Private George Edward Fisher

George Edward Fisher was born in St Pancras, Middlesex, in the summer of 1884 to Thomas George and Emily Fisher.[i] He was the second of three sons the others being James Thomas (born 1882) and Ewart William (born 1886).[ii]

Thomas had married Emily Chalk, from Stoke Newington, in the autumn of 1880.[iii] The 1891 census records the family residing at 3 Gothic Villas in Mitcham, Surrey and Thomas employed as a surveyor. By 1901, the family had moved to Harrowdene Road in Wembley. The electoral register for 1909 and 1910 shows just the three brothers sharing rooms on the first floor of 'Harrowdene' in Harrowdene Road (probably the family home mentioned in the 1901 census) because their father had become the superintendent valuer for the Inland Revenue, Central Eastern Division , Derbyshire[iv] and as a consequence had moved to Birmingham and was living at 50 Salisbury Road, Moseley.[v]

By 1911, George, a surveyor like his father, had relocated to Birmingham and was living with his parents. He was an active member of Moseley Ashfield Cricket Club.[vi] Emily's nieces Mary and Emily Chalk were also residing with them together with Lizzie Winders, a domestic servant, who had moved with the family from Wembley. George's brothers remained in London.[vii]

At the outbreak of war George joined the 15th (Service) Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment. He is listed as a member of A Company, Platoon No II.[viii]

Figure 1 : 'A' Coy, Platoon No II, 15th (Service) Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment. George is listed as being in this picture

