Private Cyril Bernard Jeffreys

The Battle of Le Transloy took place from the 1st to 18th October 1916. The plan for the 4th Army was to capture the German defences from le Sars to Sailley-Saillisel in an effort to have the British front line on higher ground from which an offensive could be renewed in 1917. At the time of the battle the weather had been terrible and the heavy, clinging, chalky Somme mud and the freezing, flooded battlefield became as formidable an enemy as the Germans. The British gradually pressed forward fighting off numerous counter-attacks. By the 18th October the British had made some progress north of Guedecourt. Rawlinson, the 4th Army Commander, describes the progress during the day as partially successful. This small success was at the cost of hundreds of lives including Cyril's.

Cyril's great grandparents were David and Elizabeth Jeffreys from High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. Cyril's grandfather, Joseph, born in 1823, was a grocer in Henley-On-Thames, Buckinghamshire.[i] In the spring of 1857 he married Ruth Richardson in Kingston, Surrey.[ii] The 1861 census records Joseph living in Hart Street with his two shop assistants. By 1871, Joseph had retired from the grocery business and moved to Northfield End in Henley with his wife, Ruth, and three children. Joseph Jeffreys, their eldest child, was born in the autumn of 1862. Joseph had two sisters Helena Mary, born 1865, and Ruth Richardson born in 1867.[iii]

Figure 1: Hart Street, Henley-on-Thames

Three years later, on 29th May 1874, Joseph (senior) died aged fifty years. Ruth was given probate on 23rd June to his estate of under £1500.[iv] In the 1881 census, Ruth was recorded as living in Bell Street, Henley-on-Thames, and a 'retired owner of house property', with her youngest daughter Ruth. Her eldest

daughter, Helena, was at school in Uxbridge and boarding with the proprietor of the school, Sarah Whittington and her sister Frances, at 51 St Andrews, Hillingdon.[v] Joseph, aged 19 years was away from home working as a draper's assistant for Ebenezer Hancock in the Market Place, Kingston, Surrey.[vi]

In early 1888, Joseph married Sarah Scroggs Rose, daughter of Joseph Rose, a builder, in the Baptist Chapel, Haddenham, Buckinghamshire.[vii] In 1891 Joseph moved to Birmingham to become the manager of a drapery business. The new family home was at Cavendish House, Church Road, in what was then Kings Norton, with Sarah and their first child, Cyril Bernard (born in the autumn of 1889), and a daughter Dorothy Gwendoline, who was born just a few months before the move.[viii] Also living with them was Nellie Wiggins, Cyril's drapery assistant and Lizzie, a general servant.

By 1901, the family had moved again, this time to 'Rodboro', 12 Queenswood Road, Moseley, around the corner from their previous house. Joseph and Sarah now had three children (another daughter Irene Muriel, was born in the fourth quarter of 1891). Joseph had changed his occupation and was listed as a 'mercantile clerk'. Cyril and his cousin, Alfred (Helena's son) were staying with their maiden aunt, Ruth, in Henley-on-Thames.

By 1911, his mother, Sarah, had declared herself a widow. However, there is no record of Joseph's death being registered between 1901 and 1911. He was, in fact, alive and well, and lived at 13 Sunningdale Road, Hinksey, Oxfordshire with another woman. There is no record of a marriage for Joseph and Mary Anne (nee Clark). Joseph died on 10th August 1933 in Hertfordshire. He left probate to his 'wife' Mary Ann Clark Jeffreys.[ix]

Sarah and her three children continued to live at Queenswood Road. Her finances were assisted by renting out rooms. The 1911 census records two boarders. Cyril. at that time. was twenty-one years of age and earned a living as an ironmonger's assistant.

When war was declared, Cyril enlisted in the Dorsetshire Regiment as a Private, No 18392(see picture left showing Cyril with his Dorsetshire Regiment cap badge[x]). There is, unfortunately, no date on his British Army WW1 Medal Index to indicate when he first served abroad, or when he transferred to the 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment (2nd Wiltshire's) as Private C B Jeffreys, No 26617.[xi]

Because the Dorsetshire Regiment was one of the main units to reinforce the Wiltshire Regiment after they suffered heavy losses during the First Battle of Ypres (19th October to 22nd November), Cyril might have been transferred to the 2nd Wiltshire's around this time.[xii]

Figure 2 . Map showing Carnoy, Montauban and Trones Wood

In December 1914, the 2nd Wiltshire's, part of the 21st Brigade, was transferred from the 7th to the 30th Division of the Fourth Army.[xiii]

It began 1916 at Carnoy in the Somme area. It was a relatively quiet sector at that time. The Brigade spent the first half of the year training for the 'Big Push' on 1st July.[xiv]

