

James Patten was Roberts eldest son, born on the 17th of September 1896 in Stobswood, he was to serve all through the war but be killed less than 3 months from the armistice, while serving in France. This page is again, a small tribute to these two men.

### **JAMES PATTEN Leading Seaman Drake Bn. RNVR**

Just after the outbreak of WW1, Robert Patten was one of around 40,000 men enlisted in the RNVR (Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve), the equivalent of the TA for the Navy. The hitch was there were no ships available for these men to serve on. It was then decided to form infantry regiments and a marine regiment from these men. Robert joined up to be a sailor and the country was going to make him into a soldier.

(James seen in his Naval uniform. When he left for Gallipoli, James would have had his normal khaki infantry uniform)



The photo above shows James in his Sailor uniform, his cap badge shows NELSON Bn, and was probably his training battalion. When he went to fight, he was a member of DRAKE Bn. The battalions took names rather than the numbers of the regular army. The RNVR soldiers were also given naval ranks. James began as an able seaman

(versus private) and was promoted to leading seaman (versus lance corporal). The

men also enjoyed the navy's daily rum ration too, they were allowed to grow beards, something the regular soldiers were not allowed. No doubt this caused some resentment between the two groups. To begin with, the RNVR soldiers who went to fight in Belgium went in the Sailors uniforms as the infantry khaki was unavailable.

James began the war in the Gallipoli campaign. He landed about the same time as John Milner, in August. James was eventually withdrawn from Turkey with sickness and moved to the UK and then onto France. It was here he was killed on the 21st of August 1918. James now lies at rest in the military cemetery in Achiet Le Grand, Pas de Calais - France.

(James in the regular army style uniform, he sits with a lady called Emma Tasker)



### **James's service history**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1915, James Patten signed a document that was to ultimately lead to his death. He joined the war effort by enrolling as a member of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, Tyneside division. His service number was TZ/3930.

From the copies of his signing up papers, his religion was C.E. or Church of England, he was unable to swim and his complexion was described as fair. Further details show he was living at home with his parents at 7 Front Row, Stobswood, Acklington. He was working as a miner in Stobswood Colliery, and on the date of

enlisting, he was 18 years old. He may have been already working down the mine for 6 or more years by this time. His physical details show him to be 5'3" tall, his chest 36.5" inflated, 34.5" deflated, with fair hair and blue eyes. His sight was 6/6 in both eyes, his hearing was good, heart & lungs normal and physical development good. He was passed as fit for service even though he was ?" too short!. By signing his papers, James agreed to a minimum of 3 years service, subject to the provisions of the Naval Forces Act, 1903.

Using James's discharge papers and casualty form we can draw the following picture of his military service during WW1.

6<sup>th</sup> March 1915, James visits the recruiting office and enlists in the RNVR.

9<sup>th</sup> March 1915, James reports to the C.P. Depot, this is probably for kitting out and initial physical and drill training.

28<sup>th</sup> April 1915, he is assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Naval Division and is "checked for discs", all the time his training continues.

1<sup>st</sup> August 1915, James is now transferred from Nelson to Drake battalion M.E.F. (Mediterranean Expeditionary Force).

20<sup>th</sup> August 1915, James arrived at Gallipoli to join the rest of the Drake battalion as a replacement for the men killed in the April landings and the 4 subsequent months.

25<sup>th</sup> May 1915, James is transferred to Blandford camp in Dorset. It was at Blandford in November 1914 that the Royal Naval Division established a base depot and training camp (a German POW camp was set up alongside it too). The first battalion to arrive was Nelson, the remaining battalions soon followed. During this period the photo of James in his Nelson cap was taken. At this point in time Drake Battalion had already set off for Gallipoli (28th Feb 1915). They landed on the peninsula on the 25th of April 1915, taking heavy casualties.

30<sup>th</sup> September 1915, Sent to hospital on H.M.Hospital Ship Karapara, he was admitted to 15<sup>th</sup> General Hospital Alexandria (Egypt) suffering with Influenza.

30<sup>th</sup> November 1915, transferred from Alexandria to Mudros on Hospital Ship Delta, listed as Enteric.

4<sup>th</sup> December 1915, Invalided to England on Hospital Ship Mauretania from Mudros.

14<sup>th</sup> December 1915, admitted to Haslar hospital (Portsmouth) – Enteritis satisfactory. I wonder if James's father, Robert, who was stationed in Southampton, ever made it over to Portsmouth to see his son?

