. The mud enabled the Germans to hold Geluveld. The Seventh Division had every right to claim that it was the elements and the conditions that defeated them and not the enemy.
- 3.12. The surviving troops could take great pride from the tribute General Shoubridge made about their “splendid behaviour”:

“They went forward under the worst conditions of mud and fire and would not give up until they died or stuck in the mud - no soldier can do more.”

- 3.13. The Seventh Division’s men had gone into the attack knowing that the chances were all against success: they had attacked as if they had believed the battle would go their way. Geluveld stands out in the Division’s story, not as a day of loss and disaster but of honourable defeat. It was to be the Division's last fight in Belgium.

4. On Reflection

- 4.1. We cannot be sure of the circumstances surrounding Lance Corporal Till's death; his body has not been found. His memory, gallantry and death are commemorated at Tyne Cot Memorial, Zonnebeke, Belgium (see Appendix D). On 26th October 1917, he was one of the South Staff's fallen men; 38 killed, 140 wounded and 92 missing.
- 4.2. In addition to the Tyne Cot Memorial, Brough's death has been further remembered on the WWI and WWII War Memorial in Coventry Road Cemetery, Bedworth, Warwickshire (see Appendix H).
- 4.3. We should not forget Brough's mother and father. Losing one of their sons must have been a devastating experience (see Appendix E - Commemorative Scroll). But they also had news about another of their sons, John William, being injured on more than one occasion during WWI. It must have been a further upset when John William Till decided to emigrated to the USA during the 1920s. John and his parents probably only communicated via letter from that point onwards.
- 4.4. The author visited the scene of the battle in 2013. Appendix F - Geluveld Reclaimed, presents a picture to show how the battle field would have looked, having been torn apart by bombs and drowned by rain. The South Staffs War Diary talks about mud that made the rifles and machine guns inoperable. It is now an idilic scene with meadows sloping down to the stream in the valley bottom. Those same slopes exposed the Allied forces to withering machine gun fire from the vicinity of Lewis House and Berry Cottages.

Appendix A - Till Family



Taken at 194 Heath Road, Bedworth for the 30th Wedding Anniversary, 1905, of

Thomas & Caroline Till

On the back row:- the twins John William & Ethel Emma

Middle Row:- **Henry Brough**, Rose Annie (the author's grandmother), Susanna, Nathaniel Thomas, Olive Jane

Front Row seated:- Ada, Father, Mother, Arthur James

APPENDIX B - Medal Index Card

| Name. | | Corps. | Rank. | Regt. No. |
|--------------------------------|---------|------------|----------|-----------|
| TILL | | S. Staff R | Pte | 20527 |
| Henry. B. | | | | |
| Medal. | Roll. | Page. | Remarks. | |
| VICTORY | F/101B9 | 1059 | | |
| BRITISH | do | do | | |
| STAR | | | | |
| Theatre of War first served in | | | | |
| Date of entry therein | | | | |

K. 1330

Correspondence.

Address.

THEATRE OF WAR
 DATE OF ENTRY

E 1905. (1246) W1. W 2884-R.P. 6267 1,000m. 17/12/20. E. 6989.

Appendix C - South Staffs 1st Battalion Summary

1st Battalion

August 1914 : in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Returned to England, landing Southampton 19 September 1914.

Attached to 22nd Brigade, [7th Division](#).

20 December 1915 : transferred to 91st Brigade, [7th Division](#).

(<http://www.1914-1918.net/sstaffs.htm>)

The 7th were moved into a scene of incredible ferocity at Bullecourt, a strongly fortified village on the Hindenburg Line, after and alongside the Australians. The Division played a major role in penetrating the village defences.

[The Battle of the Polygon Wood \(fourth phase of the Third Battle of Ypres\)](#)

[The Battle of Broodseinde \(fifth phase of the Third Battle of Ypres\)](#)

[The Battle of Poelcapelle \(sixth phase of the Third Battle of Ypres\)](#)

[The Second Battle of Passchendaele \(eighth phase of the Third Battle of Ypres\)](#)

The 7th suffered significant losses during Third Ypres, in the fighting for Polygon Wood, the successful advance on 4th October east of the wood, **and in the unsuccessful assault south of the Menin Road on 26th October**. Immediately on their relief, the Division was moved to Italy, being one of the British Divisions selected to come to the support of the Italian army. The 7th remained in Italy until the Armistice, playing a particularly important role in the assault to cross the Piave River.

(<http://www.1914-1918.net/7div.htm#hist>)

Appendix D - Memorial Record



THE INTERNATIONAL
ARMED FORCES MEMORIAL

THE MEMORIAL ARCHIVE

Search the database
Submit new information &
missing servicemen

ABOUT THE MEMORIAL

Contact us
All about the Memorial

OTHER INFORMATION

Medals and awards
Links
Volunteers and helpers



You can now upload a grave or name on
memorial photo to this person
To use this facility please [login / register](#)



Commemorated at: Tyne Cot Memorial, Belgium.

