

## *Edwin James Soden.*

### *Private (Rifleman) S.1716, 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consorts own)*

**Edwin James Soden's** family originated from Bishops Itchington, Warwickshire. Born on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 1891, he was the only child of Edwin Cowley Soden and Lucy, his wife. The Wellesbourne School records indicate that he started there on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1900 having previously attended a school in Woodford<sup>i</sup>. It may be assumed that this was about the time that the family arrived and settled in Chapel St. which was in what was then classed as Wellesbourne Mountford. After leaving school in April 1906 he became a Steam Roller Driver with Warwickshire County Council, the same occupation as his father.

Soon after the outbreak of the First World War, in August 1914, Edwin and some of his pals travelled to the recruiting office in Birmingham, to enlist. The date was the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September<sup>ii</sup>. A new Battalion, the 8<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of the Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own) had been formed at Winchester on 21<sup>st</sup> Aug 1914 as part of General Kitchener's First New Army. This was to become part of the 41st Brigade, (14<sup>th</sup> Light Division)<sup>iii</sup>. It was to this Battalion that Edwin was posted, receiving his Service number S.1716. He was 23 years of age. Two other men from Wellesbourne joined the same Battalion. Herbert Loomes was allocated Service number S.1718 and William Cherry Findon, S.1713. All were attached to 'C' Company. In November, Edwin became an Acting Corporal but was returned to the rank of Rifleman five days later. On 14<sup>th</sup> February 1915 he was absent without leave and was confined to barracks for 21 days as a punishment.

On completion of training at Aldershot and Greyshott, the Battalion embarked for France and on 19<sup>th</sup> of May 1915 landed at Boulogne. The Second Battle of Ypres was already into its fifth week as the Germans sought to capture the Ypres Salient. The 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion immediately took up positions East of Ypres.



Hooe crater photographed in 1915 Photo Dr. Trenkler

On the 19<sup>th</sup> July, Royal Engineers detonated 1700 Kilograms of explosives in an underground tunnel near Hooe, not only creating a massive crater but also allowing for advancement by the British forces. On the 29<sup>th</sup> July orders were given for the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion to replace the 7th Battalion in trenches at Hooe. This was completed by 2am the following

day. Harry, Herbert, William and the rest of 'C' Company in their trenches however were divided from those of 'D' Company by the Hooe crater.

The Battalion's War Diary for that day then records: *At about 3.15 a.m. the Germans attacked.... part of the front trenches was subjected to an intense bombardment which only lasted about 2 or 3 minutes, then suddenly sheets of flame broke out all along the front and clouds of thick black smoke. The Germans had turned on liquid fire from hoses which had been established during the night. Under cover of the flames, swarms of bombers appeared on the parapet and in rear of the line. The mass of them had broken through at the crater and then swung left and right.....*

Despite gallant efforts from elements of the Rifle Brigade the Germans broke through the lines, regaining lost ground. A British counter attack was ordered for 2.45pm. The war diary continues: *The Battalion was to lead the attack on the left.... only one company remained in hand, i.e. 'D' Company. 'C' Company was non-existent....*

The following morning, the 31st July, all three of the Wellesbourne men were posted as missing. 'C' Company had taken the full force of what was the first major use of Flame Throwers in warfare.

It was not until late March 1916 after an investigation by the Battalion Commander that Mr. and Mrs. Soden were officially advised that Edwin was dead. For the records, the date of his death was given as the day of the German counter-attack i.e. 30<sup>th</sup> July 1915. His body was never recovered and therefore has no known grave. He is however commemorated on the Menin Gate (Panels 46 – 48, 50), Ypres. His name also appears on the Wellesbourne Church of England School Roll of Honour (as Edward), The Wellesbourne Roll of Honour for the Dead, in St Peter's Church, Wellesbourne and on the Wellesbourne War Memorial.

Edwin's fellow Gunners survived the Battle of Hooge and were taken captive but were sent to different Prisoner of War Camps in Germany. William Findon returned home to Wellesbourne in January 1919. Herbert Loomes was wounded and survived till the latter days of the war. He contracted pneumonia and died on 29<sup>th</sup> Oct 1918 in the Branch Hospital, Mainz, Germany and is buried in that country.

At the end of the war, Edwin's mother received the decorations that her son was awarded for his military service; the 1914-5 Star, the British and Victory Medals. In addition she received the King's Memorial Plaque and scroll presented to the next of kin of those who died for their country. On the 28<sup>th</sup> November 1922 a man named David Korelstein called at the Chapel Street home of Mrs Soden purporting to be involved in a Government War Memorial scheme to provide work for disabled and wounded soldiers<sup>iv</sup>. Showing her a sample of a frame, he offered to mount her son's medals for her. She handed over the medals, plaque and scroll and ten shillings and sixpence. When the framed medals failed to materialise and a letter to the man's address in Coventry was returned unopened, she contacted the police. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 1923 David Korelstein (alias Stone), a traveller, appeared at Warwick Quarter Sessions sentenced to one year detention with hard labour on 3 counts out of 78 similar offences, of false pretences<sup>v</sup>. Although many medals were recovered, last reports indicated that the Kings plaque given to Mrs Soden was not<sup>vi</sup>.

*Researched by Grev Hudson (March 2014) (grev.hudson@tinyworld.co.uk)*

<sup>i</sup> Wellesbourne School records CR 371/1, CD371/2, CR371/3 and CR371/4(WRO)

- ii British Army WW1 Service Records – 1914-1920 Edwin Soden (Ancestry.co.uk)
  - iii The Long Long Trail (1914-1918.net).
  - iv Stratford upon Avon Herald 8/12/1922
  - v Warwick Quarter Sessions:Qs26/884 Calendar of Prisoners Jan 1923, QS33/8 Quarter Sessions Indictment Book 1919 -1928 and QS30 – Warwick Session Depositions January 1923.
  - vi Stratford upon Avon Herald 8/12/1920
- Sources:(War Diaries: 8th Bn Rifle Brigade. May 1915 – July 1918 (14th Div , 41st Infantry Brigade) WO95/1895)  
(British Army WW1 Service Records, 1914-1920 - Edwin Soden (Ancestry.co.uk).)