

**Grange U3A Family and Social History  
Group Project on the Grange WW1 War Memorial**



*Delville Wood*

**A short biography in commemoration of  
Percy Airey 1895 – 1916**

## ***A short biography in commemoration of Percy Airey 1895- 1916***

Percy Airey was born in November 1895 into the family of John and Anna Airey.

Of Percy's early days nothing has come to light until 1911 when Percy was working as a Groom/coachman to George Braddyll Bigland of Bigland Hall.

In the period September- October 1914, Percy enlisted with the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, 8th (Service) Battalion at Ulverston. This battalion along with many others was part of Lord Kitchener's New Army (K3).

The battalion commenced training in October and moved to Coford on Salisbury Plain for initial training and then on to Boscombe , near Bournemouth for further honing of skills.



**Percy Airey taken c1914 (Westmorland Gazette)**

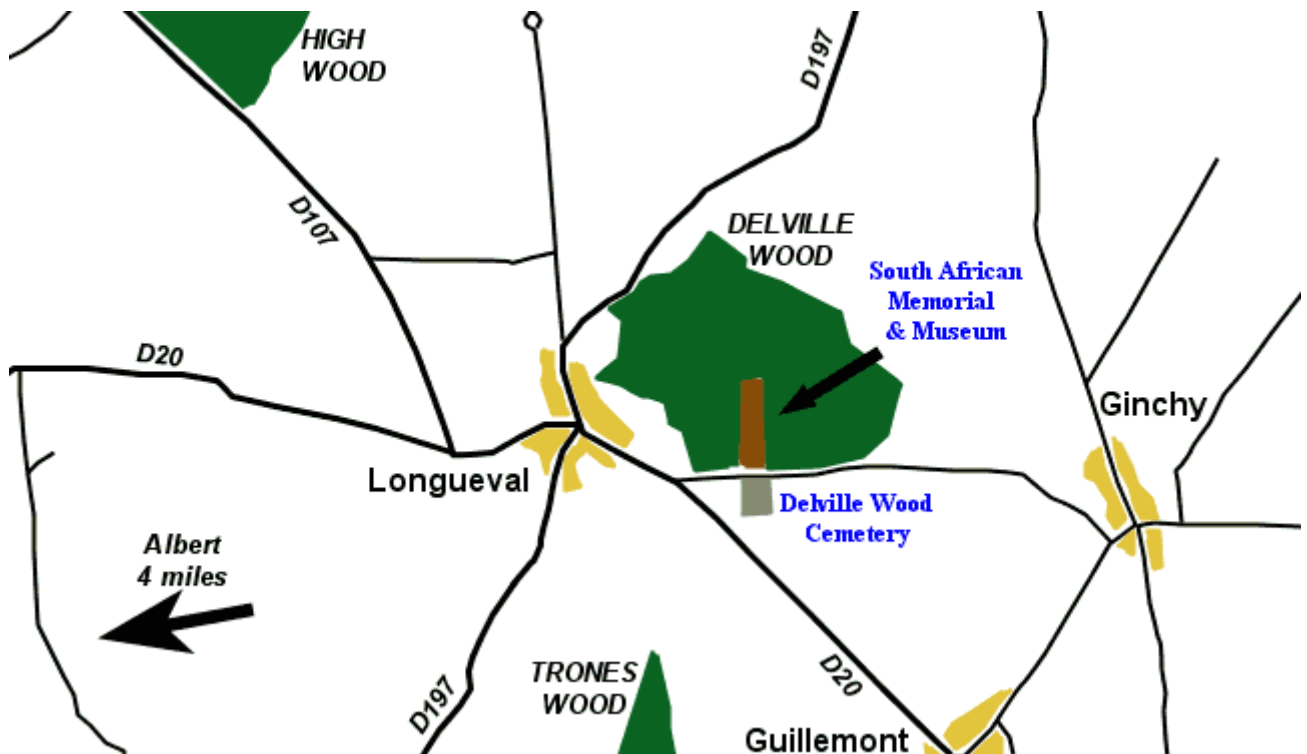
On the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1915 they arrived in Le Havre, France. The battalion came under the command of 76<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Division commanded overall by General Rawlinson. Subsequently on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1915 the battalion was attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade , (3<sup>rd</sup> Division). .

The battalion served in the trenches as part of the regular rotation of battalions. It was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1916 that they took part in a major offensive known as "The Bluff" which was part of the Battle of Loos. They

successfully overran their objectives after a surprise attack supported by heavy allied artillery shelling. The regiment continued in action on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April at the St. Eloi Craters where the men attacked across a waste of sticky mud to recapture a series of mine craters.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 the Battle of the Somme commenced. The battle is well known as being the most traumatic action the British Army faced in the Great War. Part of that battle was that for Delville Wood.

Delville Wood was one of the defining battles of the Great War. As Vimy Ridge was the battle that cemented the reputation and character of the Canadian forces, so Delville Wood did the same for the South African soldiers who suffered dreadfully to capture this important part of the front. This courageous act tends to override the other British divisions and battalions who also fought in this ferocious battle. The 76<sup>th</sup> Brigade of which the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a part with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Suffolk Regiment, the Royal Welsh Regiment and the 1<sup>st</sup> Gordon Highlanders battalion all fought with courage and tenacity. In fact the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion fought off three German attacks during these few days.



**Delville Wood 15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July 1916**

Initially Percy was listed as missing in action. He might have been killed during either the massive shelling action on the 18<sup>th</sup> July or by the German attacks



and not found until several days later. Percy was one of 53 men missing in action that day.

Percy's remains were initially interred with a number of other unknown soldiers at Quarry Cemetery in 1917 but it was not until 1921 that he was identified with a degree of certainty. The Imperial Commission Grave staff could only engrave his headstone with the line "believed to be Private Percy Airey".

The following article appeared in the Westmorland Gazette on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1916:

## **Grange**

### **KILLED IN ACTION**

*AIREY. Pte. Percy, of Grange last week reported missing between July 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> is now reported killed in action on July 18<sup>th</sup>. Pte Airey enlisted in September 1914, and has been in France since February last year. His brother, Pte. John Airey is also at the front.*



**Quarry Cemetery, Montauban, France (CWGC)**

*Front cover: Delville Wood, personal picture of author 2012*

*Author: David Clapp 12<sup>th</sup> June 2015*