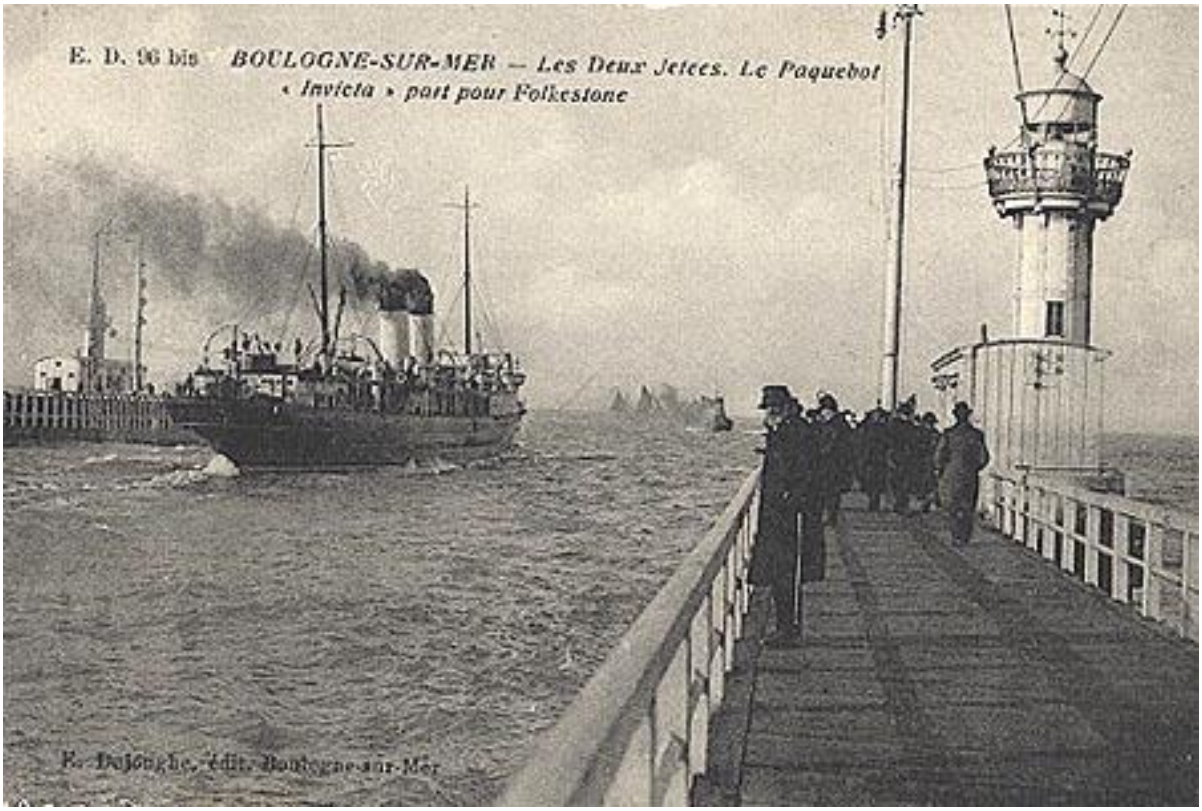

Figure 1: *SS Invicta* at Folkestone, Kent

The 15th Warwickshire Regiment (15th Warwicks) , better known as the 2nd Birmingham Pals, was formed at Birmingham in September 1914 by the Lord Mayor and a local committee. After completing its training in Sutton Park, Wensleydale, Hornsea and Salisbury Plain the Battalion came under the command of 95th Brigade, 32nd Division on 26th June 1915 before embarking for Boulogne, France from Folkestone on 21st November aboard *SS Invicta*.[ix]
The Warwickshire Regiment then underwent further training to prepare them for trench warfare. The 21st of December 1915 was the last day of instruction for A Coy of the 15th Warwicks, at Sailly Laurette before they joined the rest of the Battalion at Suzanne near the Bray front on the Somme. Having arrived at Suzanne the whole battalion marched to Maricourt (2.6 miles NE of Suzanne) where they took over the front line trenches. They remained in the area for the next month.[x]

The New Year brought about a divisional reorganisation and the three Birmingham Pal Units were transferred to the 13th Brigade of the 5th Division on the 14th January 1916.[xi] In February the 5th Division were moved to the Arras front at a time of intense cold weather where they remained until their spell of duty came to an end on Sunday 4th June.[xii]

At the start of the Battle of the Somme, the 5th Division remained part of the GHQ reserve during which all the battalions underwent general training. On 22nd July an attack commenced to take Wood Lane, near Deville Wood. The 15th Warwicks were positioned in the reserve trenches before being called up to follow through the attack. The 15th Warwicks suffered 141 casualties.[xiii] From the beginning of August the battalion remained at rest in their camp at Villars-Campsart (2.5 miles west of Amiens).[xiv]

On 24th August, the 5th Division made its way back to the Somme. The 15th Warwicks were bivouacked in 'Happy Valley' near Bray-sur-Somme, before going into line the next day on the Maltz Horn Ridge. In front of them lay 'one of the strongest redoubts ever made by the engineering skills of the Germans' according to divisional history, better known as Falfemont Farm, a mile from the town of Combles which was to be the eventual target for the next British-French offensive in September. In preparation for the assault on the redoubt, the 15th Warwicks spent their time from 27th August digging a new front line trench, 200 yards nearer to Falfemont Farm which was completed the next day despite heavy German shell-fire. On 29th August the Battalion occupied the new trenches, but persistent rain caused the new trench to collapse in places. To add to the misery, a severe German bombardment in the afternoon resulted in fourteen fatalities and others being wounded. In those three days in the front of the farm the Battalion had 132 casualties, 33 being killed.[xv]

