The ultimate sacrifice in the Great War

The twelve North Riding Constabulary police officers who died as soldiers
Twelve officers who made the ultimate sacrifice

This booklet has been produced by North Yorkshire Police in commemoration of the twelve officers of the North Riding Constabulary who died in the service of their country during the Great War.

These officers are commemorated on a memorial tablet now located at the new North Yorkshire Police Headquarters in Northallerton.

Eighty eight members of the force served in the armed forces during World War 1, including the Chief Constable Major Bower who served in France from October 1914 to February 1916.

At the outbreak of war, eleven reservists were called immediately to the Colours. The remainder volunteered or were conscripted at various times during the period of the war.

Below: A Chief Constable’s report about reservists called up from the constabulary.

On the 5th of August a state of War was declared between Great Britain and Germany, and a General Mobilisation of His Majesty’s Reserve Forces ordered. 11 members of the North Riding Constabulary were called up, 10 belonging to the Army Reserve and one the Naval Reserve, and they each left to rejoin their respective units on the 5th of August. 4 of these are married, and of the remainder who are unmarried, two have relatives partly dependent upon them. The question of allowances to the wives and children and dependents of constables called up for active service in accordance with the provisions of the Police Reservists (Allowances) Act, requires your consideration.
Policing the county a century ago

Policing in North Yorkshire during the Great War was different to the force of today, but many of the ideas behind it were the same.

Instead of the fleets of high-performance vehicles used for modern policing, the constabulary acquired their first motor vehicle second hand in 1913, but they also had motorcycles and bicycles, as well as horses and carts.

Some operational units continue to this day, such as the dog team – although nowadays they no longer use bloodhounds.

The North Riding, like the rest of the country, suffered intermittent bombardment from the air during the War, mainly from German Zeppelins and in addition there was an isolated bombardment of Whitby by German battleships.

Special Constables were called out and proved a great help during raid alerts.

The only lady member of the Special Constabulary throughout the whole of Great Britain during the First World War worked for North Riding Special Constabulary.

Above: Chief Constable Major Sir Robert L Bower led the constabulary during World War One
Below: The old constabulary HQ in Northallerton, built in 1880
Left and below: Bloodhounds made up the North Riding’s dog unit – officers used telegram to summon the team

Right: In 1913 the constabulary only had one car, which was second hand
Right: The horsemen of the North Yorkshire Mounted Detachment
The Battle of Loos in September and October 1915 was the British Army’s contribution to the major Allied offensive, launched simultaneously with the main French offensive in Champagne. 140 tons of chlorine gas was released on the front line on the morning of 25 September 1915. This was the first time the Allies had used the weapon. The British First Army then attacked along a 10km front between Loos and La Bassée. 75,000 men were involved on the first day alone – it became known as ‘the Big Push’.

Eight miles south of Ypres, Ploegsteert Wood was a sector of the Western Front in Flanders, part of the Ypres Salient. After fighting in late 1914 and early 1915, it became a quiet sector where no major action took place. Units were sent here to recuperate and retrain after tougher fighting elsewhere and before returning to take part in more active operations. British Tommies referred to it as “Plugstreet Wood”.

Respite from the Front at ‘Plugstreet’
A little corner of Yorkshire in rural France

Amongst the graves in St. Patrick’s Cemetery, Loos are 17 for soldiers who served with the Yorkshire Regiment.

Twelve of these men, including Eric Crowe, were killed on 28/29 November 1917, and are buried side-by-side.

At the time Eric Crowe died, his regiment was part of the 11th Northern Division fighting in the third battle of Ypres.

Killed as snipers pick off comrades

On 15 September 1916 the 8th Battalion KRRC were fighting in the Switch Trench at Delville Wood.

The battalion war diary for the day reports that at 6.20am the battalion emerged from the edge of Delville Wood and by 7.15am were fairly established and consolidated in Switch Trench, “although much hampered by the enemy sniping us from somewhere in front and hostile machine guns continued to give trouble.”

Casualties were 11 officers and 320 ‘other ranks’, 98 of whom were missing.
At this period of the war, siege batteries were equipped with 6-inch, 8-inch or 9.2-inch Howitzers.

The 30 hundredweight 6-inch version was originally introduced into service in 1895. It fired a 100-pound shell to a maximum range of 6,000 yards.

The batteries used horses for transport – a typical complement would include 17 riding horses, six draught horses and 80 heavy draught horses with three two-horse carts and ten four-horse wagons.

The Coldstream Guards was among the first British regiments to arrive in France after Britain declared war on Germany.

The regiment had four battalions on active service on the Western Front during the war.

It fought battles including Loos (1915), the Somme (1916) where the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions attacked in line together for the only time in their existence, at Passchendaele and Cambrai in 1917, at Arras in 1918 and in the great 1918 Advance.

Caterham Barracks, Surrey was the training ground for guardsmen of all regiments.
Reginald William MILBURN

Born: 1889, Hutton Rudby
Police service: PC 26, Hawes
Former occupation: Shop assistant
Military role: Private, 4th Battalion Grenadier Guards
Died: 16/09/1916, due to wounds
Buried: La Neuville British Cemetery, France
Memorial: Craven War Memorial
Next of kin: Widow and two children

First tank battle
Reginald Milburn died during the Battle of Flers-Courcelette.

