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Background Information

George Swain joined The Royal Sussex Regiment, in the 11th battalion and in the 39th division as a Company Sergeant Major at the age of 19. He was born and enlisted in Worthing. George's younger brother also joined the army, although he was only a private. George's brother died on April 10th 1918 at the age of 20 a year after George died. George and his family lived on Winton Place Road in Worthing. Prior to the war George was an employee of the Sussex Daily Newspaper.

Family Tree:



Below are some modern day pictures of the road The Swain family lived on. In the time George lived there, it was not a particularly wealthy area; therefore it is a rather big achievement that George became a Sergeant Major.

Good information




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Regiment, Battalion, Division and Battles

George Swain fought in the 11th Battalion and in the 39th Division, George was killed in action on 7th November 1917 at the age of 21. He had been in the war for nearly 3 years. In this time he had worked his way up from a private to a Sergeant Major.

George's Battalion fought in many battles, one of them was the battle of Passchendaele, the third major battle of the Ypres. It took place between July and November 1917, therefore implying George died towards the end of the battle. Not only was it difficult enough in the general state the army was fighting in but the trenches began to flood due to harsh weather and constant rain fall, the lowlands where turned into a swamp. The situation was made worse by the fact that the British had destroyed the drainage system in that area. This thick heavy mud caused a lot of terrible problems for the infantry and the use of tanks became impossible. In addition to the mud, the British forces had to endure mustard gas attacks which they were remotely unprepared for.



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Philip Gibbs later wrote about the offensive in his book *Adventures in Journalism* (1923)

"Every man of ours who fought on the way to Passchendaele agreed that those battles in Flanders were the most awful, the most bloody, and the most hellish. The condition of the ground, out from Ypres and beyond the Menin Gate, was partly the cause of the misery and the filth. Heavy rains fell, and made one great bog in which every shell crater was a deep pool. There were thousands of shell craters. Our guns had made them, and German gunfire, slashing our troops, made thousands more, linking them together so that they were like lakes in some places, filled with slurry water and dead bodies."

"It clung to their legs at every step. Frequently they had to pause to pull their comrades from the treacherous mire - figures embedded to the waist, some of them trying to fire their rifles at a spitting machine gun" - Percival Phillips described the battle of Passchendaele in the daily express (2nd August 1917)

excellent use of quotes



Robert Sherrell (R.C. Sherrell) is a famous soldier from WWI. In this passage he has talked about the living conditions in the trenches in the Passchendaele battle, when it flooded. Robert Sherrell said: "The living conditions in our camp were awful beyond belief. The cookhouse was flooded, and most of the food was uneatable. There was nothing but sodden biscuits and cold stew. The cooks tried to supply bacon for breakfast, but the men complained that it smelled like dead men."

All of these quotes are primary sources of the event as they are all from the time it happened and from men that experience the battle first hand. The second source, by Percival Phillips is made to inform the public of how hard the Passchendaele battle was and to keep the citizens not fighting in England informed on what's happening on the front line. These sources are

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useful as they can help historians, create a better idea and image of what trench life was like, and how difficult the battle of Passchendaele was. They are reliable in that, they have come from men that have experience it and where there in that period of time.



excellent use
of source

The photograph is an article in The Daily Mirror, about the situation in The Passchendaele Battle on 6th September 1917. George would still have been alive then and fighting in these circumstances. As you can see from the photo, the mud was thick and heavy and it was awfully difficult to do anything without getting stuck. This source is reliable as it is a copy from a newspaper of the time. It does not seem to be 'sugar-coating' the situation, from the photographs they have chosen to use implying they are not bias to what is actually happening on the front line and how harsh and difficult army life is.

Although, remember, newspapers were censored during the war.

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Uniform



My soldier would have worn a uniform a lot like the ones in these photographs. It consists of a hat, a jacket, trousers and boots. The soldiers would live in these clothes, on the front line men would stay in these uniforms for up to 3 weeks, without them being washed.

On 31st July 1917, Lieutenant Sherriff and his men of the East Surrey Regiment were called forward to attack the German positions. "At dawn on the morning of the attack, the battalion assembled in the mud outside the huts. I lined up my platoon and went through the necessary inspection. Some of the men looked terribly ill: grey, worn faces in the dawn, unshaved and dirty because there was no clean water. I saw the characteristic shrugging of their shoulders that I knew so well. They hadn't had their clothes off for weeks, and their shirts were full of lice." This passage is in fact about The Passchendaele Battle and says how the men had their uniforms on for weeks, and how they were lice-ridden. This would be the norm for men in the trenches as they had ill-sanitation and lack of clean water.

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Sports in the War

When researching George, I found out he was remembered as an 'Excellent boxer and athlete'. This was the information that drew me to George W Swain. By being rather good at sports that may have helped him gain the status Sargent Company Major. After the war, sports was encourage a lot to help with the trauma of WWI, and not long after, in 1920, the Summer Olympics came, the Olympics was said to honour the people who, after the war were suffering, Hungary, Germany, Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey where banned from the games. I cannot help but wonder if George wished to become an athlete, for his career before the war began. In the soldiers spare time they wouldn't have been able to do that much sports, due to lack of space and lack of sleep. Therefore George Swain must have done something to show his talent in boxing and athletics. Due to George being such an athletic man, it must have been hard for him to be in confined spaces and not able to run and play sports.



