

Lieutenant John William Willoughby Hudson

John William Willoughby was born on 11th June 1895ⁱ to Percy and Kate Hudson (née Wilson).ⁱⁱ The couple had married in 1889ⁱⁱⁱ and by 1891 were living at the 'Firs', Stoney Lane, Yardley with their first child Verity (born 1890). They were sufficiently affluent by then to employ two domestic servants. Percy was a master printer and stationer working in the family business Hudson & Son, Livery Street, Birmingham.^{iv} The original business B. Hudson & Son, 18 Bull Street, Birmingham, was established by his grandfather Benjamin, a printer, publisher, stationer and book seller in 1821. The bookshop he founded was the oldest in Birmingham.^v



Greenhill School dated 1907. Ref xx

In 1901, with two more children to accommodate, Helen (born 1893) and John now five years old, the family moved to 'Mere End' Salisbury Road, Moseley. John attended Greenhill School, whose entrance was in School Road, Moseley. John would have started there in 1903, when he was eight.^{vi}

At the age of twelve, John left Greenhill

School to go to King Edwards School, New Street. During his time there he joined the Officers' Training Corps and took up shooting, securing a marksman's badge. John was described as a 'crack shot'.^{vii} In 1913 he left school to join his father in the family business.

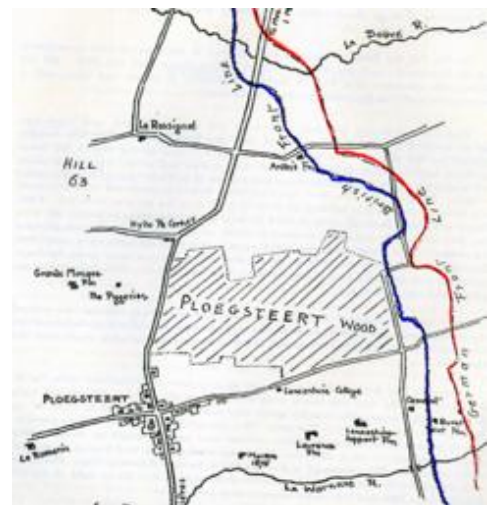


Second Lieutenant J W W Hudson. Ref xxi

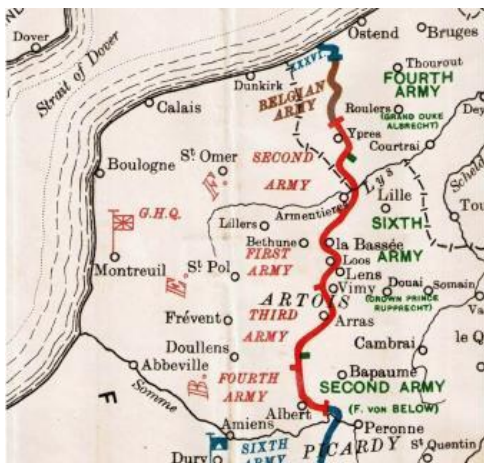
When war was declared on 4th August 1914, John joined the 2/5th (reserve) Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment^{viii} and after a period of training he was gazetted on 19th October as a Second Lieutenant in the Battalion.^{ix}

Early in the New Year, on 19th March, John was chosen for transfer to the 'A' Company 1/5th

Warwickshire Battalion.^x A few days later the Battalion was mobilised, embarking at Southampton for France on 22nd March 1915. They arrived the next day at Le Havre.^{xi} After a week to settle in, the Battalion moved to new billets at Armentieres and for two weeks were trained in trench warfare before taking over the front line sector on the north-east side of Ploegsteert village, situated about 2½ miles north of Armentieres.^{xii}



The British Front Line shown in blue at Ploegsteert village. Ref xxii



Map showing the Western Front in 1915

From the 12th April the Battalion were back in the trenches doing a good deal of night work between the lines in charge of working parties. The regime was gruelling, four days in the trenches and four days out. The 1/5th and 1/7th alternated with the 1/6th and 1/8th. At least the casualty rate in April and May was low.^{xiii} The 3rd June brought news that John was to be promoted to a Lieutenant,^{xiv} and with some rest and recuperation due eight days later,^{xv} this must have come as a big fillip to him.



