

Edward Corben Naylor (1897-1917) - a Life

M. A. Jones Feb. 9Th 2014

Edward was born on 14 June 1897 at 5 Waterlow Road, Maidstone. His birth was registered by his mother on 22 July 1897 in Maidstone, Kent.¹ Thus his age at his death on 10 August 1917 was 20, not 19 as recorded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Corben (various spellings) seems to have been the Christian name of Edward's paternal grandfather.²

Edward Corben Naylor was the seventh of nine children born to Frederick William Naylor and his wife Ann Elizabeth (nee Grant). Frederick was born at Charing or Rainham in Kent in c1850-4, Elizabeth in Milton, Kent in 1860. They married at the end of 1881. Earlier that year, when the census was taken, Frederick William Naylor was working as a blacksmith whilst boarding in the home of Ann Elizabeth's parents in Rainham, Kent. She, however, was living in Milton and working as a nursemaid in the home of a master draper who had five children, the eldest of whom was six years old.

The 1891 census shows the couple and their four children were living in Strood/Rochester. In 1901 they are living at 4 Thornhill Place, Maidstone with their eight eldest children, the youngest was born later, in 1901 or in 1902. Given the birth places of the children it seems likely that the family moved to Maidstone between 1895 and 1898. The 1911 census shows the family were living at 141 Boxley Road, Maidstone, Edward at 13 was still at school.

Edward would have been 17 when war was declared late on 4 August 1914. In the summer of 1915 a National Registration Bill was introduced which called for all men and women between the ages of 15 and 65 who were not already in uniform to register their employment details and skills. Registration took place on 15 August 1915 when Edward was 18. At this time the minimum age for joining the army was 18 and for the territorial force it was 17.³

Because the numbers of men volunteering for the army had tailed off during 1915 and the government were loath to introduce conscription the Derby Scheme was introduced. This allowed men of military age, between 18 and 40, who were willing to be called up when needed, in turn by age group, to register voluntarily. The idea was that the married volunteers would only be called up after all the single volunteers. Again the numbers signing up were disappointing so the government went ahead with plans for conscription, introducing the first Military Services Bill in January 1916. Those signing up under the Derby Scheme didn't get taken into the Army until 1916, along with the conscripts.⁴

The first Military Service Act came into effect on 10 February 1916 when Edward would have been almost 18 years and 8 months old. Single men aged between 19 and 30 were called up on 2 March, followed quickly by the remaining single men in the older age groups. The Derbyites were called up in parallel with the conscripts. All single men from each of the age groups, apart from the 18 year olds, were in the Army by the end of March 1916. On 7 April 1916 the first of the married men were called up; and it was announced that all 18 year olds would be ordered to report for military duty on their nineteenth birthday. In a fast moving world the situation changed again. In May 1916 the second

¹ Birth Certificate

² 1861 census shows Carbin Nailar, wheelwright, and his wife, Sarah, both born in Egerton, Kent living in Charing, Kent with their 11 year old son Frederick William.

³ C Messinger, *Call-to-Arms: The British Army 1914-18* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2006)

⁴ C Messinger, *Call-to-Arms: The British Army 1914-18* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2006) pp 131-4

Military Service Act stated that all men aged 18 to 40 inclusive would be liable for military service regardless of marital status, but men would not be sent abroad until they reached the age of 19. It seems however, that men were not being taken into the army immediately they reached their 18th birthday because it wasn't until "mid January 1917, [that] the minimum age men were being called up was lowered from 18 years and 7 months to 18, but the rule that no soldier could be sent abroad until he reached 19, even though he had completed his training, remained, at least theoretically, in force."⁵

Edward would have been 18 years and 11 months in May 1916 and if he hadn't volunteered to join the army before then would certainly have been called up on his 19th birthday, the 14 June 1916. Auntie Betty remembers speaking to an elderly neighbour who remembered Edward joining the army on the same day as her son. This lady said that Edward was not a military type, and that he bore a marked resemblance to Betty's eldest son David. This likeness was also remarked on by Auntie Nelly, Edward's eldest sister.⁶

