

James Henry COUCH



Born: 1898, Callington, Cornwall
Occupation: Unknown
Enlisted: Callington: February 1917 (Conscripted)
Unit: 1st Devonshire Regt.
Rank/number: Private: No.56290
Death: Killed in action, 6th November 1917
Detail: James died 3 weeks after arriving in France.

His first and last taste of war was in the muddy bloodbath at Passchendaele. A platoon of the Devons were ordered to attack an area called the Mound. The attack succeeded, but snipers and a hidden machine-gun eventually forced the stranded men to withdraw and James was one of the 15 soldiers killed.

Age at death: 19

Military info: The 1st Devons took part in the early battles of 1914/15 and fought on the Somme in 1916. They joined the Battle of Arras in 1917 and on 9th May they were all but wiped out in an attack at Fresnoy. For 5 months they rested and rebuilt in a quiet sector near Arleux before heading into hell at Passchendaele. The Devons, in 95th Brigade, 5th Division, fought in four battles: Polygon, Broodseinde, Poelcappelle and, just after James arrived, 2nd Passchendaele. On 26th October the Canadians launched a last bid to capture this pulverised village. The 2nd Army, providing flank support to the south, ordered 5th Division to attack Polderhoek Chateau. After several costly failures 95th Brigade took up the challenge on 6th November. At 6am the 1st DCLI charged the chateau whilst a platoon of Devons attacked an area to the south called the Mound. Rain had turned the battlefield into a sea of sucking mud and men had to cover their weapons with old socks to prevent them the barrel clogging up. The DCLI failed, but the Devons held the Mound all day until forced to withdraw with 15 killed and 79 wounded. James died. Three days later Passchendaele fell and the Third Battle of Ypres ended. In 113 days the British advanced five miserable miles at a cost of more than 250,000 lives.

Grave/memorial: James's body was never found. He is commemorated at Tyne Cot Memorial, Ypres, at St Petroc's Church, Padstow and on the Padstow War Memorial.

Family info: Father: James Couch, born Bolventor, Cornwall in 1876. Gas worker. Mother: Edith Delbridge, born Callington, Cornwall in 1872. Married in 1899. Edith died in 1901. James Snr later wed Maud Richards and ran Padstow gas works.

Additional info: James died before he had time to befriend anyone in the Devons, but in a note to the family his captain glossed over this with a consoling untruth. "He was a very popular man in the battalion, and his death is deeply felt by all."



This information was researched by Peter Smith, who is currently writing a book about Padstow's part in the Great War. Anyone wishing to correct errors or supply additional information can write to him at 24 Mallard Drive, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 5PW. Also phone 01825 762226 or email smithpeter24@gmail.com

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