



Life at home: April to June 1917

Spring 1917 was not a good time for small birds in Buriton. Food shortages were becoming increasingly more serious and, as well as an 'Eat Less Bread' campaign (supported by a Proclamation from the King on 2nd May), the Ministry of Agriculture urged local councils to wage war on pests endangering crops.

Rats and house sparrows were identified as the worst culprits and, with farmers felt to have rats under control, the Parish Council targeted the birds. They agreed to follow Government's advice and offer rewards to those presenting the greatest number of house sparrow eggs, unfledged house sparrows and fully fledged house sparrows.

At the end of May, however, the Hants and Sussex News reported that there had been misunderstandings about the matter and the District Council received a letter from RSPB bemoaning the indiscriminate destruction of all small birds and the ransacking of hedgerows. It seems that bird-hunting had become a new entertainment for parish children, without attention as to whether their victims were actually house sparrows!

Fly-tipping was also something of a problem. With no council collections of rubbish, villagers were throwing old tins and rubbish along the roadsides. The

District Council urged the parish to do something about this, but it continued to be a problem until a pit was identified for rubbish in North Lane in 1918.

At its annual meeting in May the Parish Council re-appointed Messrs Marriage, Seward, Bonham Carter, Bone, Sharp, Patrick and West to committee positions and also identified 'Overseers of the Poor' for Buriton, Nursted and Weston.

The parish welcomed little newcomers into the community: Bernard and Catherine Harfield's new daughter was baptised, also the daughters of Harry and Mary Hill: Rosina and her younger sister, Ettie. The parish said goodbye to William Trewell, 82, Buriton, and Alfred Shawyer, 64, Weston.

The losses of Percy Case and Frederick Legg, both employees of Lothian Bonham Carter who were killed during the battle at Arras in April, were also sadly felt. Both left parents, wives and children grieving at home.

Up in Scotland, RFC pilot Francis Cave received a telegram from his parents in Ditcham on 5th June saying: "Well done". He couldn't think what it meant but, on reading a newspaper, he saw that he had been awarded the Military Cross. "I should think I am as much or probably more surprised than anyone."

America's entry into the war on 6th April was also welcomed.

The Western Front: April to June 1917

The main Allied offensive at this time was due to be in Artois and Champagne with British troops attacking around Arras. But, when the French failed further south, pressure mounted on the British to distract the Germans. So, in May, troops attacked at Messines Ridge in Flanders: a strategically important area which could be valuable in a future offensive.



Devastation at Monchy

Arras, Monchy and Vimy Ridge

Although there was a week's prior bombardment and although lessons from the Somme were used, the Battle of Arras was one of the fiercest episodes of the war with some of the bloodiest close quarter fighting. Both the 1st and 2nd Hampshires were engaged here, including Buriton men.

On April 19th Percy Case, James Hills, Frank Newman, Basil Treagus and Arthur Watts were with the 1st Hampshires in wintery conditions around Maroeil. They advanced at 10am, following other battalions, and held their objectives through the next day. They then attacked again on each of the following two days. Friday 13th April was relatively quiet with

just one man being killed: Percy Case, aged 37, a chalk digger who left a widow and two daughters in Bones Lane.

On 16th April, just before the battalion was relieved, they were shelled heavily and lost four men including Fred Legg (27), a game keeper on the Bonham Carter's Buriton Estate who lived with his wife, Millicent, and son Colin (aged 3) at Gravel Hill.

The 2nd Hampshires (including Albert Bunce, Godfrey Hughes, Albert Marriner and James Powell) advanced from Beauval on 12th April to take over Monchy-le-Preux, a hard-won location which they held in the face of fierce counter attacks over the next few days before being rewarded with three days rest.

By 23rd April they were in action again and, at one point, lost twenty men to one shell before being strafed by machine gun fire. During this attack, Godfrey Hughes (son of Buriton's Rector), received a wound to his right arm which required amputation in a field hospital and repatriation on 6th May.



Conditions near St Eloi

Both these Hampshire battalions remained in the area and on 11th May the 1st's attacked around Roeux, surprising the enemy and reaching their objectives. A young Adolf Hitler had just moved into nearby trenches and, as a runner, may have passed within yards of some Buriton men.