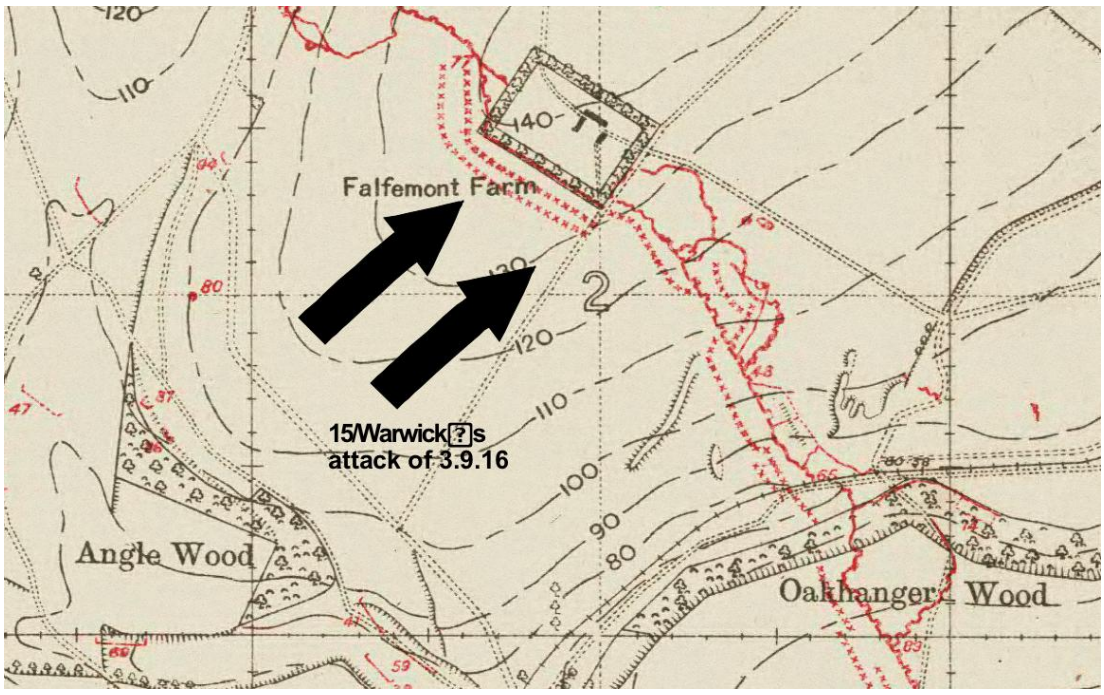

Figure 2: Map of the terrain from Angle Wood to Falfemont Farm showing the line of attack of the 15th Warwickshire Regiment on 3rd September 1916

On the morning of the 3rd September, it had been arranged with the French Army that Falfemont Farm should be stormed as a preliminary operation at 9 am. The first attack by the 2nd Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers resulted in complete failure and 300 casualties as the battery of French artillery meant to cover the assault was called upon to deal with a counter-attack by the Germans further south. The 15th Warwicks were positioned in the front line trenches near Angle Wood and at around 12.50 pm they were ordered to repeat the attack at the same time as the general attack. Yet again heavy machine gun fire held up the advance and with mounting casualties the advance came to a halt on the slopes leading up to Falfemont Farm. As darkness approached the survivors of the 15th battalion made their way back to the assembly trenches. In the attack one officer was killed and 7 other officers were wounded. In addition, 30 NCO's were killed, 14 wounded and 40 missing. Six members of the Battalion died of their wounds, two the same day and four the following day, 4th September. Private George Fisher, No 154 was one of the latter and was buried in La Neuville Cemetery, near to the 15th Casualty Clearing Station he was evacuated to.[xvi]He is also commemorated on the WW1 memorial in St Mary's Church, Moseley.

Above: La Neuville Cemetery, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens

Right: WW1memorial at St Mary's Church, Moseley

George's younger brother, Ewart, left his employment as an architect to join the Royal Engineers in Wimbledon two and a half months after his brother was killed. He obtained a commission and finished the war as a Second Lieutenant.[xvii]

Researched and written by Jim Hone and Edwina Rees

Moseley Society History Group

Endnotes

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i 1891 census
England & Wales births 1837-2006

ii 1901 census

iii England & Wales marriages 1837-2008, 1880, London, 3rd quarter, Volume 1C, page 124
1911 census

iv *Sheffield Independent*, 14th May 1914

v 1911 census

vi Reference from Jim needed

vii Electoral register for 1911,1913

viii Birmingham City Battalions Book of Honour 1920, p 82

ix The Royal Warwickshire Regiment 1914-1918
http://battlefields1418.50megs.com/regiment012.htm
Carter, Terry. 1997. *Birmingham Pals: 14th.15th & 16th (Service) Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment*. Pen& Sword Books, Barnsley, p 98

x Carter, Terry. 1997. *Birmingham Pals: 14th.15th & 16th (Service) Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment*. Pen& Sword Books, Barnsley, pp 111, 113

xi 15th Battalion (2nd Birmingham Pals)
http://battlefields1418.50megs.com/regiment012.htm

xii See x, p 127, 150

xiii See x, pp 178, 185

xiv See x, p 197

xv See x, p 199
WW1 War Graves
http://www.ww1wargraves.co.uk/ww1_cemeteries/memorials_france_t.asp

xvi See ix, p 203-206
WW1 War Graves
http://www.ww1wargraves.co.uk/ww1_cemeteries/memorials_france_t.asp

xvii Surrey recruitment Registers 1908-1933
Medal Index Cards WO372/7

Illustrations

Figure 1 Birmingham City Battalions Book of Honour 1920, p 83

Figure 2 *HMS Invecta*
http://www.simplonpc.co.uk/SR_SECR1.html

Figure 3 Map of Falfemont Farm showing the direction of attack of the 15th Warwicks on 3rd September 1916
http://www.sutton-coldfield.net/memorial/c.html