

Jesse Wincott

Hannah Wincott who lived in and was born in Moreton Morrell, at the time of the 1911 had two sons Jesse age twenty three Census and Richard who was age sixteen. There were two younger children Alice and Arthur age ten and eight respectively.

Hannah was age 47 in 1911 and was described on the census form as an “unmarried person”. Her father was Thomas who was born in 1835 in Ashorne. He had married Mary Dodd of Moreton Morrell in 1960 and Hannah was born in 1964. Unfortunately Mary died in 1870 at a very young age of 33 leaving Thomas a widower with a young daughter of six years.

Richard may have served in the Great War but it is not clear whether the Richard Wincott of Moreton Morrell reported elsewhere on this website is the son of Hannah or another Moreton Morrell family. (See entry for Richard Wincott)

Jesse her eldest son joined the Royal Navy on the 24th December 1914 (Christmas Eve) age 25. He listed his next of kin as Hannah and that he was from Middletown, Moreton Morrell. He was 5ft 8inch tall and described as sandy haired.

At the commencement of the war, the Royal Navy found itself with a surplus of between 20,000 and 30,000 men of the reserves for whom there were no jobs on any ship of war. So as had been done in the past a Royal Navy Division was formed with two naval brigades and a brigade of Royal Marines to serve on land in support of the hard pressed army. The naval brigades had battalions named after famous admirals including Admiral Hawke.

We have discovered an official record which summarises Jesse’s service in the Royal Navy. It is to the Royal Navy Division he appears to have been allocated. He is initially shown as part of a machine gun battalion. He appears to have been undergoing training in England and then joined a reserve battalion until 5th December 1915 when he was drafted to the Hawke Battalion, Middle East Forces. The Royal Navy Division had moved to the Middle East in 1915 to be part of the Dardanelles

Expedition. He arrived in Alexandria, Egypt on 17 December 1915 and appears to have made several short voyages on troopships before being recorded as joining the Hawke Battalion on 7 February 1916. Jesse arrived too late to be part of the Dardanelles campaign.

The Allies had evacuated the Dardanelles in December 1915 and some troops including the Royal Navy Division had been moved to Mudros, Greece which had been used as a base for the Dardanelles campaign. It appears Jesse left Egypt in January and was sent to Mudros. On 18 May 1916 he embarked on the Franconia and sailed to Marseilles where he disembarked on 23 May 1916 to join 2nd Royal Navy Brigade Machine Gun Company.

By November his unit was described as 189th Brigade Machine Gun Company of which the Hawke Battalion appeared to be a part. He was wounded on 13 November 1916 on the first day of the Battle of Ancre the final stage of the Battle of the Somme. His mother Hannah was told as his next of kin.

He was still with Hawke Battalion and there has been no information discovered of how he was wounded that day but the following is one account of the Hawke Battalion's action on that day.

"On the left of the advance the Hawke and Nelson Battalions had attacked in the mist at 5.45 a.m. but as the first wave approached the German trenches and with the barrage still on the German first line, a devastating German machine-gun fire broke out from a Redoubt between the first and second enemy lines and opposite the Hawke Battalion front. About 20 men on the right managed to get past the Redoubt and isolated from the left flank and without officers fought under Colonel Freyberg's command getting to the Ridge and the Green Line. A Lewis Gun team also managed to keep with the barrage as far as Station Road keeping the gun in action until the conclusion of Colonel Freyberg's joint attack. On the right of the Redoubt a portion of "B" Company led by Lieutenant the Hon. V. S. T. Harmsworth passed the strong point and followed the barrage to the second German line where Lieutenant Harmsworth was wounded a second time, this time mortally, a majority of his little party also becoming casualties. Of the remainder of the Hawke Battalion all that is known is that nearly 400 of the officers and men became casualties mainly falling round the Redoubt."ⁱ

He was treated for his wounds in the 2nd Canadian General Hospital in Le Treport before being discharged for convalescence. In early December he was transferred to the Machine Gun Corp Depot, Camiers where he stayed either for further recuperation or training until May 1917 when

he was transferred to the 190th Machine Gun Company. In November he joined the 223rd Machine Gun Company.

He then got two weeks leave from 23rd November 1917. Then on 23rd December he was awarded his first Good Conduct Badge for unblemished three years service.

In March he was reported wounded suffering from gas. The following extract appears to explain what is likely to have been the engagement in which he suffered the gas attack. (His file papers indicate he was treated by the 149th Field Ambulance mentioned in the article below.)

“In March 1918 the RND was in the Flesquieres Salient to the south west of Cambrai. It had been sent to this sector in response to the German counter attack at Cambrai, this counter attack actually resulted in the RND not going back to Ypres for a second tour. As the name suggests the Flesquieres salient is precisely that, it bulged into German lines, the size of it enabled three divisions to deploy, the RND were on a 3 brigade front, with one battalion in the front line , and the others deployed behind. Since the collapse of Russia the Germans had been moving more divisions to the Western Front, with the Americans due in significant numbers later in the year any chance of winning the war lay in striking early and knocking out the French and the British armies. This thought wasn't lost on the British either, they knew it had to come. The Germans started their preparations in early March by launching gas attacks over a prolonged period of time, units were subjected to days of gas shells with the aim of gradually wearing down the morale and numbers of the British troops. The RND were victims of this too, in mid march, Drake and Hawke battalions lost over half their strength over several days of constant gas shelling. Examination of the 149th Field Ambulance admission book reveals that March 14th to 17th the field ambulance was full of gas cases . The Marines had suffered quite a number of casualties but nowhere near the level of Hawke and Drake. So when March 21st came the Division was short on numbers and quite run down.”ⁱⁱ

Despite treatment in France he was seriously ill and was evacuated to England and transferred to Bagthorpe Military Hospital, Nottingham. However he recovered and on 15th June 1918 was given nine days leave and announced fit for light duties. He stayed in the UK in reserve and was demobilised on the 20th February 1919.

No further information has been found of what happened to Jesse after the war.

There is however a gravestone for his mother in the churchyard inscribed “For our Dear Mother Hannah Wincott”. Hannah died 24th October 1929.



ⁱ http://www.ww1wargraves.co.uk/ww1_cemeteries/lt_colonel_tetley.asp

ⁱⁱ http://www.royalnavaldivision.co.uk/?page_id=37