On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the 2nd Wiltshire's took part in the attack on Montauban, where the allies initially made good progress, but at a heavy cost. The 2nd Wiltshire's lost one officer and eight other ranks. Another thirty-nine men were wounded. The war diary records that 'considering the circumstances of these two days out our casualties were slight'. A few days later, on 8th and 9th July the story was very different. The Battalion made an attack on Trones Wood (see Fig 3) and, although they initially captured the south side of the wood, they were driven back in a German counter attack, and sustained 240 casualties. The Battalion was in the line or in reserve until the end of July, and returned to the Somme between Le Sars and Flers at the beginning of October 1916.[xv]

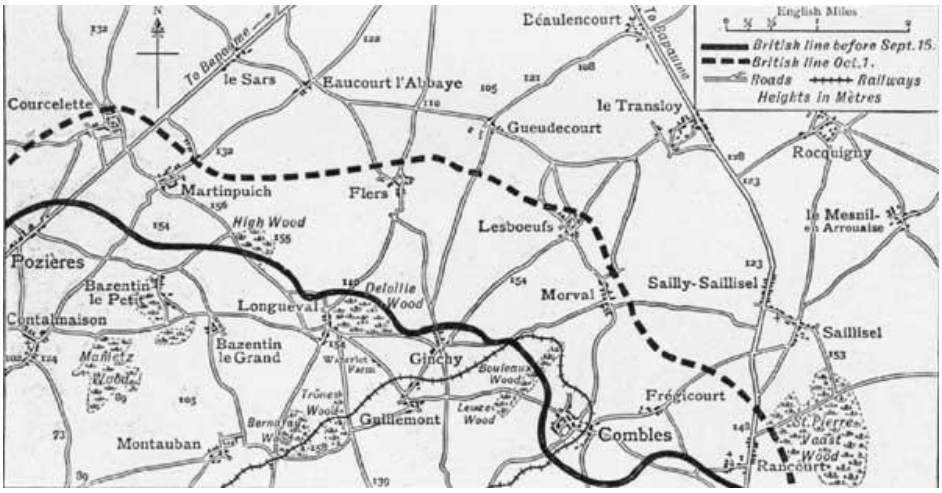

Figure 3: Map showing the position of the British front line on 1st October 1916

The weather in October was very wet and the area had become a quagmire. On 11th October the 2nd Wiltshire's went into the line at Pommiers Redoubt (west of Montauban) and advanced to Switch Trench near High Wood. Two days later they were in the front line before they returned to Flers Trench on 15 October 1916. While in the reserve trench on 16th and 17th October the Battalion was heavily shelled and suffered over 60 casualties. The weather conditions were awful. The following day, 18th October, the artillery bombarded the German lines, the usual and telling prelude to any British attack. The 2nd Wiltshire's started their approach to the German front lines at 3.40 am in waves. 'C' and 'D' Coys reached their objectives but failed to take it. 'A' Coy advanced but were held up by wire and eventually driven back. 'B' Coy lost direction, but some of them were able to cross the Sunken Road into the German trenches but were driven back before a block could be made. A second attempt was made to bomb up the trench but once again they were driven back on account of the shortage of bombs. The attack failed on the whole front of the 21st Brigade attack, although there were successes elsewhere. The war diary report estimated the casualties on the day of the attack to be 14 officers and 350 other ranks. The remains of the Battalion held the old British Front despite the appalling state of the trenches due to the weather until they were relieved on the 19th October.[xvi]

