

Captain George Frederick Victor Heaven

Captain George Frederick Victor Heaven was the first officer of the 16th Royal Warwickshire Regiment to be killed. He was twenty-three years of age. He was the only son of George Frederick and Mary Elizabeth Heaven of 'Shenstone', Grove Avenue, Moseley.

George was born on 4th September 1892ⁱ. In the 1901 census the family, including Helen Mary Heaven (born 1896), George's sister, are recorded as living at 21 Clarence Road, at that time in Kings Norton. George's father earned a living as a 'general commissioning agent' that enabled the family to live comfortably with the assistance of a domestic servant.



Figure 1: Mill Hill Independent School

In January 1907, at the age of fifteen, George was sent to Mill Hill School, an independent boarding school in north London, where he remained until December, 1908.ⁱⁱ

In the following year, 1909, tragedy struck the family when George's father died. He was only forty-four years old.ⁱⁱⁱ By 1911, the family had moved from 21 to 17 Clarence Road and George had started an electrical engineering course at Birmingham University while his sister, Helen, now fifteen years old, was boarding at a school in Rugby. His mother continued to keep house having retained the services of their domestic servant, Jane Elvins

when the family had moved house.

Tragedy struck the family again in 1913, when George and Helen's mother died, aged fifty.^{iv} It is likely that this prompted the move to 'Shenstone' Grove Avenue, Moseley, the address used by the War Office for communication purposes three years later.

On completing his degree, George became apprenticed for three years to Alldays & Onions Ltd, as a motor engineer.^v The firm manufactured cars from 1898 to 1918 and motorcycles from 1903. The engineering company was originally founded in 1885 by the merger of the long established John C Onions Ltd (formed by John Onions in 1650) and William Allday & Sons Ltd (formed by William Allday in 1720).^{vi}

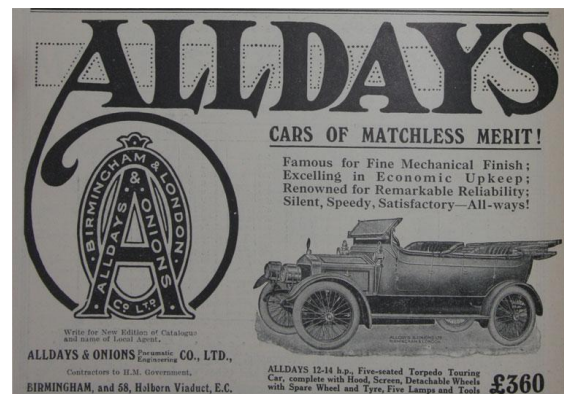


Figure 2: A 1913 advertisement for Alldays cars

During his time at university George had been attached to the University Officers' Training Corps^{vii}, so it is unsurprising that on the outbreak of war, George left his apprenticeship, to join the 1st Birmingham City Battalion (14th Royal Warwicks), the first of the three Birmingham Pals Battalions. His attestation dated 12th September 1914, records George as signing up to serve for three years in the colours and reserve. He is described as a temporary lieutenant based at the Military Training Depot, Spring Hill College, Moseley, 5' 8¼" tall and able to ride a horse.^{viii}

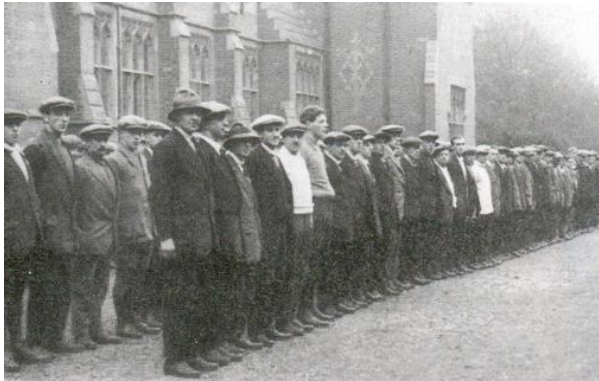


Figure 3: Members of the 16th Royal Warwicks in front of Moseley College. Birmingham Library Services

Spring Hill was a Wesleyan College and once the home of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens before it became better known in later years as Moseley Grammar School. It was situated in the triangle of land formed by Wake Green Road, College Road and Springfield Road. The buildings were commandeered by the military authorities during the middle of September 1914 and renamed Moseley Barracks.^{ix}

The accommodation was unable to cope with the influx of around 500 men, which resulted in the officers being billeted in a large empty residence near the barracks called 'Windermere' and others with local residents.^x

