

## ***Herbert Percival Hancox.***

### ***Gunner, No, 226903 Royal Field Artillery (formerly Pte. No. 2471 Warwickshire Yeomanry).***

The ancestors of Herbert Percival Hancox had for centuries been born and lived in the rural setting of South Warwickshire. His grandfather James Alfred owned a biscuit manufacturing company in Stratford-upon-Avon and later became a Miller in Wootton Wawen. James was able to send his son Frank, Herbert's father, to attend the King Edward VI Grammar school in the town.

Frank left Stratford and went to work as an assistant for an Iron Merchants in Stamford, Lincolnshire before becoming a travelling salesman, probably for the same company. He was 28 when on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1884 he married Mary Catherine Batty, aged 31, in Christ Church, Lancaster. The couple initially set up home in Preston, Lancashire where they had 4 children, Violet, Herbert, Florence and Harold.

Herbert Percival Hancox was the couple's second child, born in Preston during July 1884 and baptised in the church of St. John on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October. At the time of the 1901 Census Herbert was still at school, in Alford, Lincolnshire, where the family then lived. What Herbert's career path took immediately after leaving school we do not know but by the following Census in 1911 his parents had moved the few miles from Alford to 3, Alexandra Terrace in Trustrhorpe on the Lincolnshire coast. Herbert is amongst those identified as being at this address and his occupation was given as 'A Gentlemans Valet'. Conflicting newspaper reports at the time of his death<sup>i</sup> suggest that on the 2nd April, the date on which the 1911 Census was taken, he was either working for or would be about to join the employ of Mr. Robert Emmet of Moreton Morrell, Warwickshire. Until his death Herbert's life would become inextricably linked to that of Emmet.

Following the declaration of war by England on Germany on the 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914, the 1/1<sup>st</sup> Warwickshire Yeomanry was mobilised. The War Office also ordered the formation of Reserve Units and on the 10<sup>th</sup> September Robert Emmet was commissioned Major in what was to become the 2/1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of the Warwickshire Yeomanry. He commanded 'D' Squadron. Within days Herbert had joined the same force<sup>ii</sup> and it can be assumed that he would ostensibly serve for the rest of the war as Major Emmet's 'Batman'. With horses in short supply it was Emmet's task to round up ponies and hunters for the purpose of instruction at the Yeomanry riding school on Warwick racecourse.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> September 1914, in Kenilworth, Herbert married Elizabeth Windridge and they made their home in Chapel Street, Wellesbourne Mountford.

The 1/1<sup>st</sup> Yeomanry Regiment finally sailed for Egypt in April 1914 before being transferred to Gallipoli in August 1915 and after a disastrous campaign were ordered back to Egypt. Herbert first set foot in the Egypt War Sector on the 11<sup>th</sup> September 1915<sup>iii</sup>, Emmet having been transferred from 2/1<sup>st</sup> to the 1/1<sup>st</sup> Regiment. The 2/1st Regiment remained in England. By May of 1916 the temperatures in Egypt were such that Emmet suffered from heat apoplexy to such an extent that he had to return home.

After recovery in November 1916 he was transferred to the Royal Field Artillery 'A' Battery of the 168<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 32<sup>nd</sup> Division serving in France and taking part in the later stages of the

1916/7 Somme offensive and some of the first and second phase battles of the 1918 Somme campaign. Emmet arranged for Herbert, now No. 26903 Gunner Hancox, Royal Field Artillery, to join him. On the 12th August 1918 the Officer and his Batman transferred to 'B' Battery of the 161<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the same Division.

During the middle of September 1918 Herbert returned home on leave for a short break before returning to France<sup>iv</sup>. It was to be his last visit.

In 1946, for the benefit of his grandchildren, Robert Emmet wrote down his own memories of his experiences during the Great War. We are indebted to Mrs. Rowena Phillips, a descendent, for allowing us to use the following extracts.



