

Second Lieutenant Philip Eric Edkins

Cyril enlisted in the 1st Birmingham Pals Regiment after war was declared. He was commissioned the following year and went to France in early 1916 to join his regiment the 1/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, Territorial Force. He was wounded in the Battle for the Bazentine Ridge, the second phase of the Battle of the Somme on 14th July 1916 and died two days later at the Heilly casualty clearing station.

The Edkin's family can trace their roots back to Droitwich where his great-great-grandfather, Ellis was born around 1796.ⁱ He married Ann Turrall on the 4th December 1827 at Kidderminster.ⁱⁱ Three years later, in 1830, John Turrall Edkins was born, the second of three children.ⁱⁱⁱ Pigot's Directory of 1842 records Ellis as a draper in Bromsgrove Street, Droitwich.

John married Sarah Bakewell, from Sutton Coldfield, on 1st August 1860.^{iv} After his marriage John and his wife returned to Droitwich, where they lived in Queens Street with his brother, Frederick Ellis Edkins.^v

John was employed in the family drapery business as was his younger brother. On the 9th February 1861, an opportunist thief stole 50 yards of carpeting from the outside the shop, but thanks to the quick thinking of a young girl on an errand, the transgressor was apprehended and the goods recovered.^{vi}

BOROUGH PETTY SESSIONS, MONDAY, FEB. 18.
Before The Mayor and Messrs. Smith and Peurice.
ROBBERY.—James Bourne, labourer, of the Hill End, was brought up in custody of Sergeant Ham, charged with stealing 50 yards of carpet and a woollen shawl, the property of Messrs. Edkins, drapers, of this place. Mr. John Edkins gave evidence that the articles abovementioned were safe at his door, on Saturday night, the 9th instant, about nine o'clock, but between ten and eleven o'clock they were missing. A girl, named Edginton (aged between 10 and 12 years), stated that she was sent to prosecutor's shop, on the night in question, on an errand. On going out of the shop she observed the prisoner unpinning a piece of paper from some carpet, lying at the door. She went farther up the street to another shop, and on returning, overtook prisoner on Chapel Bridge, with a roll of carpet on his right shoulder. She was sure it was carpet, as she saw the stripes, and was certain prisoner was the man. Bourne, who protested his innocence, was committed for trial at the next adjourned Sessions, but admitted to bail.

Figure 1

Newspaper report of an attempted robbery at the Edkins Drapery shop in 1861, Droitwich

Tragedy struck the family when John died on the 7th January 1869, aged only 38 years,^{vii} just a month after the birth of his third child Catherine Fanny. At the time of his death the family were living with Sarah's mother at Doe Bank in Sutton Coldfield. Sarah was left a widow at 36 years of age, with three children, Frank Tyrrell Bakewell just seven years old, Walter Sutton, aged five years and Catherine Fanny only one month old.^{viii}

By 1881, Frank, now 19 years old, had left home to become a draper's assistant in the employ of Mary Wilkins, and her sister Hannah Payne at their drapery shop in the High Street of Coleshill.^{ix} Seven years later on 19th August 1888, Frank married the daughter of a wine merchant, Agnes Gertrude James at Sutton Coldfield.^x The couple lived with Agnes' parents after they were married and it was here at 'Chalford', Bellswell Lane, Sutton Coldfield, their first child, Claude, was born in 1889.^{xi} By 1901, Frank and Agnes had moved to their own home nearby at 'Glaisdale', Bishops Road, Sutton Coldfield. By then, the family had increased to three children with the births of sons, Philip Eric on 10th October 1893 and Frank Douglas, in 1896.^{xii} Frank, now an Insurance Company Inspector, was sufficiently affluent to employ a nurse/housemaid and general domestic servant. The 1911 census records Frank as a 'retired as Insurance Branch Manager' and residing at 'Chalford' in St Agnes Road, Moseley. Another child, Kathlene Mary, had been born in 1903.

Philip was educated at Wolverhampton Grammar School. On leaving school he joined the local Birmingham branch of the insurance company Ocean Accident and Guarantee Corporation Ltd^{xiii} as an inspector.^{xiv} Sometime after his seventeenth birthday, he joined the Territorial Force based at Birmingham University, obtaining a commission in the Officers Training Corps (OTC) on 1st October 1913.

After the declaration of war on 4th August 1914, Philip enlisted in the 1st Birmingham Pals Regiment, later the 14th Royal Warwickshire Regiment (14th Warwicks). At his attestation on 8th September 1914, he was described as being: 21 years and 11 months old, 5' 10" tall and an 'insurance official' by occupation.^{xv} Although the family home was at 'Chalford', St Agnes Road, Moseley, Birmingham in the 1911 census, the address on Claude's and Philip's attestations in 1914/15 was 83 Reddings Road, Moseley and by July 1916, 11. Cambridge Road, Moseley.