After the huge losses of men during the battle of the Somme, which commenced on 1 July 1916, the Army reorganised its system of reserve and training formations which made it easier to keep all of the active battalions abroad supplied with replacement soldiers. We don't know whether Edward showed a preference as to which regiment he joined – it may even have been the Royal West Surreys. On 1 September 1916, all 2nd reserve and local reserve formations lost their regimental designations becoming part of a general training reserve. The 9th (Reserve) Battalion of the Royal West Surrey regiment had since September 1915 been based in Shoreham. On 1 September 1916 it was absorbed into a training Reserve battalion of the 5th Reserve Brigade, also based at Shoreham. If Edward had joined the army in June 1916 and had his full fourteen weeks of training he would have been ready for a draft to France/Flanders by the end of October 1916. He presumably would have been in one of the new general training reserve battalions at that time so it may have been chance and not choice that Edward ended up in a battalion (bn) of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) regiment. Men drafted to France/Flanders from the general reserve battalions could be sent to any infantry unit when they arrived in France.

At this stage of the war "infantry training remained at fourteen weeks after which a soldier was ready for drafting to an active division."⁷ If the need arose some individuals may have found themselves on the battlefield in a much shorter timespan with minimal or non-existent training.

At the time of his death Edward was a private in D company of the 7 bn Queen's regiment. This was a Service battalion, formed in Guildford, and was raised as part of Kitchener's second army (the second 100,000 volunteers) in September 1914. The battalion was part of the 55th brigade, along with the 7 bn the Buffs (East Kent Regiment), 8 bn East Surreys, and 7 bn Royal West Kents. The 55th brigade along with the 53rd and 54th was part of the 18th (Eastern) Division. The Division had arrived in France in May 1915. Its first major action was on the first day of the battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, the first anniversary of which its officers marked a year later. Later the battalion took part in operations on the Ancre. In 1917 it was involved in the German retreat to the Hindenburg line, and in the third battle of the Scarpe which was part of the Arras offensive. In August 1917 it took part in the battle of Pilckem which was part of the third battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). In this latter action the 18th division along with the 25th division formed II Corps, part of General Gough's Fifth Army, which was used in a limited action in a successful attempt to take Westhoek, a village which had been part of the

⁵ C Messinger, *Call-to-Arms: The British Army 1914–18* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2006) p 153

⁶ Phone conversation with Auntie Betty in November 2013.

⁷ C Messinger, *Call-to-Arms: The British Army 1914–18* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2006) pp 153-4

objectives for the much larger actions on 31 July 1917.⁸ It was in this action, in which the 18th Division helped capture Westhoek, that Edward and hundreds of his comrades in the 7 bn Queen's regiment were killed.

Without his personal army record it is not possible to say when Edward joined 7 bn Queen's in France/Flanders and what his war experiences were up until the action in which he died. Given the dates above it is possible that he saw service in France for almost a year. However long he was in France/Flanders it is unlikely that he would have had home leave that would have allowed him to visit his family in Maidstone. Although a few Other Rank (OR) members of the battalion were sent home on leave during this period they would have been men who had been out in France the longest. The only chance of his seeing his family again would have been if he had sustained a wound that required treatment or recuperation back in the UK. The small photo kept by his sister, of a young man in uniform, was probably taken in the UK before he left for France.

The War Diaries for 7 bn Queen's show that in a period of just over a month during October and early November 1916 it received a number of other rank (OR) drafts amounting to 347 men. This number represents approximately a third of the total manpower of an infantry battalion. The battalion must have suffered a high number of casualties during the Somme campaign. Some of these groups would have been men returning after injury or illness but some of the larger drafts were probably newly trained soldiers sent out from the UK: 96 on 7 October, 30 on 9 October, 31 on 11 October, 43 on 13 October, 30 on 28 October and 70 on 10 November. After two more large drafts in 1916: 81 on 8 December and 108 on 11 December, no further large drafts were received until the following July and August. Edward could have been in any of these drafts. If he was part of the drafts sent in early October 1916 to make up the battalion's numbers after the Somme battles then he may not have had the full period of basic training. The battalion did have a number of lengthy spells of training away from the front line in France/Flanders before taking part in the third battle of Ypres. A summary of the battalion's war diaries for the period October 1916 to the end of July 1917 is given in Appendix 1 at the end of this document.

