

# POMPEY PALS

## THE 14TH AND 15TH BATTALIONS OF THE HAMPSHIRE REGIMENT

**Albert Victor Webb**

**14<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion Hampshire Regiment  
"1<sup>st</sup> Pompey Pals"  
1898-1917**

Born and raised in Portsmouth, the ninth of ten children, Albert Webb joined the Pompey Pals at the outbreak of World War One.

Killed on 1 August 1917 during the battle of Pilckem Ridge, he is one of 54389 men who are remembered on the Menin Gate memorial to those who fell in the Ypres Salient and have no known grave.

The battle of Pilckem Ridge 31 July to 2 August 1917 was the start of the third battle of Ypres or, as it is more widely known, Passchendaele.

Zero hour was at 3.50am with troops advancing behind the biggest barrage of the war. The 11<sup>th</sup> Royal Sussex having taken the 'Blue Line' (the first objective) without much difficulty the 14<sup>th</sup> Hampshires 'leap frogged' them and went ahead to the 'Black Line' (second objective). The German trenches had only been lightly held, but the pillboxes dotted about quite irregularly, which had largely replaced regular trench lines, presented the attackers with a new problem and gave much trouble. Several farms converted into pill boxes lay in the path of the 14<sup>th</sup> and their capture, mainly effected by getting round behind them and taking them in the rear, caused most of the casualties, delaying and disorganising the later stages of the advance, though the 14<sup>th</sup>, after taking both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> objectives, pushed down the slope to the fourth and eventually mastered this also despite much difficulty at Alberta, a defended locality north west of St Julian where two tanks were very helpful in crushing uncut wire and subduing the garrison fire.

Second Lieutenant Hewitt, after the recapture of the Black Line, had reorganised his company and was

waiting for the barrage to lift when a shell burst near him, hitting him and setting fire to the signal lights (flares) in his haversack and his clothing. After extinguishing the flames and despite his burns and wounds, he led his men resolutely forward in the face of heavy machine gun fire and played a big part in capturing the objective. While superintending consolidation he was sniped and killed. Captain West, finding the attack held up by uncut wire and a strong point, brought up his company from support and carried the position pushing on over three lines of trenches, and Captain F H Freeman, who led his company with much skill also did much to consolidate the captured objective. Some men went across the Steenbeek River to the fifth objective while the 118<sup>th</sup> Brigade took St Julian and pressed on well across the St Julian-Poelcapelle road, but the 39<sup>th</sup> was ahead of the Division on its right and with its flank exposed, this advanced line could not be held against heavy shelling and vigorous counter attacks and was evacuated by order, to the fourth objective, which the 14<sup>th</sup> was consolidating, being adopted as the mainline of resistance and successfully maintained, our artillery and machine guns inflicting heavy casualties on the counter attacking troops.

While the failure to retain St Julian was disappointing the British had gained a substantial success with the 14<sup>th</sup> alone taking over 200 prisoners with the loss of 63 killed and 161 wounded. Second Lieutenant Hewitt was later awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. For two days, the 14<sup>th</sup> had to hold on under heavy shelling, another 14 men being killed and 40 wounded. On the morning of 3 August, the battalion was ordered to retire.