Private, No 14/228, P. E. Edkins was a member of No 6 Platoon, 'B' Coy, of the 14th Warwicks. While training at Codford, Philip received news that he was to be

commissioned as Second Lieutenant from 2nd October 1915.^{xvi} Three months later having completed his Officers Training he embarked for France on 8th January 1916 to join his new Regiment the 1/7th Royal Warwicks, part of the 143rd Brigade, 48th (South Midland) Division.^{xvii} He is mentioned in the regimental war diary as 'arriving from England' on 14th January at Foncquevillers and it being 'a very fine day'.^{xviii}

The next few months were spent in and out of the trenches in the Hebuterne area during which the Battalion took part in digging trenches and carrying out raiding parties on the enemy trenches, invariably held up by the German wire defences and under fire from canister bombs, small mortars, whizz bangs and 5.9" howitzers from the German defences.^{xix} This was in preparation for the 'big push'.

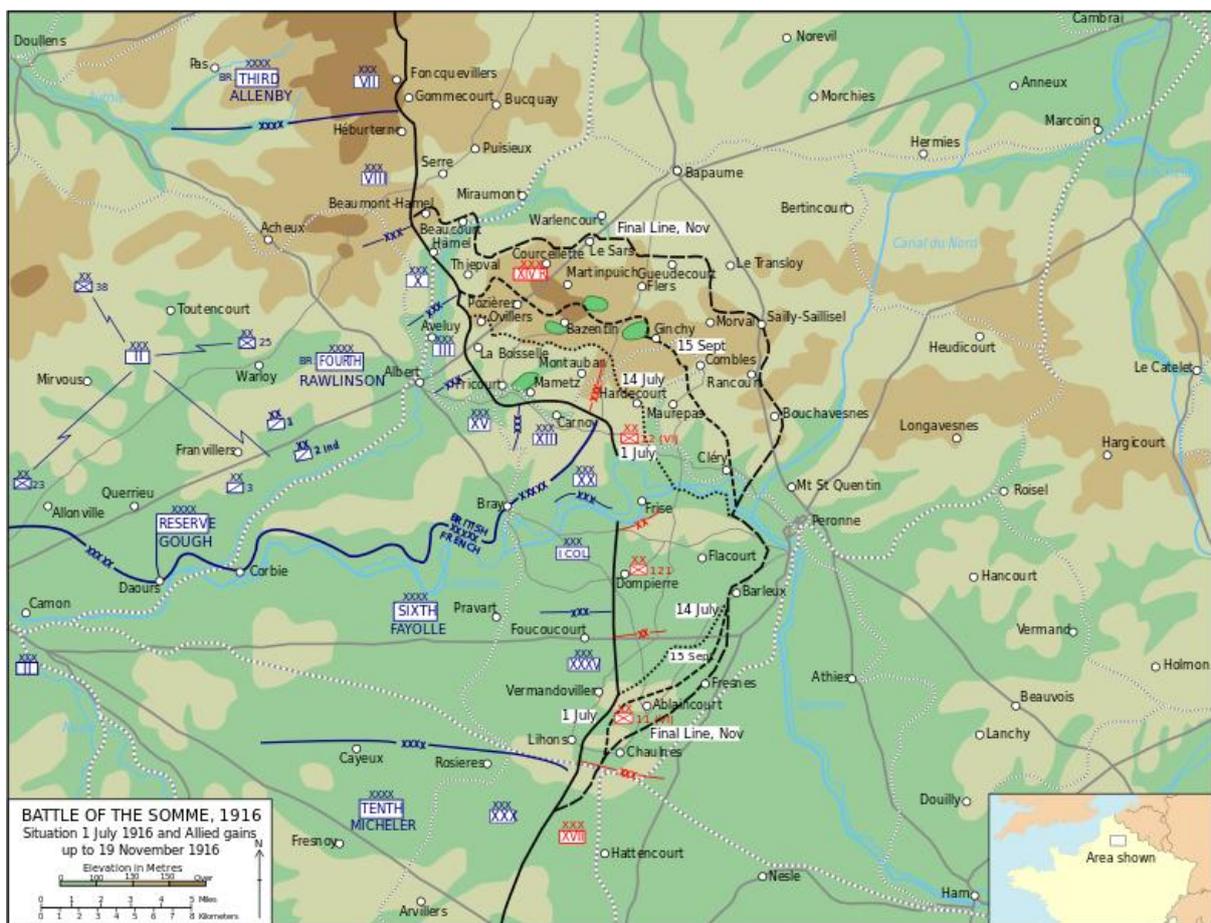


Figure 1: Map showing the progress of the Battle of the Somme and the push forward from the line marked with the small dotted line, on 14th July 1916. The 1/7th Worcesters were positioned on the left flank.