A month later, on 10th October, George was given a commission and discharged from the 1st Battalion to become a temporary 2nd Lieutenant with the 3rd (Service) Battalion, 16th Royal Warwicks.^{xi} Several newspaper articles give a sense of the early training undertaken by the battalion while based at Moseley Barracks. An esprit de corps was established by taking on local teams at football, including the Birmingham Trams team in October at their local stadium in Kings Heath, although narrowly losing to them on that occasion.^{xii} There were regular route marches from the barracks of around eleven miles and drill practice on the parade ground at Windermere. There were even lessons in French and lectures in military subjects in addition to the regular church parades.^{xiii} In early December, two columns of 16th Royal Warwicks were very nearly mowed down by a speeding motor cyclist when crossing the

Alcester Road to reach the Salisbury Road. The motor cyclist swerved through the ranks of men scattering them in all directions. The driver was fined 40 shillings and costs. Fortunately no one was seriously hurt.^{xiv}



Figure 4: 2nd Lt G F V Heaven

On 20th January 1915, George was promoted to temporary Captain.^{xv} A few months later, the training of the Birmingham Battalions was stepped up and on 17th April the 16th Royal Warwicks marched from Moseley to Snow Hill Station where special trains were laid on to take them to Malvern for field training. In June 1915, the training continued in Wensleydale, Yorkshire and from there, at Codford Camp on the Salisbury Plain.^{xvi}

Just weeks before being mobilised, George had leave to marry Mabel Edgerton Lawley on 30th October 1915 in Moseley.^{xvii}

Three weeks later, the Birmingham Battalions were on their way to France. On a freezing cold, pitch black night on 21st November the 16th Royal Warwicks made their way to Folkstone, boarding *SS Princess Victoria*, arriving in Boulogne the next day.^{xviii}

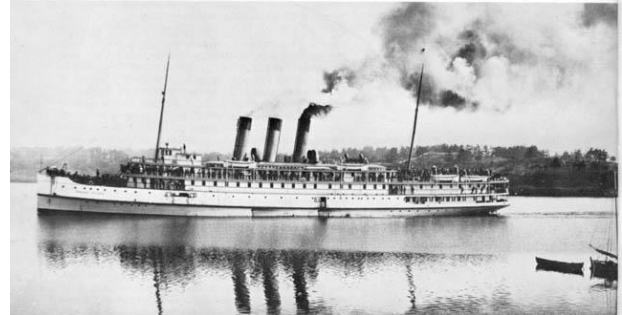


Figure 5: *SS Princess Victoria*



Figure 6: Comic postcard published in WW1

On 30th December 1915, the 16th Royal Warwicks returned to the 'C2' sector of trenches near Carnoy, suffering their first casualty on New Year's Day, during the 'softening up' of the British Front Lines by the German infantry. As the month progressed the intensity of the shelling increased. As a consequence, it was decided

In France the 16th Royal Warwicks were attached to the 15th Brigade of the 5th Division at the Bray Front in the Somme region. It was here the Birmingham Pals gained their first experience of trench warfare, at that time a quiet sector with deep trenches. As 1915 drew to an end, severe frosts set in followed by rain causing the collapse of trenches. The enemy became the mud not the Germans.^{xix}

For Christmas, the Birmingham Pals received a Christmas pudding, card and a bottle of 'Bass' beer provided by the Lord and Lady Mayoress of Birmingham and entertainment from the Divisional concert party, the 'Whizz-Bangs'.^{xx}



Map 1: Map showing the positions of trenches 72, 73 and 74 highlighted in yellow where the 16th Royal Warwickshire Regiment were positioned on 25th January 1915 and where Captain G F V Heaven was killed

that the 16th Royal Warwicks should stay behind and support the 30th Division, in case of an attack on the British lines.^{xxi}

The War Diary records that on 25th January the 16th Warwicks had re-occupied and cleared the front line trenches numbered 72, 73 and 74 (see map 1). It was here, on that day, that Captain George Frederick Victor Heaven, of B Coy, became the first officer of the battalion to be killed. By the time the 16th Warwickshire finally relieved on 1st February 1916, nine men had been killed and thirteen wounded.^{xxii} By way of retaliation, the German trenches opposite were heavily bombarded until the end of the month, and the Battalion joined in with two Lewis guns, which fired 2,000 rounds. As a consequence of this action there was very little sniping and practically no rifle fire against the Battalion for some time.^{xxiii}

All those killed are now buried in the Citadel New Cemetery, Fricourt.^{xxiv}

An extract from a letter from Colonel D F Lewis, formerly OC 3rd Birmingham City Battalion (16th Royal Warwicks) states:

In raising the battalion he was a great help. He was always in the right place and in the right tone. You may have an old soldier's word that he lived most honourably and usefully. He has died gallantly and gloriously.^{xxv}

Figure 7: A copy of the telegram sent to George's sister on 29th January 1916. The date of death on this first telegram was incorrect and subsequently amended to 25th January 1916.