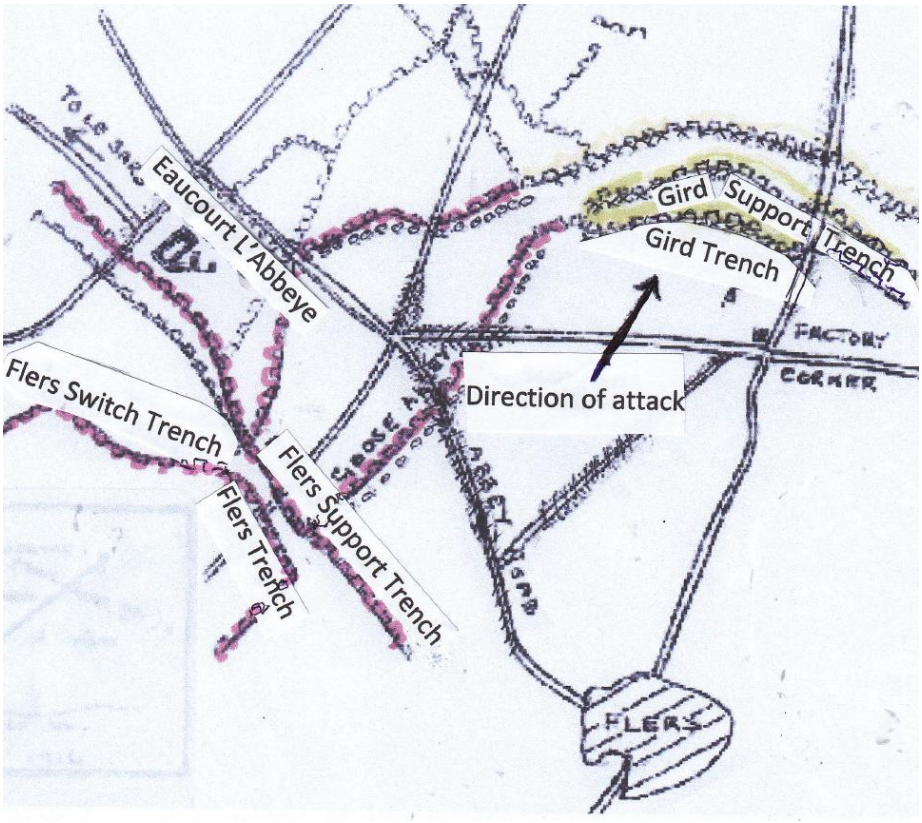

Figure 4: Map showing the British held trenches highlighted in pink and the German trenches highlighted in yellow on 18th October 1916. The hatched lines show the positions of sunken roads

The attack cost the Brigade over 360 casualties, including 14 officers. One of the casualties was Cyril. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial and the WW1 memorial at Henley Congregational Church memorial[xvii] and St Mary's Church, Moseley. Cyril was 27 years old when he was killed.

Figure 5: Henley Congregational Church, Henley-on-Thames

Figure 5: St Mary's Church, Moseley WW1 memorial

Figure 7: Thiepval memorial

Sarah died on 4th March 1951 at the Brendon Stuart Nursing Home, King's Lynn, Norwich. She left assets of £4891 19s 6d (£151,316 in today's money).[xviii]

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Moseley Society History Group

Endnotes

i England & Wales Non-Conformist births and baptisms
1861 census, Hart Street, Henley

ii England & Wales marriages, 1837-2008, Kingston, 1857, 2/4, 2A, 299

iii England & Wales Births 1837-2006
Joseph Jeffreys, 1862, Henley, 3/4, Sa, 476
Helena Mary Jeffreys, 1865, Henley, 2/4, 3A, 542
Ruth Richardson Jeffreys, 1867, Henley, 2/4, 3A, 575

iv Probate Calenders for England& Wales 1858-1959, 1874

v 1881 census for51 St Andrews, Hillingdon

vi 1881 census for Market Place, Kingston, Surrey

vii *Leighton BuzzardObserver and Linslade Gazette*, 3rd April 1888

viii England & Wales births 1837-2006
Cyril Bernard Jeffreys, 1889, Amersham, 3/4, 3A, 613
Dorothy Gwendoline Jeffreys, 1890, Aylesbury, 3/4. 3A, 692 Erratum - name transcribed incorrectly as Gwendolone

ix Probate Calenders for England& Wales 1858-1959. 1933. In the name of Joseph Richardson Jeffreys (Richardson is his mother's maiden name)

x *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 18th November 1916

xi Soldiers died in the Great War 1914-1919

xii Harkin Trevor, 2011. *Thiepval Memorial, 333 Coventry Men, Day by Day*" , War Memorial Park Publications, p 174 ISBN 978-0956372772

xiii Wiltshire Regiment
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiltshire_Regiment

xiv National Archives, War Diary 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment, Ref WO 95/2329, pp 6-17

xv See xiv, pp 38-59

xvi See xiv, pp 59-62

xvii *Henley Herald*
http://www.henleyherald.com/2015/05/01/lest-we-forget-project-update/

xviii Probate Calenders for England& Wales 1858-1959, 1951

Illustrations

Figure 1 Hart Street
http://thumbs2.picclick.com/d/l400/pict/141806019713_/Hart-Street-Henley-Reproduction-RP.jpg

Figure 2 Map of Carnoy area
http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/battles/battles-of-the-western-front-in-france-and-flanders/the-battles-of-the-somme-1916/the-capture-and-defence-of-montauban-1-13-july-1916/

Figure 3 Map of the Somme 0ctober 1916
http://www.fovanthistory.org/vclay.html

Figure 4 Map from the article on 'Captain Vivian Hastings Clay', 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment
http://www.fovanthistory.org/vclay.html

Figure 5 Heley Congregational Church, Submitted by Sue McArdle on 22 July 2013

http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-246321-congregational-church-henley-on-thames-o/photos#.WFR3vlOLTcs

Figure 6 St Mary's Church WW1 memorial, Moseley Society History Group

Figure 7 Thiepval memorial, Commonwealth War Graves Commission photograph