

Private Sydney Anderton

On 14th July 1916 the British 4th Army made a breakthrough in the Battle of the Somme and captured a 5000 yard salient on the Bazentine Ridge but had failed to exploit the advantage to take a small sector of the German front line. One part of this front was from Highwood to Wood Lane (see Figure 2). The eventual breakthrough was to cost the lives of thousands of more men, including that of Sydney who was killed in action on 23rd July 1916, aged 23 years.

Sydney's father John was born in the Aston district of Birmingham in 1846ⁱ. Little is known about him until early 1892 when at the age of 46 years he married , the 25 year old, Edith Amelia Scott in the Keighley district of Yorkshire.ⁱⁱ

In the 1901 census, John (a scientific instrument maker), and Edith , together with their three children, are recorded as living at 21 Wellington Road, Edgbaston with two servants in their employ. Sydney, their first child and only son, was born on 29th October 1892.ⁱⁱⁱ

Just days before Christmas, on 21st December 1905, John died, aged 60 years, leaving Edith with four children. On 19th February, the following year, she was granted probate together with Arthur Short, an accountant. John's effects amounted to £5467 12s 0d (£464,753 in today's money).^{iv}

In September 1906, aged thirteen, Sydney was admitted to King Edward's School (KES) New Street, Birmingham. The family address on the school and probate records is given as 'Eagle Cliff', Strensham Hill, Moseley (In 2014/15 the council tax register records a residence called Eagle Cliff Nursing home at 12, Strensham Road)^v. On 7th April 1909^{vi}, John left school and is recorded in the 1911 census as an office clerk to a brush manufacturer and living at home with his mother and three sisters together with a cook and a domestic servant.

When war was declared, John joined the 1st Birmingham Pals Battalion, soon after renamed the 14th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment (14th Royal Warwicks). He became Private S. Anderton, No 14/565 in 'A' Coy.^{vii} Training commenced in Sutton Park in October 1914 and was completed nine months later, at Codford Camp on the Salisbury Plain. The first contingent of the Birmingham Pals Battalion to leave for France left Codford Camp at midnight, on a freezing cold pitch black night, on the 21st November 1915 to march to Wyllye Station. The 14th Royal Warwicks were the first to entrain at 2 am for Folkestone where they boarded the *SS Invicta*, arriving in Boulogne at 10 am the following day.^{viii} Sydney was part of this contingent.^{ix}

