



Today I want to talk to you about World War One. Remembrance Day is about far more than remembering WW1 – it is about remembering the sacrifices made by all British people in all wars.

For some in this room it may well be about something far more recent, and individual.

However it was started after, and because of, the losses of World War One. It is on the 11th November because that was the day, in 1918, that the guns finally fell silent. The poppy is used as it grew out of the battlefields of Belgium and France at the end of the war. And so, 100 years on, I *am* going to ask that you think this year about World War One.



One of the problematic things about Remembering WW1 is that we *don't* remember it. That we can't remember it. 100 years on, nobody is left alive that has any actual memory of WW1. So, a century later, what does it mean to remember? Something you will often see is big number like this infographic that tries to '*remember*' everyone.

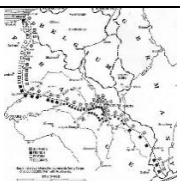
The Numbers are hard to understand

So if remembering on this scale doesn't mean much, then we need to zoom in to find something meaningful.








There was fighting across the world – the first shots of the WW1 were fired in Africa – and there was fighting in the air, on the oceans and on land.



This map shows the areas of fighting in Europe. It is still too much to remember the war at this scale, so we must zoom in. Most British soldiers found themselves fighting on the Western Front.









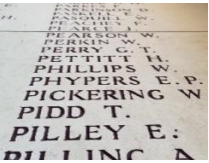

This was a line that had to be held. The great fear was the enemy would break through, or pass around the end. This would mean losing the war. So the soldiers dug 2,500 miles of trenches that zigzagged across 400 miles front from the mountainous Swiss border in the south right up to the channel

	<p>coast of Belgium in the north, leaving no gaps in the line. This was a line that had to be held.</p> <p>Right at the northern end of this line we find the small Belgian city of Ypres.</p> <p>The Germans were desperate to take Ypres, so they could break through the Western Front trenches and allow their soldiers to pour around the northern end.</p>
	<p>Ypres was very vulnerable in 1915. The British held the city, but the German trenches were only a mile or two away, and they surrounded the city three, and sometimes even four sides.</p> <p>The huge German artillery guns were pounding the city day and night, from the high ground that surrounded the city-known as the Salient</p> <p>Ypres was not dissimilar to York, with high medieval walls and a series of gates that had stood guard over the city for centuries.</p> <p>The gate most used by the soldiers led out onto the Menin Road. It was and is known as the Menin Gate.</p>
	<p>If we leave Ypres from the Menin Gate, and walk that road again, out of the city for a couple miles north east, up towards the hills of the Salient, we find ourselves at the crossroads of Sint Jan.</p> <p>On the 23rd of April 1915 the 1st Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment marched this route. With them was 28-year-old Ernest Pilley, the youngest son of Joseph and Suzannah Pilley.</p>
	<p>Joseph and Suzannah had four children. Ernest Pilley had an older sister, Hannah, and two older brothers, Herbert and Tom. By 1901, at the age of 14, Ernest was working in the sweltering heat of a Barnsley forge, learning his trade as a</p>

	<p>blacksmith's apprentice and living with his family in the heart of industrial Yorkshire.</p> <p>Something about the life of a blacksmith in West Yorkshire wasn't enough for Ernest though – because in 1911 we find him, now as Private Pilley, stationed in central India, as one of the soldiers manning the British Empire's outpost at Jabalpur.</p> <p>Pilley and his regiment were still in Jabalpur in 1914 when the war broke out in Europe. They were urgently recalled to help hold the line on the Western Front.</p>
	<p>By April 1915, Ernest Pilley and the other York and Lancs lads could be counted on as experienced, professional soldiers. This was the reason they had been asked to march the two slow, sludgy miles north west from Ypres to the crossroads at Sint Jan, under relentless artillery fire.</p> <p>It must have felt very different to garrison duty in the baking heat of India. It was cold, muddy and hard going, but they were moving as fast as they possibly could. They were in a desperate rush.</p>
	<p>That morning, troops from the French Empire had fallen back in the face of a gas attack, retreating as the lethal chemicals floated and settled over their trenches. It was a very new weapon in 1915 and the soldiers had no equipment to handle it. The Germans advanced behind their gas cloud, hoping to break through and move on into Ypres, just two short miles to the south west.</p> <p>So it was the reliable, experienced lads of the 1st Battalion, York and Lancaster Regiment who were ordered out of Ypres, out onto the Menin Road, and up into the deserted trenches, to plug the vulnerable gap and hold the line.</p> <p>When they arrived at the trenches, they ignored the terrifying, unmistakable, lingering smell of the gas and counterattacked</p>

