Gunner Victor Henry Pitfield, age 31

Lance Sergeant Henry Douglas Baines Hardwick, age 36

Private Arthur George Lindridge, age 29

The final weeks

The [final assault](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_Days_Offensive#Battles_of_the_Hindenburg_Line) on the Hindenburg Line began with the [Meuse-Argonne Offensive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meuse-Argonne_Offensive), launched by French and American troops on 26th September. The following week, cooperating French and American units broke through in [Champagne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Champagne,_France) forcing the Germans off the commanding heights, and closing towards the Belgian frontier. On 8th October the line was pierced again by British and Dominion troops at Cambrai. The German army had to shorten its front and use the Dutch frontier as an anchor to fight rear-guard actions as it fell back towards Germany.

Though the allied victory was now agonisingly close, it did not arrive early enough for Gunner Victor Henry Pitfield. Victor lived in Australia with his father and mother Jacob and Sophia Pitfield in Guildford, New South Wales but originally from Jessups Farm, Chiddingstone Kent. He had returned early in the War to fight with the 8th Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery.

Pitfield embarked in October 1915 from Sydney, Australia on board the Australian troopship, HMAT *Port Lincoln*. In November 1916, having been evacuated from the Western Front, he was admitted to a Hospital at Shorncliffe, Kent with severe shrapnel wounds. He soon returned to the front. Almost two years later he was again evacuated from the battlefield having suffered more wounds, including a gunshot which resulted in a compound fracture of the femur. He was admitted to Rouen Hospital, France on 30 September 1918 but succumbed to his wounds on 3rd October 1918.

Lance Sergeant Henry Douglas Baines Hardwick was born in 1893 and lived with his family at the Spotted Dog, Smarts Hill, Penshurst. His father, Frederick William was a grocer, publican and butcher. Prior to the War he worked in the family business as a butcher’s assistant. He enlisted in Tonbridge with the 8th Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers, the second largest regiment in the British Army.

On 29th August 1918 the Division took over positions in the line south of the River Scarpe and was involved in fierce fighting throughout that day and the next. During the following months the Division advanced on the Hindenburg Line, fighting alongside Canadian troops at the Canal du Nord, Cambrai and during the pursuit to the Selle when, on 1st October 1918 L/Sgt Hardwick was killed in action, age 36. He is buried in Chapel Corner Cemetery , Sauchy-Lestree, in France.

He was survived by a brother, George William Guy Hardwick, who enlisted in the Army at Tonbridge, Kent on 21st November 1916. A skilled butcher, when asked for his service of preference he requested the Army Service Corps (Supplies) but was posted, ironically, to the Royal Army Medical Corps. Having served in England and Dublin he rose to corporal and was discharged from the Army on 11th September 1919.

Private Arthur George Lindridge fought with the 1st Battalion, Guards Machine Gun Regiment. He was born and lived in Penshurst village and was educated at Cranleigh School. He worked as assistant to his father Samuel Lindridge in the grocer’s and draper’s shop, initially the ‘top shop’, latterly Buxton House, with his brother and mother. It was a large household. In 1891 when Arthur was aged 2, the household apart from his parents included a lady help, a draper’s assistant, two grocer’s apprentices, a housemaid and a nurse. His service record shows that he was born in Tonbridge and resident at Penshurst when he enlisted in St Pancras, Middlesex. He joined the war on August 15th 1914 in the British Expeditionary Force. The Guards Division fought at the battle of the Selle from 17th to 25th October 1918 which is when Pte Lindridge may have died.

Meanwhile, news of Germany's impending military defeat spread throughout the German armed forces. The threat of mutiny was rife. Admiral [Scheer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reinhard_Scheer) and Ludendorff decided to launch a last attempt to restore the "valour" of the German Navy. When rumours of the impending assault reached sailors at [Kiel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiel), many rebelled, refusing to be part of a naval offensive, which they believed to be suicidal, and were arrested. The Kaiser dismissed Ludendorff on 26th October. And the collapse of the Balkans meant that Germany was about to lose its main supplies of oil and food. Its reserves had been used up, even as US troops kept arriving at the rate of 10,000 per day.

With the military faltering and with widespread loss of confidence in the Kaiser, Germany moved towards peace. The collapse of the Central Powers came swiftly. Bulgaria was the first to sign an armistice, on 29th September 1918 at [Saloniki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saloniki). On 30th October, the Ottoman Empire capitulated at [Moudros](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moudros). The [Armistice with Austria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armistice_of_Villa_Giusti) was signed in the Villa Giusti, near [Padua](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Padua), on 3rd November. Austria and Hungary signed separate armistices following the overthrow of the [Habsburg Monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habsburg_Monarchy). [Prince Maximilian of Baden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Maximilian_of_Baden) took charge of a new government as Chancellor of Germany to negotiate with the Allies.

Negotiations with US President Wilson began immediately, in the hope that he would offer better terms than the British and French. Wilson demanded a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary control over the German military. There was no resistance when the [Social Democrat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Democratic_Party_of_Germany) [Philipp Scheidemann](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philipp_Scheidemann) on 9th November declared Germany to be a republic. The Kaiser, kings and other hereditary rulers all were removed from power. Imperial Germany was dead; a new Germany had been born: the [Weimar Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Republic). The [Kaiser](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaiser) fled to the Netherlands.

On 11th November, at 5:00 am, an [armistice with Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armistice_with_Germany) was signed in a railroad carriage at [Compiègne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compi%C3%A8gne). At 11 am on 11th November 1918—"the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month"—a ceasefire came into effect.