The third Battle of Ypres

The third Battle of Ypres started at 3.50am on the morning of 31 July 1917. Gains were made along a length of the front in the direction of the Gheluvelt ridge. During the day it began to rain and the rain continued for several days and thereafter the weather was stormy and unsettled. The Germans made determined efforts on the following days to dislodge the British army from the gains it had made, forcing a withdrawal from St Julian. On the 3 August St Julian was retaken by the British without serious opposition. "A week later a successful minor operation carried out by English troops (18th and 25th Divisions) gave us complete possession of Westhoek."⁹

The capture of Westhoek had been part of the second objective for the action on the Gheluvelt Plateau of General Hubert Gough's 5th Army on the 31 July. After this first action and in view of the heavy rainfall and poor ground conditions General Haig, the Commander in Chief, advised Gough to wait for a couple of days of fine weather before trying again. However the action went ahead on 10

⁸ Website www.1914-1918.net/queens.htm 28/03/2007

⁹ Extracts from Sir Douglas Haig's 'Passchendaele' Despatch

August on ground that was still very wet. "The attacking troops [of the 18th and 25th Divisions] were heavily shelled by the unsubdued German guns even before they went over the top. And although they initially made progress against demoralized German forces that had been left too long in the line, this was soon negated by local enemy counter-attack formations aided by fire from several strongpoints in Inverness Copse. As a result the British suffered 2,200 casualties (amounting to in the case of one brigade to half its strength) and gained no ground on the right and a mere 450 yards on the left."¹⁰ Prior and Wilson continue, referring to Gough, "the inability, consequent on bad weather, to provide effective artillery support had cost him lives and failed to make good even the second objective of his initial attack."¹¹

The war diary of the 7 bn Queen's regiment provides the following details:

1-3 August the battalion moved into a camp in the Dickebusch area where they spent time cleaning up and holding rifle inspections. A draft of 1 officer and 38 OR was received.

In heavy rain during the late afternoon of the 4th the battalion spent one and a half hours moving to the Chateau Segard area. Nothing much happened during the next couple of days apart from a voluntary service on the 5th for non conformists and Presbyterians. The CO held a conference at battalion HQ.

On the 7th an operation order for attack was issued and at 7pm the battalion moved into the line relieving 7 bn Royal West Kents. A and D companies were to be the assaulting companies, B in support and C to Strong points with both B and C companies having mopping up duties.

In the early hours of the 8th A and D companies went into 'Crab Crawl' [a forward area that gave some shelter from shell fire] where they stayed in readiness for the attack. At 9.30 that evening they were subjected to a "heavy enemy barrage for 30 minutes while our advance were getting into position. Attack postponed till the 10th."¹²

The next day was used for further preparations, the officers and several NCOs reconnoitred the route to be taken in the attack and at midnight 1 NCO per platoon put out tapes as left markers.

10th August 1917

At quarter to one on the morning of the 10th August the leading platoons of A and D companies reached the tapes. The enemy sent up flares which brought down a heavy barrage upon them. This caught and disorganised D company, the right assaulting company. At 2.28am there was a further barrage by the enemy's guns. This barrage also caused many casualties, one platoon of 31 men was reduced to 11.

At 4.35am "Assault launched accompanied by an excellent barrage. Ground difficult with numerous obstructions including loose wire & tree trunks. Enemy very numerous in Inverness Copse causing many casualties by rifle and M/G fire. All officers with the exception of Capt. T.C. Filby & 2/Lt. J.M. Wilson became casualties".

On the extreme right, south of the railway the advancing sections were practically wiped out soon after rifle and machine gun fire started up from their front and right flank. The officers on the left of D company were all severely wounded before proceeding far, and the men of the leading platoons got entangled in loose wire, the enemy in front were occupying a line of shell holes. Only 3 or 4 men of the leading platoons of D company escaped being killed or wounded and the two rear platoons came under heavy fire which caused heavy casualties. They took cover in shell holes from where they

¹⁰ R Prior & T Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996) pp97-101

¹¹ R Prior & T Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996) pp97-101

¹² Battalion War Diaries

trickled back to the front line. These men were collected and later took part in an advance on the left front. The left assaulting company, A company, met with less opposition but being weakened from the earlier barrages didn't make the expected gains.