1<sup>st</sup> February 1916, discharged from Haslar Hospital to Blandford 1<sup>st</sup> Reserves. James spent around 40 days in Gallipoli before being admitted to hospital. One can only guess how ill he was bearing in mind it was more than 120 days until he would be discharged again!!!

2<sup>nd</sup> February 1916, Given 28 days leave. First time in a year he had been back to the North East. He had in the mean time spent time in Turkey, Greece and Egypt, as well as 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the year in hospitals. One has to wonder how much he remembered of it.

May 1916, transferred from 1<sup>st</sup> reserves to 2<sup>nd</sup> reserves Blandford. After 120 days of Influenza and Enteritis James must have lost a good deal of weight and strength, hence he ended up spending most of the next year in the UK training.

15<sup>th</sup> August 1916, 2<sup>nd</sup> reserves taken off strength, transferred to "A" reserves

16<sup>th</sup> August 1916, Deprived 3 days pay, no reason given.

13<sup>th</sup> October 1916, forfeited 2 days pay for absence during the 25<sup>th</sup> September 1916.

16<sup>th</sup> October 1916, "A" reserves to Davenport for physical training course.

15<sup>th</sup> December 1916, "A" reserves Blandford, rated A.B. (Able seaman)

16<sup>th</sup> December 1916, Drafted back to Drake battalion B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force) France, from "A" reserves.

18<sup>th</sup> December 1916, Embarked Folkestone, Disembarked Boulogne.

19<sup>th</sup> December 1916, Joined base depot.

11<sup>th</sup> January 1917, Joined Unit in Calais.

13<sup>th</sup> January 1917, Joined Battalion in France.

7<sup>th</sup> February 1917, From 47<sup>th</sup> casualty clearing station to hospital – Trench feet.

16<sup>th</sup> February 1917, Admitted to 16<sup>th</sup> General Hospital Le Treport – Trench Feet Slight. The winter of 1916-17 was one of the harshest on record. Soldiers on both sides had to face horrendous conditions, many freezing to death. Trench feet was a common complaint due to soldiers standing in freezing mud & water for days.

25<sup>th</sup> February 1917, Admitted to 3<sup>rd</sup> Convalescence Depot Le Treport.

16<sup>th</sup> March 1917, Discharged to base depot for details.

24<sup>th</sup> March 1917, Rejoined Battalion from base depot.

15<sup>th</sup> May 1917, Promoted to L.S. (Leading Seaman)

9<sup>th</sup> January 1918, Leave to UK with R.A. (Ration Allowance) 9<sup>th</sup> Jan to 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 1918. This would be the last time James was in England with his family.

22<sup>nd</sup> February 1918, to 149 field ambulance.

25<sup>th</sup> February 1918, admitted 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian General hospital Abbeville

28<sup>th</sup> February 1918, Admitted 30<sup>th</sup> General Hospital Calais. NYD – Mild

11<sup>th</sup> March 1918, Admitted 4<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital Arques – St Omer.

18<sup>th</sup> May 1918, discharged to details – St Omer

21<sup>st</sup> May 1918, From hospital to L. Base depot.

30<sup>th</sup> May 1918, Rejoined battalion from base.

4<sup>th</sup> June 1918, The Division was relieved and enjoyed three weeks rest in the Toutencourt area. Then they moved back and took over the line in front of

Auchonvillers immediately to the left of the Hamel sector.

23<sup>rd</sup> June 1918, to 25<sup>th</sup> July 1918, was very uneventful although a German attack was expected at any time. A new style of Allied defence was built to meet this attack but it never came. Bombardment of the enemy strong points continued. They appeared demoralized and apparently did not repair them.

15<sup>th</sup> August 1918 to 21<sup>st</sup> August 1918, The following is an account of the final days of James's life, taken from the Royal Naval Division book. James will probably have been part of the main Drake force held up at Achiet-Le-Grand.

“Marching only at night, the Division moved north between August 15th and 19th, and found themselves at Souastre, in rear of the line held by the 87th Division, which ran through the Western outskirts of Bucquoy. Here, for the first time, detailed orders were received for the attack, which was to open on August 21st, at 4.55 a.m. The first objective of the IVth and VIth Corps was to be Bucquoy, Ablainzeville and the Ablainzeville Spur. Here were the German first line positions, which they had held for some months. The next objective was defined as the Irlès-Bihucourt line, and then north along the Achiet-le-Grand-Arras railway. The direction of the attack was south-east. The first objective on the IVth Corps front was to be taken by the 87th Division, already in the line, and the 5th and Naval Divisions were to go through to the second objective. On the left of the Naval Division would be the 8rd Division of the VIth Corps.