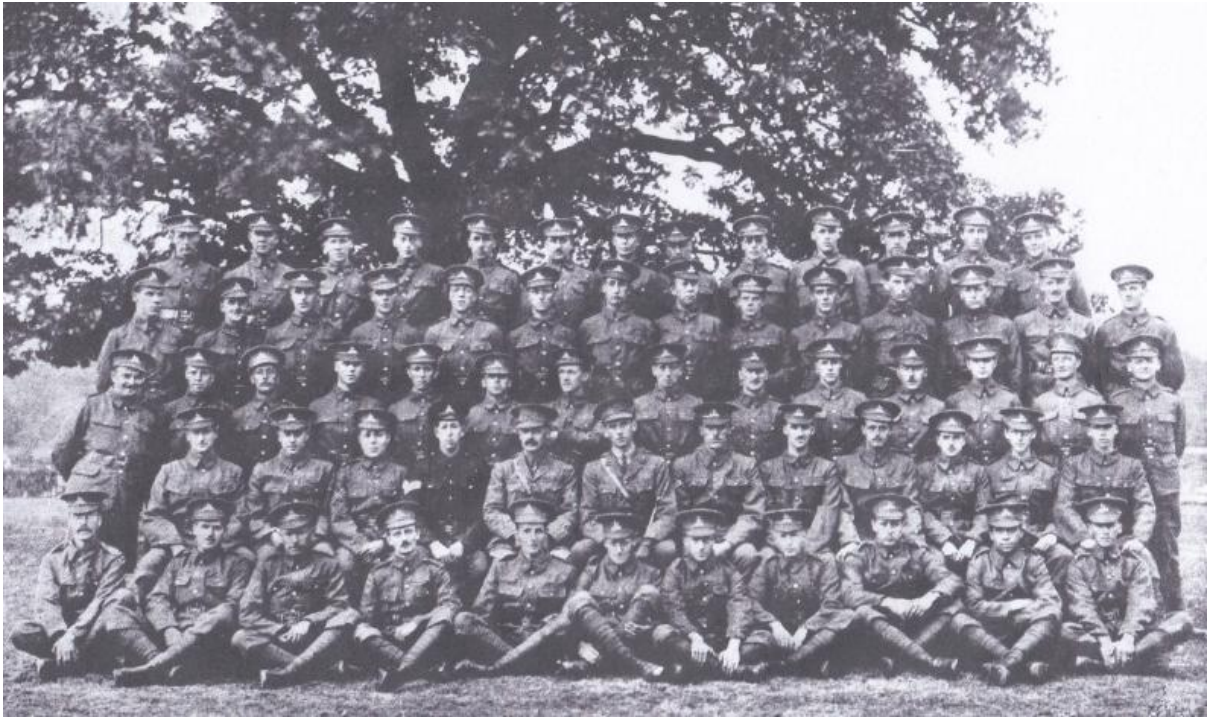


Figure 1: 14th (Service) Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Private S Anderton is recorded as being in this 'A' Coy photograph

As 1915 drew to a close, the 14th Royal Warwicks became the first of the Birmingham Pals to experience trench warfare on the Bray front, which prior to their arrival had been fairly quiet. It was not the pleasantest of experiences as the cold, frosty weather gave way to rain and the trenches started to collapse and became half filled with mud. On 28 December 1915, the Birmingham Pals Battalions were assigned to the 13th Brigade, 5th Division.^x

In early January 1916, the 14th Warwicks left the trenches at Bray, but following an outbreak of measles, spent the next two months in isolation at Vaux-sur-Somme. On 10th March, the Battalion rejoined the 5th Division in K1 sector on the Arras front.^{xi}

For the first two weeks of July, the 5th Division was designated to remain in reserve undergoing a period of general training. The 14th Royal Warwicks were billeted around the village of Mognicourt at this time preparing for a proposed attack at Wailly Stunt. At short notice, however, on 13th July the orders were changed and the 5th Division was ordered to move south to the Somme as quickly as possible.

The weather was hot and the roads dusty but the move southwards, in a series of night marches, made the going a little easier. The forty-five miles were

covered in the same number of hours. On 16th July the 5th Division were deployed a few miles south-west of Albert.^{xii}

On 18th July, the 5th and 7th Division came under the command of XV Corps of the British 4th Army and given orders to take the high ground between High Wood and Deville Wood and ultimately the German Switch Line. The 14th Royal Warwicks (part of 13th Brigade) were ordered to take up positions on the Black Road, near High Wood, in order to strengthen and hold the position (see map on next page). In the evening of the 18th July, Lieutenant Alan Furse (brother of William Henry Furse killed on the 1st Day of the Battle of the Somme), the new transport officer of the 14th Royal Warwicks, based in the village of Meaulte, wrote:

We spent only one night here, but this was our first real insight into what a push means. Day and night the road was one long line of ambulances and walking wounded and occasionally a battalion which had been relieved would march through with a total strength of 150 instead of 600 or 700 men. Although we realised what losses these men had, it never seemed to occur to us that we might be the same, but then of course we had not been blooded then.

The following day the 14th Royal Warwicks marched up to the line, resting along a road south of the recently captured village of Montauban. Here they waited until dark. Sergeant Arthur Cooper (14th Royal Warwicks) recalled:

At about 6 pm we march on again. We got a fairly thick shelling on the way too. A Coy was lucky and got through whole but the other companies lost quite a few. Of course the Huns knew the nooks and corners some. It was an awful march up to the trenches. The stink from the dead horses and the dead Tommies who lay about was chronic.