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Burial and Memorial

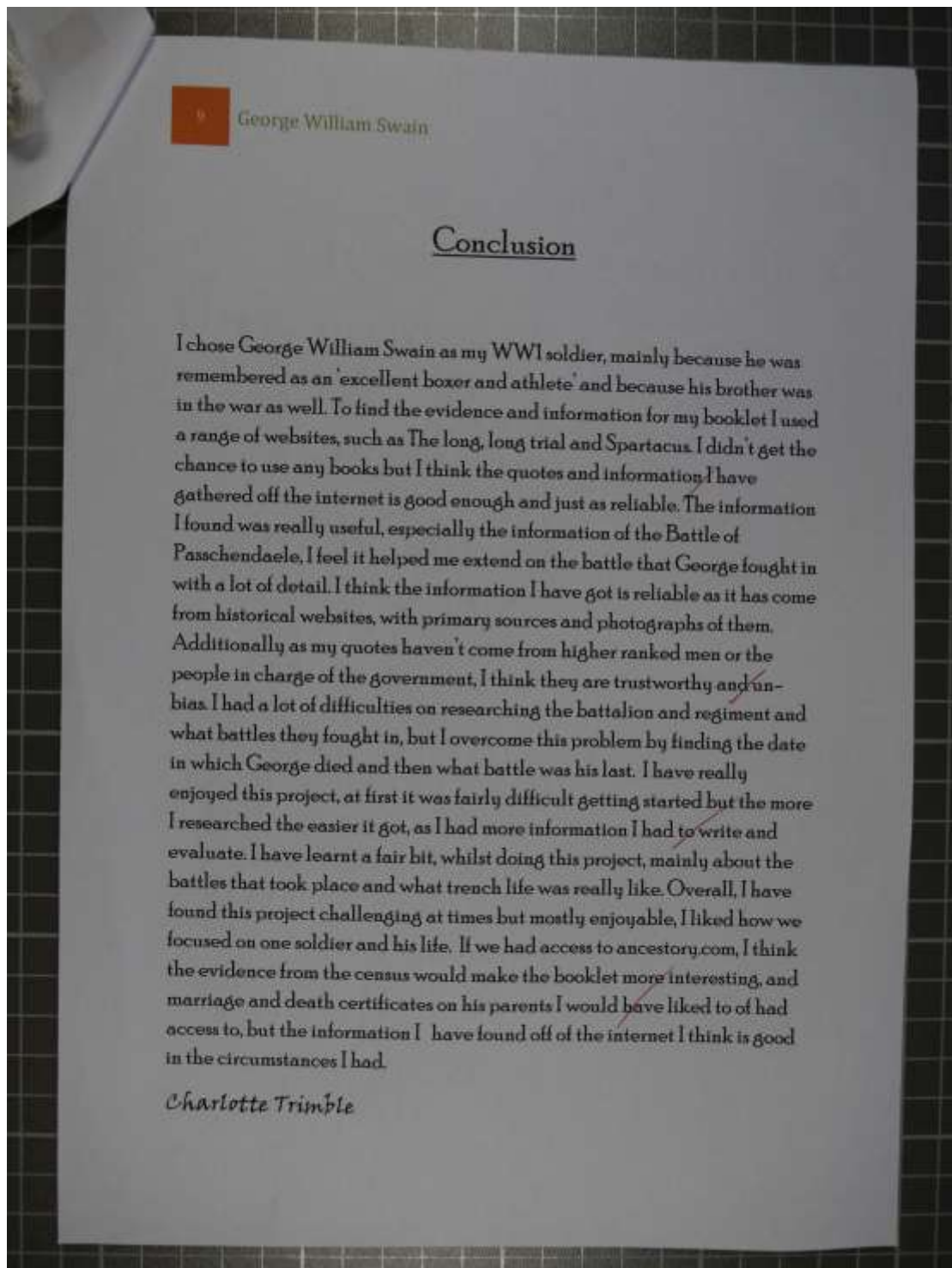
George William Swain was killed in action on the 7th November 1917 age 21. George unfortunately has no known grave but is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Belgium. As George was killed in action, he would have died in no-man's land making it difficult due to the shooting and barbed wire to retrieve his body for him to be buried and have a funeral. George's body was left in no-man's land therefore resulting in him not having a grave. Although, his brother Arthur (who was killed in action a year after George died) was buried in a cemetery - Browns Road Military Cemetery.



Tyne Cot Memorial
The memorial bears the names of almost 35,000 officers and men whose graves are not known.



This is the cemetery where Arthur was buried.



(7B) Outstanding work, well done!

This is very well researched beyond the obvious, is supported really well by evidence and begins to evaluate reliability.

Target → You should now aim to consider how the author and purpose of sources affects reliability.

- eg - generals would want to focus on the positives as they were making the decisions in battles.

- Newspapers were censored so only printed what the government allowed.