At 8pm that evening the battalion was told it was to be relieved by 10 bn Essex regiment. This was effected early the next morning.

Total casualties: 10 officers 272 O.R.¹³

On the 11th what was left of 7 bn Queen's regiment moved to the camp at Dickebusch where the troops bathed in an improvised open air bath. They were issued with new clothes. Later that afternoon they moved by route march and train to another area. It is unlikely in the hours after the action that the battalion would have had time to collect and bury their dead, as they would be more concerned to collect and treat their wounded. The task of collecting and burying the dead would have been left to the troops which occupied the area afterwards when the opportunity arose.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission web site shows that Edward, a private in D company of the 7 bn Queen's regiment, died on 10 August 1917 in an action that was part of the 3rd battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), that he has no known grave, and that he is mentioned on the Menin memorial. A letter received from a Captain Bentley, OC D company and dated 28 January 1928 was written in response to a query made on behalf of Edward's mother. It states he was "killed by a German bomb while in the front line trenches and was buried at Tjillibike with some of his comrades who were killed at the same time." His body may have been buried in a grave but when ground is fought over a number of times graves can be disturbed and thus men once buried could become one of the many for whom there is now no known grave.

Medals:

British War Medal

Victory¹⁴

His memorial plaque ('Death Penny' or 'Dead Man's Penny') was sold on e-bay in 2012. (seller and buyer are unknown to us) This large bronze plaque was issued to the next of kin of those servicemen who gave their lives in the First World War. The name of the serviceman was worked in relief on the front surface, without rank or unit information. The main production of plaques was started in December 1918. Each plaque was accompanied by a scroll and a letter from the King, George V: "I join with my grateful people in sending you this memorial of a brave life given for others in the Great War."

The scroll gave details of the rank and unit in which he served and contains the lines "Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten." Edward's plaque when sold in 2012 was in a wooden frame of the type manufacturers were quick to produce at the time.

Edward's sister, Edith Florence Naylor had in her possession a small oval double sided photo frame, which could have been worn on a necklace. One side contained a photo of Edward, on the other a soldier of the Leicestershire regiment who is unknown to us.

¹³ Battalion war diary on the museums web site: www.queensroyalsurreys.org.uk

¹⁴ Army service record



Appendix 1

From the war diaries of the 7th Battalion the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) regiment Oct 1916 – July 1917¹⁵

01 – 21 Oct 1916 Battalion in reserve, providing carrying parties. It then spent time resting and reorganising following the arrival of several batches of reinforcements, followed by a couple of weeks training.

22 – 26 Oct 1916 spent in the **front line trenches** in front of Miraumont where they were shelled frequently. Casualties for this period are recorded as Officers: 1 wounded. ORs: 15 killed, 98 wounded, 1 missing

27 – 01 Nov 1916 after bathing, cleaning up and assimilating more reinforcements there was more training. A Major General presented medal ribbons to those men who had been awarded Military Medals (MM) since 1 July 1916.

03 – 06 Nov 1916 in **front line trenches** named Regina and Hessian, occasional bursts of heavy shelling.

07 - 08 Nov 1916 having been relieved from the front line trenches they worked on support trenches.

09 – 13 Nov 1916 they were in billets in the Albert region. On the 13th they were put in readiness to move with only 30 minutes notice.

14 Nov 1916 after moving to hutments near Orvillers that night they took up battle position, later this order was cancelled and they returned to the huts.

16 Nov 1916 they again moved into battle position

18 Nov 1916 at 6.10am two of the battalion's companies **attacked** Desire trench

19 – 21 Nov 1916 the battalion was holding Regina trench and was being heavily shelled, at one point the adjutant comments that the shelling although heavy was generally inaccurate.