By nightfall on 20th July, the 14th Royal Warwicks had moved into the second line along the Bazentine Ridge ready to take up their positions on the Black Road. A conference on 21st July attended by all the Corps Commanders of the 4th Army decided to resume the offensive for the Switch Line on the evening of 22/23 July. The objective of the 14th Royal Warwicks, Wood Lane, lay on slightly lower ground than Black Road, approximately 320 yards away. This meant that British soldiers standing and coming over the slight crest would be silhouetted against the sky and an easy target for German snipers. The British plan was for the artillery barrage, starting at 4.30 pm, to eliminate this threat by concentrating the guns on the German Switch Line and High Wood. At 8 pm the range was adjusted to concentrate upon Wood Lane. A and B Coys were entrenched in Black Road ready to attack. In addition to the normal 120 rounds of ammunition, the men were issued with an extra bandolier of ammunition and

two hand grenades, one for each pocket. They were also required to carry across with them all the spades the battalion had in their possession so that on taking the German line they could dig a thin skirmish line about 150 yards in front to give cover in case of a counter attack. Unfortunately, unbeknown to them, the barrage that had appeared destructive had missed Wood Lane.

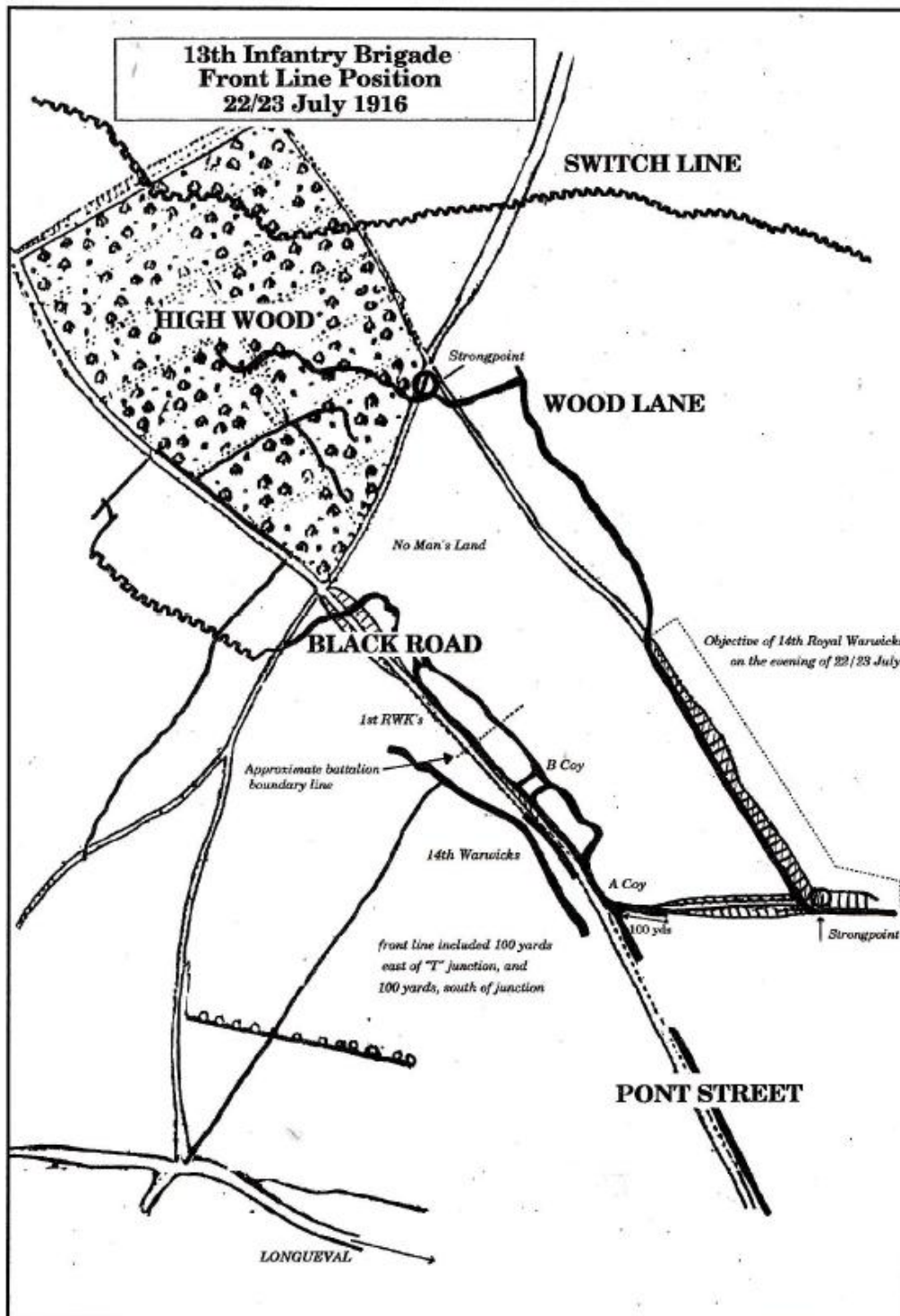


Figure 2: Map showing the position of 'A' Coy of the 14th Royal Warwicks on the 22/23 July 1916

At 9.50 pm A and B Coys made their way into No Man's Land unobserved by the Germans because of the lie of the land to that point, but as soon as the whistle sounded at 10 pm and the men stood up to rush the German line they were met with a 'heavy counter-barrage and streams of lead from the numerous machine guns. After suffering severe casualties, they were forced to retire to their jumping off point'. The 14th Royal Warwicks suffered a total of 485 casualties during the attack; of these 194 were killed.^{xiii} Sydney was reported as 'missing'. It was not until the following June that it was officially recorded that he was presumed killed on 23rd July 1916.^{xiv}