On 16th May the 2nd Battalion was enduring routine trench life with minor casualties. But amongst those injured, on this final day of the Battle of Arras, was Albert Bunce, son of the railway signalman at Buriton sidings. A severe gunshot wound meant that Albert (19) lost his right leg.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge was another part of the opening phase of the Battle of Arras. From 9th April 100,000 Canadians participated in this battle which has become a symbol of Canadian national achievement and sacrifice.

Algernon Bonham Carter's 1st Battalion of the Kings Royal Rifles took part in operations after the capture of Vimy Ridge, discovering some remaining enemy positions and helping to capture Bailleul railway station.

Messines Ridge

French failures further south upset the overall Anglo-French strategy and so the British made a move to gain important territory in Flanders by attacking the Messines Ridge. Plans had begun many months before and over twenty shafts had been dug under German lines, ready for mines to be laid.

Heavy artillery bombardment began

Crater at Messines Ridge



on 21st May before ceasing, suddenly, at 2.50am on 7th June. German troops, sensing imminent attack, rushed to their defensive positions but silence prevailed until, at 3.10am, the mines were detonated.

At 1 am Allied troops had moved up into jumping-off positions and, just before the explosions, everyone was warned to lie flat on the ground. Four Buriton men (Cyril Fullick, Wilfred Gamblen, Horace Gamblen and Frederick Raley) were lying out in no-man's land near to St Eloi with the 15th Hampshires, close to one of the largest mines.

The effect of the explosions upon the German defenders was devastating and the Hampshire men were able to advance, under covering fire, with little resistance. Godfrey Harfield, also attacking nearby with the 7th Lancshires, saw some harder fighting before taking Oosttaverne village and a strategic crossroads.

The Battle of Messines was probably one of the most successful operations of the war, with all the objectives achieved by mid-afternoon and with defenders losing more men than the attackers for the first time.

Laurence Cave and the Theberton Zeppelin

Diaries of Royal Flying Corps pilot Francis Cave of Ditcham House show that his older brother, Laurence, also in the RFC, saw a Zeppelin airship brought down in June 1917 – and that his squadron was in charge of the wreckage.

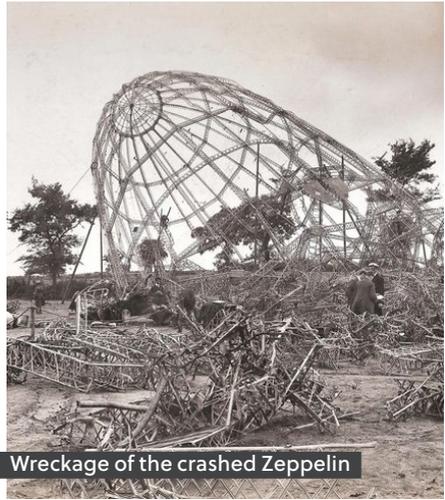
At this time Laurence Cave was based in Suffolk and, although the area was probably less than 100 miles from the front-line in Belgium, it must have come as a huge shock when some of the most modern and deadliest machinery of warfare made itself felt nearby.

The first attacks by Zeppelins had begun in January 1915, dropping bombs along the east coast. Initially British defences could not deal with this new threat but by 1916 a range of anti-airship measures were in place: many more guns, searchlights and fighter aircraft.

In response, a new version of the Zeppelin was introduced which could fly at 60 mph as high as 20,000 feet; out of the reach of anti-aircraft guns and fighter planes.

On the night of 16th June, Zeppelin L48 was one of four airships sent to attack London. After dropping bombs on Harwich, it tried to return home by heading east. However its compass had frozen at the high altitude and it drifted north in the dark along the Suffolk coast.

The airship was caught in searchlights but was unharmed by anti-aircraft guns as it was flying so high. Aircraft took off to attack but they could not gain the altitude



to inflict any damage.

Trying to escape before dawn, the Zeppelin descended to find better winds. Aircraft noticed the descent and attacked again with bullets igniting the airship and causing it to crash near Theberton, lighting up the sky and visible from 50 miles away.

Three of the German crew managed to jump out as they hit the ground – the first and last men to escape from a burning airship in England. They then watched in horror as the flames consumed the entire Zeppelin, as well as their 16 fellow crew members.

Over the next few days an estimated 30,000 people visited the site whilst the huge structure was dismantled for military study.

Despite the best efforts of Laurence Cave and his colleagues, it is likely that countless pieces were taken by visitors and may still be on show in Suffolk homes to this day.

L48 was the last Zeppelin to be shot down on British soil: the days of these terrifying airships were numbered.