

FORGET ME NOT

ALFRED JAMES KEMP SHEELAGH BOLT'S GRANDFATHER; ANNE THOMAS'S GREAT GRANDFATHER SAM, LUCY & ELLA THOMAS'S GREAT, GREAT GRANDFATHER



My grandfather had a collection of trench art that he said had been made by a friend of his to relieve the boredom of life behind the lines when their Battalion was resting away from the trenches.

The pieces photographed here are made out of shell cases and bullets and some of the pieces are engraved with the name of the area they were in at the time they were made. I don't know anything about grandfather's service during the war; I assume he was in the Gloucestershire Regiment as he was born in Gloucestershire and lived all his life there but I cannot verify this.

The handle of the letter opener is a bullet and the blade is made from a shell case, it is engraved Fins. The village of Fins is situated in the Somme on the road between Cambrai and Peronne. Fins and near by Sorel were occupied at the beginning of April 1917, in the German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line. They were lost on the 23 March 1918, after a determined defence of Sorel by the 6th Kings Own Scottish Borders and the staff of the South African Brigade; they were regained in the following September. There is now a Commonwealth Wars Graves Commission Cemetery at Fins and there are 1,289 Commonwealth casualties commemorated there.

The smaller shell case, marked T67, appears to be from a German anti tank gun. The 13.2mm Tank Abwehr Gewehr M1918 was the worlds first large scale anti-tank rifle and was the only anti-tank rifle in use during WW1. It was based on an over-grown Mauser action chambered for a 13.2 x 92mm semi-rimmed bottlenecked cartridge. The Tank Abwehr Gewehr, M1918 or T-Gewehr was capable of penetrating around 20mm of armour at 100 metres and 15mm at 300 meters, when striking at 90 degrees, the rear sight is graduated from 100 to 500 metres. Approximately 15,800 were produced at the Waffenfabrik Mauser AG factory at Oberndorf am Neckar, delivery commenced in May 1918. Early tanks were protected by no more than 12mm of armour plate, so this was a fairly effective weapon despite being cumbersome at

17.3kg and 1.68m long. Bullet weight was 795gn with a muzzle velocity of 2600 ft/sec, all ammunition was hardened steel core and manufactured at the Polte factory, Magdeburg Germany.

This rifle did not have a muzzle break, but did have a bipod assembly to help support its massive weight.

I have not been able to find any information about the larger round Sp255 22 119A. One case is inscribed Albert and the other Hedeauville. I cannot find a reference to Hedeauville and I wonder if it was confused with Deauville.

However, I know that the town of Albert, also in the Somme, was three miles away from the front line in 1916 and so many British soldiers who fought at the Battle of the Somme passed through Albert. Fierce fighting took place around Albert from the earliest days of the war and by the autumn of 1916 the town had largely been reduced to a pile of rubble. At the heart of the town, is the Golden Madonna basilica. Before the war 'la Basilique' was a popular tourist attraction, with the golden figure of the Virgin Mary holding aloft the baby Jesus. Allegedly found by a shepherd in the middle ages the statue was credited with miraculous properties and consequently received many pilgrims. In January 1915 German shelling toppled the statue to an angle horizontal to the ground but the statue did not fall. Superstitious legends sprang up on both allied and German sides. The British and French believed that the war would end on the day that the tower came crashing down and the Germans believed that whoever caused the statue to fall would inevitably lose the war; both sides therefore took care not to aim shells at the tower holding the statue. This arrangement suited the allies since the tower provided a valuable vantage point from which to view the opposing German forces. As it turned out, the British eventually destroyed the tower during the German occupation of the town in Spring/Summer 1918 and the statue was destroyed. After the war a replica basilica was completed to the original design.

