

St Helens Pioneers Battalion

The St Helens Battalion was formed in September 1914 and was made up of **normal men** from a range of backgrounds, including members of **St. Helens Saints Rugby team**. The battalion came out of the result of a public meeting held by Lord Derby at the Theatre Royal, St. Helens. After training at Bangor, Grantham and Larkhill they landed in France on 6 November 1915.



Many saw it as an **adventure** and some wanted to make the town **proud**. It was also a good opportunity to join the army alongside your **local friends** and colleagues and this is where the name `pals` comes from. **1007** men signed up voluntarily.

The battalion took part at the battle of the Somme and were able to capture and hold the village of **Montauban**. The 30th Division were incredibly successful in achieving their aims. The village lay behind the first major German defensive system and had been a key stronghold for the Germans. The regiment suffered heavy casualties when attacking, however they were able to reach the village. The troops then came under very heavy fire when defending the position from German counter attacks. A total of **594 men** of the South Lancashire regiment were lost during the attack. However, the St. Helens Pals were relatively unscathed. They had **succeeded in achieving** their objectives and numerous men were commended for bravery. However, these soldiers struggled to adapt to normal life and the trauma was too much for them to handle.

In 1917 they saw action at Arras, Messines and Passchendaele. However, the battalion was effectively destroyed in another battle after the Somme when over **400 men were killed** in a German attack. After this the surviving few soldiers joined a new battalion (the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers) which helped to train incoming American soldiers in trench warfare tactics. **Out of the 1007 troops who signed up, 13 still remained.**

It is also worth noting that Liverpool had one of the largest Pals Battalions in the country. The volunteers were addressed by Lord Derby, who said:

I am not going to make you a speech of heroics. You have given me your answer, and I can telegraph to Lord Kitchener tonight to say that our second battalion is formed. This should be a Battalion of Pals, a battalion in which friends from the same office will fight shoulder to shoulder for the honour of Britain and the credit of Liverpool. I don't attempt to minimise to you the hardships you will suffer, the risks you will run. I don't ask you to uphold Liverpool's honour, it would be an insult to think that you could do anything but that. But I do thank



you from the bottom of my heart for coming here tonight and showing what is the spirit of Liverpool, a spirit that ought to spread through every city and every town in the kingdom.

Businesses had been asked to encourage their staff to enlist, and the volunteers were drawn from city offices and factories. By November, enough volunteers had come forward to form four battalions. They left for France in late 1915, and took part in some of the fiercest battles of the war, with heavy loss of life. Almost 200 of the Liverpool Pals were killed in one day, 1 July 1916, in the Battle of the Somme. At the end of the war, about 20% of the volunteers had been killed, and a further 50% injured.