PERSONNEL DETAILS



Lance Corporal Henry Brough Till

Unit: 1st Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment

Service: Army

Service Number: 20527

Force Nationality: British Forces

Rank/Appointment: Lance Corporal

Commemorated at: Tyne Cot Memorial

Locality: Zonnebeke, West-Vlaanderen

Country: Belgium

Other Details: 26th October 1917. Age 26. Son of Thomas and Caroline Jane Till, of 54, Leicester Rd., Bedworth, Nuneaton. Panel 90 to 92 and 162 to 162A

Date of Death: 26th October 1917

War/Conflict: WW I

Medals & Awards (where known):



British War Medal, Victory Medal, , , , ,

To learn more about medals and awards [click here](#)

Grave Photo by Volunteer:

View and Print a
Memorial Scroll
for this casualty
[click on a scroll >](#)



Appendix E - Commemorative Scroll

Henry Brough Till

20/12/2007 11:10



HE whom this scroll commemorates was numbered among those who, at the call of King and Country, left all that was dear to them, endured hardness, faced danger, and finally passed out of the sight of men by the path of duty and self-sacrifice, giving up their own lives that others might live in freedom. Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten.

Lance Corporal Henry Brough Till

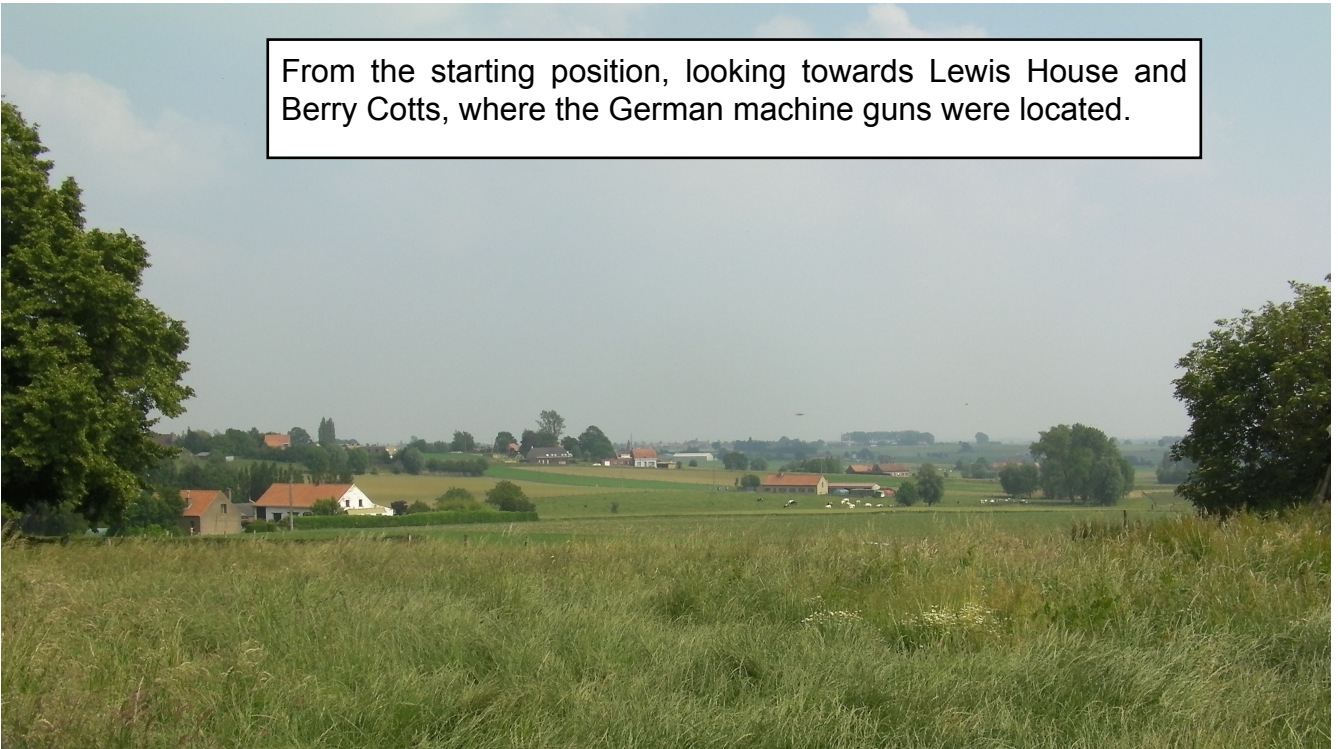
20527
1st Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment

Appendix F - Geluveld Reclaimed



A depiction of the battle field.

From the starting position, looking towards Lewis House and Berry Cottis, where the German machine guns were located.



Appendix G - Bedworth War Memorial



Coventry Road Cemetery, Bedworth