General Lawrie, with his objective across the Achiet-Arras railway, decided to attempt to reach the railway with the 188th and 189th Brigades, and to send the 190th Brigade through at that stage to complete the operation. An intermediate objective, known as the Brown line, was arranged for the 188th and 189th Brigades (James's brigade) a little to the east of Logeast Wood. This line was to be attacked by two companies of the Anson, the Marines, two companies of the Drake and the Hawke.

The line of the railway was to be attacked by the remaining companies of the Anson and Drake, the R.I.R., and the Hood Battalion. The limit of our barrage was the Brown line, and, beyond that, the attack would be covered by tanks.

Shortly after midnight on the 20th, the Brigades moved forward, their march being timed to reach our front line ten minutes before the attack opened. Punctually at 4.55 a.m. the advance of the 37th Division began, and immediately behind followed the two Naval Brigades, a change in tactics eloquent of the changed character of the German resistance as experienced further south. There was a thick mist, and the Division were in unknown country, but they kept their direction, and almost all

units reached the Brown line with virtually no opposition. An unfinished message found by the Hawke Battalion in a captured dug-out revealed indeed that a very sudden retreat had taken place, and that the enemy's line of resistance was further east.

By now, we were out of reach of our barrage, and in the thick mist one of the tanks went over into the 5th Division area, taking a company of the Hood Battalion with it into Achiet-le-Petit, which was captured. Two tanks, however, maintaining direction, reached the Achiet-Arras railway, on the right of the Divisional front, and here two companies of the Hood with one company of the Drake on their left secured a temporary lodgment. A similar success was achieved on the extreme left of the Division's front (actually in the 3rd Division area ), where " B " Company of the Anson Battalion reached the railway embankment, with details of the Marines and the R.I.R.

In the centre, the advance from the Brown line made less progress in the face of strong opposition, and " A " Company of the Anson Battalion, " B " and " D " Companies of the Marines\* (who had gone forward in place of the main body of the R.I.R., which had lost direction), and the main body of the Drake Battalion found themselves held up on the outskirts of Achiet-le-Grand. At this place there was a cemetery, a brick field, and the remains of one of our old hut camps west of the railway. The floors of these huts had been lowered three or four feet below ground level to give protection to our troops against German aeroplane bombing, and these huts now afforded a ready-made entrenched position for the enemy.

\* The Marines lost very heavily in this advance; Major R. A. Poland, R.M. and Captain B. G. Andrews, H.M., were among the killed.

The Germans had placed machine guns and anti-tank guns in these places, and established a strong line of defence, which could be easily reinforced from the ample reserves which they had in the railway cutting. It was evident that they had thinned out their front lines, and concentrated a defence here, maintained by fresh troops. As our troops reached this place, about 11 a.m., the sun cleared away the mist, and they found themselves coming up against it without the help of a barrage which had been left behind, the effective range of the Field Artillery having been passed. The Tanks, which had come up by now, tried to assist, but were disabled by the anti-tank guns. The infantry made a most gallant attack, as the dead lying

out in line after the fight testified, but, in the absence of artillery support, the enemy could not be dislodged except by an enveloping movement, for which no preparations had been made.

The result was that the troops in the centre of the divisional front, falling back to a position a few hundred yards east of Logeast Wood, compelled a retirement on the flanks. Advanced posts were finely maintained, ahead of the general line, by the Anson and Drake,\* and the former battalion actually achieved a local advance in the afternoon. By 6 p.m., however, the battle was at a standstill, and the line was consolidated, the front being reinforced by units of the 190th Brigade and held from left to right by the Anson (in advanced posts), the 7th Royal Fusiliers, the Drake (in advanced posts), the R.I.R., the Artists' Rifles and the Hood Battalion.

