

Charles Bertie Comber

According to the 1911 Census Charles was living with his mother and father in Morton Morrell. He was working with his father who was a stud groom. His father also called Charles had been born in Redhill, Surrey in 1853 and his mother Christina in Inverness around 1857, In 1901 according to the Census both father and son had been working as grooms in East Haddon, Northamptonshire.

At outbreak of the war, Charles joined the 10th Hussars as a private. His medal records index entry shows that he was deployed to the Western Front as from 8 November 1914. He was discharged from the army on 13 December 1917 and awarded the Silver War Badge which was given to servicemen who had been given honour discharge because of wounds received.

Further research as shown that he was wounded on 11th April 1917 at the Battle of Monchy le Preux.ⁱ

The 10th Hussars role in the battle was on their cavalry mounts and they suffered very heavy casualties from shelling and machine gunning. The following extracts give a feel to the events of the day.

“Brig. Gen. Bulkeley-Johnson, ordered his brigade to advance to the north of, and beyond the village; the 10th Hussars and Essex Yeomanry of 8th Brigade were to circle around between Monchy and the River Scarpe. In view of this advance, 6th Cavalry Brigade was instructed to conform with the advance of the 8th Cavalry Brigade - the 3rd Dragoon Guards of 6th Brigade headed south of the village. These three regiments moved forward over prepared trench crossings at around 8.30am.

According to David Kenyon’s PhD Thesis “British Cavalry on the Western Front 1914-1918”:

Emerging south of Orange Hill they advanced at the gallop, in line of troop columns, with one troop advanced as scouts. An advance in brigade strength like this was a rare enough sight to make a significant impression on the watching infantry.

Capt. Cuddeford of the Highland Light Infantry (15th Division) was witness to this advance:

During a lull in the snowstorm an excited shout was raised that our cavalry were coming up! Sure enough, away behind us, moving quickly in extended order down the

slope of Orange Hill was line upon line of mounted men covering the whole extent of the hillside as far as we could see. It was a thrilling moment for us infantrymen, who had never dreamt that we should see a real cavalry charge, which was evidently what was intended.

Jonathan Nicholls takes up the story:

And so, at 8.30am a squadron of the Essex Yeomanry under Lieutenant Chaplin, followed by a squadron of the 10th Hussars under Captain Gordon-Canning, each with a section of machine gunners, cantered smartly round the southern slope of Orange Hill. They made a magnificent sight...Towards the northern edge of Monchy they came under fire; several saddles were suddenly emptied...galloping headlong for the village while German shells exploded all around themⁱⁱ

Much of what happened to Charles after his discharge is not known. In the summer of 1929 he married Lillie B Townsend. His mother Christina died in 1929 and the death was recorded in Warwick. No information is available concerning his father. Charles himself died in 1960 age 72 and his death was recorded in Warwick. It seems likely he had stayed in the county until his death

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ⁱ 10th (P.W.O.) Royal Hussars and The Essex Yeomanry, during the European War 1914 -1918 by Lt Col FHDC Whitmore, CMG, DSO, TD, DL

ⁱⁱ The Western Front : The Real Warhorse

<http://www.cwgc.org/APRIL%202012%20WFA%20WAR%20HORSE.pdf>