In the first phase of the Battle of the Somme, commencing on 1st July 1916, the 1/7th Warwicks were held in reserve, their turn in engaging the enemy not coming until 14th August, as part of the second phase of the battle, the Battle

for the Bazentine Ridge (14th-17th July 1916). The plan was to attack the German Second Position in the southern sector of the battlefield along the line of Longueval to Bazentine-Le-Petite. The artillery battery was shortened as a tactic to catch the enemy off guard and the men moved closer to the enemy trenches to increase the odds of capturing the German trenches in their favour.^{xx}

Two days previously day, 12th July, the whole Battalion had been engaged in digging trenches in wet and cold conditions. The following day, however, started warm and sunny and at 1.30 pm the Battalion was moved by lorry to just outside Bouzincourt. From there they proceeded in fighting order to Albert where they lay down in a field until midnight waiting for orders to attack N E of La Boisselle at 7.30 am the following day, 14th July.

As day dawned, the Battalion filed into the trenches at la Boisselle where they came under heavy shell fire. At 7.30 am, after the shortened British artillery bombardment, two companies proceeded to assault the German lines and reached their objective despite many casualties chiefly from machine-gun fire. The newly won trench was held for several hours before having to evacuate it due to the extremely heavy enfilade fire both from shells and machine-gun fire from the Germans. Altogether there were 150 casualties, 68 of them reported killed. Philip was one of the wounded and taken to No 36 Casualty Clearing Station at Heilly where he died two days later on 16th July.^{xxi}



Figure 3: Heilly Station Cemetery

Philip was buried at Heilly Station Cemetery, near Merricourt L'Abbe, 10 km SW of Albert.^{xxii}

His name is also commemorated at St Mary's Church, Moseley

Philip died intestate leaving £70 8s 10p in Post Office savings.^{xxiii}

The operation to capture the Bazentine Ridge, despite the casualty rate, was considered a success, resulting in the capture of the German second position on a front of 6,000 yards. For a time the important position of High Wood remained open to occupation but delays in getting the cavalry forward meant that this opportunity was lost.

Philip's brothers also enlisted and, fortunately, survived the war.

Claude joined the Territorial Force on 24th September 1914 for four years. He went on to enlist in the regular army, joining the 259th Coy, Army Service Corps as a motor engineer on 20th February 1915. Starting as Private, No M2/035260, C Edkins he was promoted to Sergeant on 23rd August 1915, but while based in Wells, he faced reprimands for several minor offences, for example, failing to stop when challenged by sentries, and disobeying a standing order. Claude embarked for France from Avonmouth on 10th March 1916 where he served until demobilisation on 25th May 1919. On his discharge papers it was noted that he had done 'excellent work with the BEF'. The 1939 register records Claude married to Gladys with a son Frank born 13th April 1929 and living at 1, Oaklands Road, Sutton Coldfield. He is working as a 'Motor and Fire' insurance assessor.^{xxiv}

Frank, aged 20 years, joined the Royal Naval Air Service on 19th February 1917, as an Air Mechanic, Class 2.^{xxv}

Researched and written by Edwina Rees

Moseley Society Local History Group

Endnotes

-
- i 1841 census
 - ii England marriages 1538-1873
 - iii England Births and Baptisms 1538-1975
1851 census
 - iv Warwickshire marriages
 - v 1861 census
 - vi *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 23rd February 1861
 - vii England and Wales deaths, 1869, Aston, 1/4, 6D, 215
Birmingham Daily Gazette, 11th January 1869, erratum in article age s/b 38 not 28
 - viii 1861, 1871 census
 - ix 1871 census
 - x a) Warwickshire marriages

-
- b) 1881 census
- xi 1891 census
- xii a) National Archives, Officers after 1913, Ref WO 374/21961
b) England & Wales births, 1896, Aston, 3/4, 6D, 451
- xiii Anna Stone, Every Man Remembered
<http://www.everymanremembered.org/profiles/soldier/270848/>
- xiv 1911 census
- xv See xii (a)
- xvi See xii (a)
- xvii a) WW1 Army medal index
b) See xii (a)
- xviii War diary of the 1/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, National Archives,
Ref WO 95/2756, p 46
- xix See xviii, pp 66-71
- xx The Battle for the Bazentine Ridge
<http://www.cwgc.org/the-somme/battle-of-the-somme/bazentin-ridge.aspx>
- xxi See xviii, pp 70, 71, 87
See xii (a)
- xxii Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- xxiii See xii (a)
- xxiv British Army Service Records
- xxv British Royal Air Force , airman's service records 1812-1939

Illustrations

Figure 1 *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 23rd February 1861

Figure 2 The Battle of the Somme
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Battle_of_the_Somme,_1916.svg

Figure 3 Heilly Station Cemetery
<http://www.cpgw.org.uk/cwgc-cemeteries/heilly-station-cemetery-mericourt-labbe/>