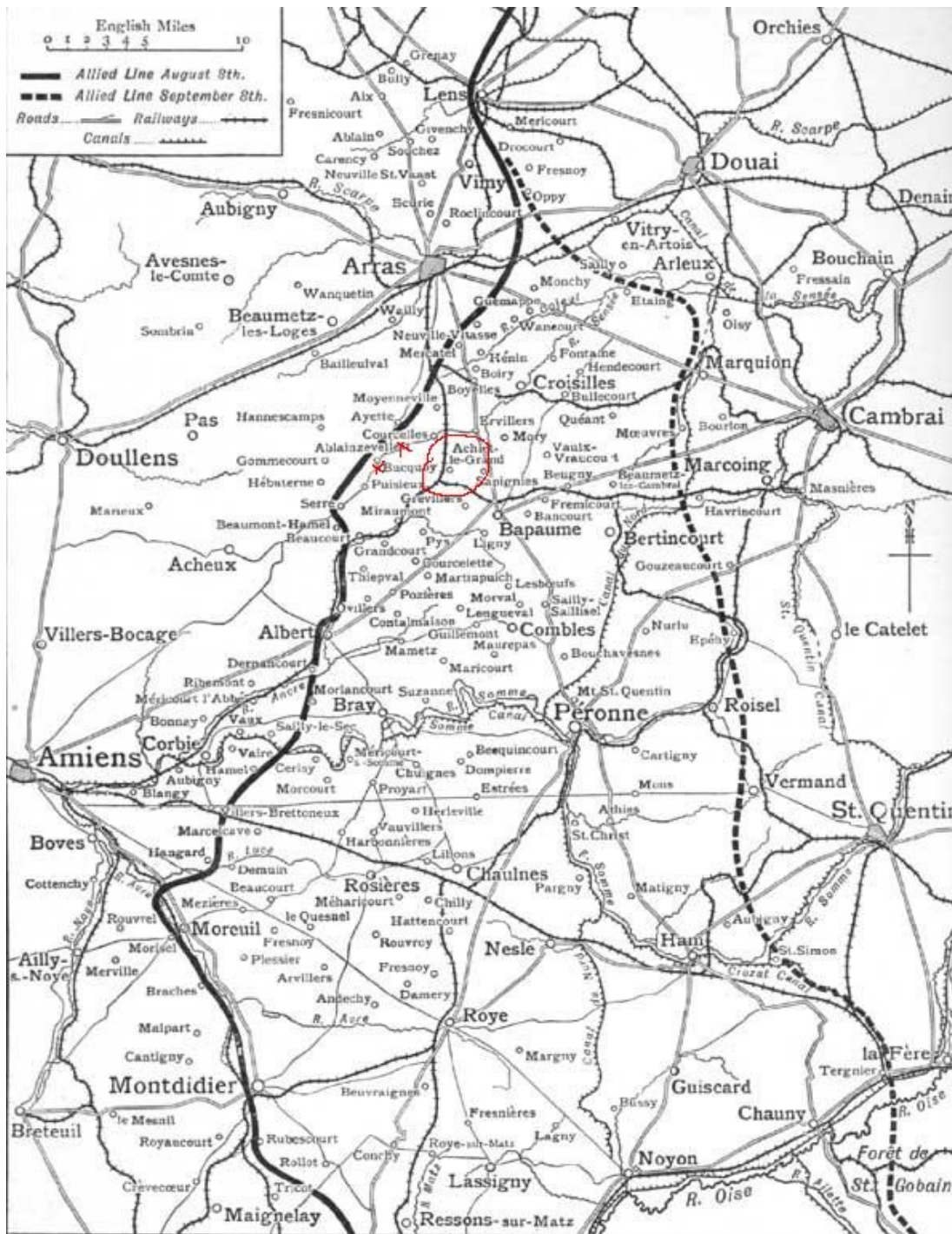
And that was it, sometime between 04:55am and probably 18:00 James was killed in action. It is not know exactly when or how he was killed, only that he was part of Drake battalion and he was probably attacking Achiet-Le Grand where he now lays.





The night of the 21<sup>st</sup> was quiet, but on the 22nd, the enemy, still standing to their line on the railway, made three determined counter-attacks at 5.55 a.m., at 10.30 a.m. and at 1.15 p.m. The Divisional artillery had, however, by now come forward, and, thanks to their barrage, to some excellent work by the 189th L.T.M. Battery (in which Sub-Lieut. Telfer, R.N.V.R., especially distinguished himself), and to the effective machine and Lewis gun fire from the flanking positions occupied by the Anson and Hood, our line held. The town was back in allied hands and would remain so until the end of the war.

The map below shows a solid black line on the left. This was the allied line on August 8<sup>th</sup>. Roughly the starting point of the attack on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The two red crosses show the initial objectives of the attack for the IV and VI corps. The red circle shows the section of the Achiet-Le Grande to Arras railway line that James would have been attacking. It also encircles the village where James is buried.



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