

## *Herbert Loomes*

### *Rifleman, No. S1718. 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own).*

The grandparents of **Herbert Loomes**, Thomas, born in Husband's Bosworth, Leicestershire, a painter and glazier by trade, and his wife Elizabeth (nee Matthews) born in Huntington, arrived in the village of Wellesbourne at sometime between their marriage in 1851 and the following year when their first child, given the same name as his father, was born.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> June 1879, in the Parish Church of St. Peters, Wellesbourne Herbert's father married Fanny O'Donnell, a girl from the village of Long Itchington. She originated from Donegal, in Ireland. Thomas worked as a plumber and painter and Fanny as a laundress. They were to have 8 children including Herbert who was born on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1889 and baptised on the 9<sup>th</sup> June of the same year in the village church. Herbert attended both the infants and junior sections of Wellesbourne school finally leaving on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 1902 to work on a farm<sup>i</sup>. By the time he was 22 years of age however, he was employed as a Footman and lived with his parents and siblings in Stratford Road, Wellesbourne.

At the outbreak of the war in August 1914 Herbert was one of the first from Wellesbourne to enlist. He and a number of other young men from the village travelled to the recruitment office in Birmingham where on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September they joined the 8<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of the Rifle Brigade (Prince Consorts Own), a new Battalion formed at Winchester on 21<sup>st</sup> Aug 1914 as part of General Kitchener's First New Army, part of the 41<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 14<sup>th</sup> Light Division. Herbert was given the number S/1718. Two of the other Wellesbourne lads joined the same battalion, Edwin Soden, number S/1713 and William Cherry Findon, number S/1716. They were all attached to 'C' Company.

After training, the Battalion sailed for Boulogne arriving on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 1915 and were immediately sent to a position East of Ypres where fighting continued until the 27<sup>th</sup> when the Second Battle of Ypres ended in virtual stalemate.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> July Herbert with colleagues Edwin and William the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion were moved to trenches at Hooge to replace the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Ten days earlier Royal Engineers had detonated 1700KG of explosives creating a huge crater which, in their trench positions created a gap in the line, dividing 'C' Company from 'D' Company. Early the following morning the German Army counter attacked at the gap using flame throwers for the first time leaving 'C' Company virtually non-existent. On the 31<sup>st</sup> July the three Wellesbourne men were among those posted as 'missing'.



German Flamethrowers WW1

News reached home in August 1915 that Herbert had in fact been taken prisoner and had been wounded<sup>ii</sup>. He was sent a parcel each week from the villagers of Wellesbourne to which he responded later in the year by thanking all who had contributed and stating that he

was now in good health<sup>iii</sup>. He remained a prisoner for the next three years.

With the armistice signed, it was announced in the local press that on Tuesday the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1919 a gathering would take place in the Town Hall to honour the men recently repatriated. Councillor Flowers, the Lord Mayor of Stratford upon Avon, would express the town's gratitude to the soldiers. Herbert Loomes was named as one of those that would be present<sup>iv</sup>. A week later the local newspaper recorded that although Herbert's brother Charles, who had also been a prisoner of the Germans, had arrived home but there was no news of Herbert<sup>v</sup>. A few days later his parents received the sad news that he had in fact died from influenza on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 1918 in the Branch Hospital, Mainz, Germany<sup>vi</sup>; a victim of the worldwide pandemic of that year. He was described as a great favourite within the Wellesbourne village community.

Herbert is buried in the Niederzwehren Cemetery, Kassel, Germany which is part of the original Niederzwehren Prisoner of War Camp in Hessen province (Grave reference III.F.11).



Niederzwehren Cemetery, Kassel, Hessen, Germany

The medals awarded, the 1915 Star, British and Victory were forwarded to his mother. He is commemorated on the Wellesbourne Church of England School Roll of Honour, The Wellesbourne Roll of Honour for the Dead in St Peter's Church, Wellesbourne and on the village War Memorial.

Of Herbert's comrades also involved in the attack at the Hooze Crater, Edwin Soden was killed but his body was not identified. William Findon was taken prisoner and returned home at the end of the war.

Footnote: Herbert's brothers, Charles and William also fought and survived the war although Charles initially became a prisoner of war.

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

<sup>i</sup> Wellesbourne School Records (WRO. CR371/2,CR371/2.CR371/3 AMD CR371/4)

<sup>ii</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 3/9/1915.

<sup>iii</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 3/12/1915.

<sup>iv</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 17/1/1919.

<sup>v</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 24/1/1919.

<sup>vi</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 31/1/1919

Sources: (War Diaries: 8th Bn Rifle Brigade. May 1915 – July 1918 (14th Div , 41st Infantry Brigade) WO95/1895)