Launched on 15 September 1916, the battle went on for one week and was the third main phase of the Battle of the Somme.

It is best known as the first tank battle in history, as it featured 49 MkI tanks (although not all of the tanks made it into battle).

John Henry NORTH

Born: 1892, Sowerby
Police service: PC 230
Former occupation: Foundry apprentice
Military role: Private, 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards
Died: 27/09/1918, Lagnicourt
Buried: Sanders Keep Military Cemetery, Graincourt Les Havrincourt, France
Memorial: Sowerby War Memorial and St Oswalds Church, Sowerby
Next of kin: Mother

Emerging from the trenches for one last stand

On 27 September 1918, the 2nd battalion Coldstream Guards were in trenches near Lagnicourt.

They left the assembly area at 1.50am and took part in an attack on the German lines.

Six other ranks were killed, 11 were missing and 38 wounded.

Mechanical warfare: British troops with a MkI tank at the battle of Flers-Courcelette
On 13 September 1916, the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards held the Northern Sector of the Ginchy Line. Orders were received for a night attack in preparation for a big attack on the 15th. Under strong moonlight, the left of the attack had to advance further than the right to form a line facing north east.

Thirty or forty shrapnel were fired at the German trench just north of the Orchard – the Germans responded with heavy rifle and machine gun fire causing casualties. The party cleared the Orchard and dug in after trying to push on. They were shot at heavily the whole time but completed their trench before morning.

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An epic fight for stalemate

Often known as the First Battle of Ypres, this series of battles from 19 October to 22 November 1914 formed part of an outflanking manoeuvre.

It became a desperate epic fight east of the city of Ypres which finally resulted in stalemate and entrenched warfare.

It took place at the same time as the Battle of the Yser, fought nearby by the Belgian Army against the Germans, and the battles to the south at Messines, Armentieres and La Bassee.
In April 1918, the 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards were in action in France, moving to and fro between Front Line trenches and positions in reserve at camp near Hendecourt. They also spent nine days in billets in Bavincourt for training.

In April the Battalion received drafts totalling 85 other ranks, but lost nine other ranks killed and 52 other ranks wounded.

Comrades: Coldstream Guards pose for a photo in front of sandbags in 1917. Guardsmen were among the first British soldiers in France and played a significant role during the conflict.

The base hospital was part of the casualty evacuation chain, further back from the Front Line than the Casualty Clearing Stations. They were manned by troops from the Royal Army Medical Corps, with attached Royal Engineers and men of the Army Service Corps.

Treating the casualties of war

Base hospitals needed to be close to a railway line for casualties to arrive. Base hospitals also needed to be close to a port, where injured men could be evacuated for longer-term treatment in Britain.
Finding out about the people behind our history

Author Jane Palmer explains how she approached the project.

The starting point for my research was the list of names and regiments on the memorial tablet.

I then identified the soldiers via the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, using information about collections made for the mothers or widows of deceased officers in a Chief Constable’s Memorandum book to distinguish between soldiers where there were multiple candidates with similar names in a regiment.

The information in this booklet has been researched using:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission www.cwgc.org
- An article describing “North Riding Constabulary Involvement in WW1” produced in 2014 by Ralph Lindley, Vice President of Ripon Museums Trust
- England and Wales GRO Birth Marriage and Death indexes
- Information published on commercial genealogical sites, particularly www.ancestry.co.uk, www.findmypast.co.uk and www.thegenalogist.co.uk
- Various resources located at the National Archives (including UK Census Records, UK WW1 War Diaries, WW1 Service Medal Rolls and Medal Index Cards, British Army WW1 Service Records)
- British newspapers
- Parish records
- National Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
- General Register Office Birth and Death indexes www.gro.gov.uk
- A booklet commissioned by the North Riding Constabulary in 1956 to mark “The First Hundred Years of the North Riding of Yorkshire Constabulary”
- North Riding Constabulary records held by North Yorkshire Police, North Yorkshire County Record Office and Ripon Police Museum
- Information about WW1 published on a number sites, particularly www.longlongtrail.co.uk and www.forces-war-records.co.uk
- Information about war memorials published on various websites

Any mistakes in interpretation of data are entirely mine.

All research has been completed in my own time, at no cost to North Yorkshire Police.

I have not been able to source photographs of all the officers for this edition.

North Yorkshire Police has agreed to consider updating and publishing a second edition of the booklet if readers are able to let me have copies of photographs or indeed any other additional information.

Full details of the resources consulted with source citations have been recorded and will be made available to applicants who think they may be related to any of the officers mentioned.

To get in touch, please email StaffOffice@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk

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Individual thanks and acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank all those who have contributed time, information or resources to make this project possible.

Special thanks include:
 acknolledgement for photo of JJ Chapman – Chapman family
 Acknowledgement for photo of RW Milburn – www.myfamilyhistory.online (Milburn & Wilcox Family Tree)
 Acknowledgement for photo of JH North – www.stoswaldsowerby.org.uk

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