Map showing the locations of Hebuterne, Gommecourt and Fonquevillers. Ref xxiii

At the end of June the 1/5th Battalion left this sector of France on a four day march south to Lozinghem and spent the first half of July billeted around the Brigade HQ at the Chateau du Lozinghem. On the 20th July the 1/5th moved to trenches north and east of Hebuterne on the Somme, at that time a peaceful sector.^{xvi}

From 12th to 18th October John was home on short leave.^{xvii} It was to be the last time the family saw him. Back in Hebuterne on 30th November, the artillery major and John had just finished observing a trench mortar that had been firing at them from behind the German lines at Gommecourt, when a bullet from a sniper struck John in the head as he was climbing down from the parapet. He died without gaining consciousness.

After a military funeral, attended by the Colonel, all the officers of his company and the men of his platoon, John was laid to rest in Fonquevillers Military Cemetery. John's Platoon Sergeant wrote of him, "your son was held in high esteem by all the NCO's and men. To me personally it was a great blow. I have lost one whom I felt honoured to be commanded by."^{xviii}

A month later a second tragedy hit the family. John's recently married cousin Catherine Stoehr, on her way to be reunited with her husband in Aden, was killed when the Germans torpedoed the P & O passenger liner 'Persia' off the coast of Crete. Her husband Felix, a Royal Engineer in the 3rd Sappers and Miners, had only recently escaped from death himself when bursting shrapnel severely wounded him in the arm and leg. He fortunately recovered from his wounds.^{xix}

Endnotes

- i British Army De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour, p174
- ii 1891 Census
- iii England & Wales marriages 1837-2008 Transcription
- iv 1891 Census
Birmingham Daily Post, Monday, December 6, 1915
- v Benjamin Hudson 1786 -1875 Sue Young Histories
<http://sueyounghistories.com/archives/2009/11/19/benjamin-hudson-1796-1875/>
Edwards, E. (2013). *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men*. London: Forgotten Books. (Original work published 1877), p 203
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18821/18821-h/18821-h.htm>
- vi British Army De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour, p174
Janet Berry, Moseley History Society
- vii *Birmingham Mail*, Monday, December 6, 1915
- viii *Birmingham Gazette*, Monday, December 6, 1915
- ix *London Gazette*, 24 November, 1914. Issue No. 28984, p 9699
- x *Birmingham Gazette*, Monday, 6 December, 1915
Record Details of John William Willoughby Hudson - Royal Warwickshire Regiment
www.forces-war-records.co.uk/ViewRecord/1270382?reference=arrowLinks
- xi The Great War Forum. The Fifth Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Source Brigadier-General Peter Caddick-Adams
<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=93391>
J W W Hudson in the British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920
<http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1262>
- xii The Great War Forum. The Fifth Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Source Brigadier-General Peter Caddick-Adams
<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=93391>
- xiii See xii
- xiv *London Gazette*, 23rd July, 1915. Issue No. 29239, p 7200
- xv See xii
- xvi See xii
- xvii See viii
- xviii See i
- xix *Birmingham Mail*, Tuesday, January 4, 1916
- xx Greenhill School. Courtesy of Roy Cockel
- xxi John William Willoughby Hudson. Courtesy of Alison Wheatley, Archivist KES, From the article 'Who Do You Think They Were' by Stephanie Silk in the November 2015 (Issue 455), Moseley B13 Magazine.
- xii With the British Army in Flanders.
<http://thebignote.com/2012/09/17/south-of-ploegsteert-part-one-london-rifle-brigade-cemetery/>
- xiii Gommecourt.
<http://Gommecourt.co.uk/plan.htm>