Sydney is buried at Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, Longueval, France. He is also commemorated on the WW1 memorial at St Mary's Church. Moseley and KES



Figure 3: Caterpillar Valley Cemetery



Figure 4: KES WW1 memorial

When Sydney's mother received the devastating news that her son had been posted 'missing' she was living at 60 Chantry Road, Moseley.

Also killed in the same battle was Private Leslie Jolliffe who was in the same 'A' Coy as Sydney. He is also named on St Mary's Church WW1 memorial.

Researched and written by Edwina Rees

Moseley Society History Group

Footnotes

i England & Wales births 1837-2006, 1846, Aston, 2/4, , 16, 190

ii England & Wales marriages 1837-2008, Keighley, 1892, 1/4. 9A, 120

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- iii From the archives of King Edward's School, Edgbaston, Birmingham. Courtesy of Alison Wheatley, archivist.
 - iv England & Wales deaths 1837-2007, Kings Norton, 1905, 4/4, 6C, 230
Probate calendar for England & Wales 1888-1959, 1906, p 42
Inflation calculator
http://www.moneysorter.co.uk/calculator_inflation2.html#calculator
 - v What address? Strensham Hill
<http://www.whataddress.co.uk/postcode/b13-8ag>
 - vi Service record of King Edward's School, 1914-1919
 - vii Commonwealth war Graves Commission
<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/552527/ANDERTON,%20SYDNEY>
 - viii Carter, Terry. 1997. Birmingham pals: 14th.15th& 16th Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Pen & Sword Books Ltd, Barnsley, pp 95-98
 - ix British Army WW1 Medal Index
 - x See viii, pp 103-105
 - xi See viii, pp 124, 132
 - xii See viii, p 166
 - xiii See viii, pp 170-178
 - xiv *Birmingham Daily Post*, 28th June 1917

Illustrations

- Figure 1 Birmingham City Battalions Book of Honour, p 42
- Figure 2 See viii, p 176
- Figure 3 Catterpillar Valley Cemetery
<http://www.nzwargraves.org.nz/cemeteries/caterpillar-valley-cemetery-longueval>
- Figure 4 KES picture gallery
<http://www.kes.org.uk/gallery/Other/King%20Edward%27s%20School%20and%20the%20Great%20War>