Mabel Lawley less than three months earlier.^{xxvi}

Mabel was left the balance of £109 17s 3d, the undisposed balance of George's officers pay, together with a widows pension.^{xxvii} George's Medal Roll Index records that Mabel applied for and received her husband's three WW1 medals. Her address at the time of application was 41 Anderton Park Road, Moseley.^{xxviii} She remarried in 1927.^{xxix}

The National Archives at Kew still retains a copy of the telegram sent to inform George's next of kin of his death dated 29th January 1916. A mistake was made on George's date of death on the first telegram which was subsequently corrected 12 days later from the 26th to the 25th January 1916. The telegram was sent to George's sister, Helen, and not his wife, probably because his personal records, held at the War Office, had not been updated to record his marriage to

George is commemorated on the Gate of Honour at Mill Hill School, the WW1 memorial in the Aston Webb building at Birmingham University and also at St Mary's Church Moseley



Figure 8

Far left: The Gate of Honour, Mill Hill School

Left: The WW1 memorial at Birmingham University showing George F V Heaven

This article was researched and written by Edwina Rees, Moseley Society History Group

Endnotes

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- i Mill Hill School Roll of Honour
http://www.atwar.millhill.org.uk/Search_Result_View.php?recID=76
 - ii See i
 - iii England & Wales deaths 1837-2002 transcription. Kings Norton, 1909, volume 6C, page 190
 - iv England & Wales deaths 1837-2002 transcription. Kings Norton, 1913, volume 6D, page 41
 - v See i
 - vi Alldays and Onions Ltd
http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Alldays_and_Onions
 - vii See i
 - viii Attestation papers for George Frederick Vincent Heaven held at the Kew Archives. Ref WO 339/21800
 - ix Carter, Terry. Birmingham Pals: 24th, 15th & 16th (Service) Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Pen & Sword Books Ltd, Barnsley, 1997, p 63
 - x See ix, p 64
 - xi London Gazette 24th October 1914, Issue 28950, page 8605
 - xii Birmingham Daily Gazette, 30th October 1914, page 3, column 6
 - xiii Birmingham Daily Mail, 4th November 1914, page 3, column 4
 - xiv Birmingham Daily Post, 23rd December 1914, page 3, column 8
 - xv London Gazette, 10th February 195, Issue 29064, page 1410
 - xvi See ix, pp 78-94
 - xvii England & Wales marriages 1837-2008 transcription, Kings Norton, 1915, volume 6D, page 326
 - xviii See ix, p 98
 - xix See ix, p 104
 - xx See ix, p 121

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- xxi See ix, p 126
- xxii See xxi
- xxiii Birmingham City Battalions Book of Honour, pp17- 8
- xxiv See xxi
- xxv See i
- xxvi From the personal papers of Captain G F V Heaven held at the Kew Archives. Ref WO 339/21800
- xxvii The London Gazette, 29th December 1916, Issue 29883, page 12672
- xxviii WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards 1914-1920
<http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1262>
- xxix England & Wales marriages 1837-2008 transcription, Birmingham South, 1927, volume 6D, page 722

Illustrations

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<http://collectionsonline.nmsi.ac.uk/detail.php?type=related&kv=230236&t=objects>
- Figure 2 1913 advertisement for Alldays cars
http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Alldays_and_Onions:_Cars
- Figure 3 Carter, Terry. Birmingham Pals: 24th, 15th & 16th (Service) Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Pen & Sword Books Ltd, Barnsley, 1997, p 63
- Figure 4 Mill Hill School Roll of Honour
http://www.atwar.millhill.org.uk/Search_Result_View.php?recID=76
- Figure 5 British Columbia Coast Steamships
<http://www.trainweb.org/oldtimetrains/CPR/ships/bccs/history.html>
- Figure 6 Carter, Terry. Birmingham Pals: 24th, 15th & 16th (Service) Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Pen & Sword Books Ltd, Barnsley, 1997, p 115
- Figure 7 Copy of the telegram sent to Captain G F V Heaven's next of kin, from the personal papers of George Frederick Vincent Heaven held at the Kew Archives. Ref WO 339/21800
- Figure 8 Gate of Honour, Mill Hill School
<http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Middlesex/MillHillSchoolMagazine.html>
- Photograph of WW1 memorial in the Aston Webb building at Birmingham University taken by Edwina Rees

Maps

- Map 1 Map of the trench system at Carnoy
914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=167048