	<p>immediately, pushing beyond their own trenches, pushing the Germans back to their original line.</p> <p>It wasn't a great battle, or a huge advance. The Germans held their own line. It wasn't anything particularly heroic or unusual for the Western Front. Sometimes all you could do, all you needed to do, was hold the line.</p> <p>At some point in that action, in that scramble to secure that small gap in trenches, Private Pilley died. The York and Lancaster men had done what was needed. They had held the line.</p> <p>A few days later a much-feared telegram was delivered to a small labourer's cottage in Barnsley, and Ernest's parents and older brothers and sisters learned what had happened to their youngest family member.</p>
	<p>Let's move forward in time by two years to 1917. 100 years ago, Ypres was the place of a great battle, and it witnessed some of the fiercest and hardest fighting of the trench war.</p> <p>Two years later, in 1917, the British were still trying to break out of the crushing 3-sided vice that had held them in Ypres for three years. The trench line had inched forwards in the two years following Private Pilley's death, pushing out towards the hills of the Salient, past Langemarck and Zonnebeke.</p> <p>The deep, scarring trench line that Private Pilley and the York and Lancaster lads had held was by now behind the British lines, left to fade back into the land.</p> <p>This third battle of Ypres was called Passchendaele, named for the village on the Salient ridge that was the target of the operation.</p>
	<p>The Battle of Passchendaele is remembered as some of the worst conditions of the war, as throughout the appalling summer of 1917 it did not stop raining, turning the battlefield into a marshy, mud-drenched hellscape.</p>

	<p>The battle lasted for three and a half months, and cost of 260,000 casualties on each side. over 500,000 individuals like Private Pilley, over 500,000 families across Europe finding <i>that</i> telegram when they answered the door. The trenches moved very little.</p>
	<p>The mud and the conditions were overwhelming. The Battle is a good example from the Western Front, it came at a high human cost for very little gain. Historians still cannot agree if it should be counted as a victory for Britain or not.</p>
	<p>Now let's leave the mud-soaked wasteland of Passchendaele and travel the 5 miles back down off the ridge to the Sint Jan crossroads, remembering as we pass Private Pilley and all those others who held the line there back in 1915. Two miles more brings us back to the gate on the Menin Road that leads into the shattered, exhausted remains of the city of Ypres.</p>
	<p>If you stand there now, where the Menin Road cuts the walls, you will see the Menin Gate. The Menin Gate is a memorial to the missing – those whose remains couldn't be identified or were never recovered from the chaotic, mud-sodden hellscape of the Ypres Salient and the Battle of Passchendaele.</p>
	<p>When it was opened in 1927 by General Herbert Plumer, he had an audience of over 700 mothers who's sons remains had never been found. He told them "He is not missing, he is here."</p>
	<p>Every day since it opened, with the brief exception of World War Two, there has been a ceremony at the Menin Gate, every evening at 8pm, to remember the fallen.</p> <p>Every day, buglers from the town Fire Service play the Last Post, and every day wreaths are laid by people visiting from across the world. Every year, for many years, there has been a</p>

	<p>Huntington School wreath laid by those representatives of the school who come with us on the Battlefields Trip.</p> <p>Some of those people are in this room, and will have really clear memories of this place.</p>
	<p>The Menin Gate lists the names of 54,896 soldiers whose bodies were never recovered.</p> <p>There is now at least one name on that gate that means something to you.</p>
	<p>Moment of silence for this name – unannounced</p> <p>Private Pilley was the great-great uncle of Jess Pilley, in Year 11 at this school. We researched his story on the trip this year, and she has kindly allowed me to share it with you today.</p>
	<p>The reason I have told you his story is that Private Pilley is only one of the 54,896 names on the Menin Gate – they all have different stories and they all were real people.</p> <p>In some ways those names are there for <i>different</i> reasons: some out of duty to King and Country, some seeking adventure, some wanting to travel abroad, some volunteering because their mates did, because they felt the pressure from propaganda and other people back home.</p> <p>Some volunteered from the Empire - from Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Canada or the West Indies to fight for the British.</p> <p>But in another way, those names are all there for the same reason.</p>



So we return again to the issue of remembrance. How can we remember something we never experienced?

If you're wondering what you should think about in that minute's silence, then think of Private Pilley, or any of the Yorks and Lancs lads who trudged through the mud and up into that trench that still smelt of the poison gas.

Think of those men up at Passchendaele, assaulting that ridge that the Germans had held for so long, cursing their way through the mud.

You cannot remember them as such, but you **can** not forget them.