With reference to what was a night proceeding the Battle of San Quentin Canal that commenced on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1918 Emmet wrote: *'I ordered the position to be cleared.....I sent the Sergeant Major to superintend the evacuation of half of the position and a Subaltern to supervise the clearing of the other half.....I joined my group of half the men when one of those strange, mysterious, inexplicable rumours reached me that someone had been badly wounded at the battery position. I went to investigate and found that a 'pip-squeak'' shell had directly landed upon the corrugated roof of my batman's 'bivvy''vi'. Poor Hancox (my Valet in private life) had been seriously wounded... I could see that he had been nearly shot to pieces for an arm and leg had been fractured, several ribs had been broken besides numerous other minor wounds. Suffering from his old dysentery the doctor had given him some opium pills to keep him with the battery for a time... till there was a chance of a bed in a hospital..... He reached the base hospital, was operated on successfully and was progressing well when a heavy flush of badly wounded cases arrived, necessitating the evacuation of every case which could be moved. Though delighted at the prospect of reaching 'Blighty' and a proper treatment of his old enemy, dysentery, the poor chap did not have the vitality to stand the fatigue of the move, dying during the journey back to his wife.*

Communication between 'the front' and home was very rapid. Emmet's letter to Herbert's wife, Elizabeth, advising her that her husband had been seriously wounded arrived in Chapel Street on the 28<sup>th</sup> September. This was followed the next day by the disquieting news from the hospital in France of the amputation of Herbert's leg, together with the fuller extent of his injuries; a day later the news of his death at the No. 6, General Hospital, Rouen, France, on the 29<sup>th</sup> September<sup>vii</sup>.

Herbert Percival Hancox was laid to rest in the St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen. (Grave S.II.D.9)

Robert Emmet's words taken from his memoirs provide a fitting epitaph for Herbert Hancox. *'His unremitting care of me in Egypt at a time when he needed the doctor's care himself, probably more than he did, besides his never failing devotion to me again in France, where he constantly risked his life to procure some trifling comfort for me, (until I was compelled to threaten him with serious punishment if he continued to run personal risks on my account), and in addition to all that, his gallant fortitude, persisting with his work, in spite of the return of his debilitating dysentery, all performed without even a growl or complaint, was so full of*



*St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen*

*self-sacrifice and noble courage that I confess, very gladly, to being a better man and better Christian for having known that valet and batman hero.'*

Herbert's family were entitled to receive the 1914-18 Star and the Victory and British War Medals. Records indicate that only the former was actually issued. It's possible that the others were not claimed by his wife Elizabeth as she subsequently remarried in June 1920. She and her new husband Edwin Castle settled in the Cotswolds.

Herbert is commemorated on the Wellesbourne Village War Memorial in the grounds of St. Peter's church and on the Roll of the Dead within the church.

Herbert's younger brother **Harold Martin Hancox** served throughout the war in France as a Gunner No. 26438 in the Royal Field Artillery, trench mortar battery detachment, and suffered Gas Poisoning in April 1918. He is believed to have no direct connection to the Wellesbourne and Walton parishes.

*Researched by Grev. Hudson (May 2016)([grev.hudson@btinternet.com](mailto:grev.hudson@btinternet.com)) & assistance from Tony Whiteley(Emmets researcher).*

<sup>i</sup> Herbert Hancox died on 29<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1918, *The Stratford upon Avon Herald* edition of the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1918 records that he had worked for Major Emmett for 10 years whereas the same newspaper in its 4<sup>th</sup> October 1918 edition suggests that it was only 7 years.

<sup>ii</sup> Herbert was allocated no. 2147. Service nos. 2144 to 2478 were issued during September 1914. ([armyservicenumbers.blogspot.co.uk](http://armyservicenumbers.blogspot.co.uk))

<sup>iii</sup> Herbert Hancox – Medal card.

<sup>iv</sup> *Stratford upon Avon Herald* 30/8/1918.

<sup>v</sup> *A German Rifle Grenade.*

<sup>vi</sup> *bivouac*


<sup>vii</sup> *Stratford upon Avon Herald* 4/10/1918 and 11/10/1918.

*Other Sources:*

*Robert Emmett's memoirs courtesy of Mrs. Rowena Philips.*

*The Long, Long Trail.* ([www.1914-18.net](http://www.1914-18.net))

*Warwickshire Yeomanry in the Great War* compiled by Hon. H.A. Adderley

 Indicates a war fatality.