Casualties recorded for the attack of 18/19 Nov: Officers: 2 wounded, 5 missing. ORs: 10 killed, 75 wounded and 172 missing. [3 Queen's officers are recorded as being held as prisoners of war of the Germans, with a 'missing' date of 19/11/16. One died on 23/11/16, one was shot dead whilst attempting to escape in June 1918, one returned home at the end of the war.¹⁶ Many of the missing men may also have been taken prisoner]

21 – 29 Nov 1916 after being relieved the battalion returned to the huts near Orvillers. The next five days were spent marching to Canchy where they received reinforcements.

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¹⁶ Cox & Co, *List of British officers taken prisoner in the various Theatres of War between August, 1914 and November, 1918* (London: The London Stamp Exchange Ltd, 1988)

30 – 7 Dec 1916 was spent training. Four men were given parchment certificates for gallantry in the field by the officer commanding the division.

08 – 24 Dec 1916 during this time the battalion was training, using a new attack formation and was inspected on this by the brigadier. They also practiced attacks.

25 – 26 Dec 1916 they had a Christmas dinner followed by a divisional sports day.

27 – 31 Dec 1916 training

01 – 10 Jan 1917 period of training, lectures and route marches.

11 – 16 Jan 1917 four days march to Varennes

17 – 02 Feb 1917 training

4 – 17 Feb 1917 working parties, baths, practice attacks

18 - 19 Feb 1917 became reserve to brigade in the front line

20 - 21 Feb 1917 became support battalion

22 - 27 Feb 1917 in **front line trenches** Regina trench again. On the 23rd a fire was spotted and a patrol sent out. When they found enemy trench unoccupied men were sent to occupy it. Over the next two days the battalion was going forward tentatively. On the 26th they experienced heavy rifle fire during their advance. On 27th they mounted an **attack** in Irlès. They then moved into reserve in Zollerén trench.

Casualties during this period: Officers: 2 wounded, 2 missing. OR's: 10 killed, 48 wounded, 8 wounded and missing and 41 missing [the 2 missing officers are recorded as prisoners of the Germans,¹⁷ so many of the missing men may also have been taken prisoner].

28 – 03 Mar 1917 whilst in reserve the battalion were shelled by High Explosive (HE), gas and lachrymatory (tear gas) shells. In three hours on the 2nd they recorded 400 gas shells

03 – 20 Mar 1917 they moved to Wellington huts and provided working parties, at times housed in a camp and in Miramont quarries.

21 – 25 Mar 1917 two days marching then transport on motor buses and train to Steenbecque near Hazebrouck.

27 Mar – 19 Apr 1917 training. On the 8th there was a presentation of medal ribbons and a cross country race.

20 – 21 Apr 1917 marched to Bethune

¹⁷ Cox & Co, *List of British officers taken prisoner in the various Theatres of War between August, 1914 and November, 1918* (London: The London Stamp Exchange Ltd, 1988)

22 – 26 Apr 1917 training

27 – 29 Apr 1917 march to Neuville Vitasse

29 – 01 May 1917 **in front line and support trenches** on a quiet front

02 – 04 May 1917 moved up to old British line to prepare for an attack by other units in the brigade. At 2.20pm on the 3rd the battalion was ordered to prepare a **counter attack** to reoccupy a lost trench. Casualties: Officers: 4 killed 6 wounded. ORs: 21 killed, 102 wounded, 3 wounded and missing, 14 missing, 2 died of wounds.

04 - 21 May 1917 after being relieved, bathing and cleaning up equipment, inspections. Providing salvage and working parties, practicing attacks, baths, training and sports.

22 - 28 May 1917 **in the front line trenches**. Some heavy shelling. Constant patrolling and improving trenches. On 27th an attack was launched by 33 division on battalion's right.

27 - 01 Jun 1917 in support. Enquiries held into shooting of one battalion's soldier by another and two self-inflicted injuries.

02 – 30 Jun 1917 in camp 17 central. Tidying up, inspections, physical training, reorganising. On 15th moved to Bayencourt billets.

02 – 05 Jul 1917 march and train to Houptre – shed and tent camp

06 - 16 Jul 1917 in reserve trenches to east of Zillebeke, on 7th a draft of 50 OR arrived. On 10th 2 officers killed by shell, buried at Reninghelst next day. On 12th a draft of 112 OR arrived. Shelled by 4.2s and lachrymatory shells. On 13th intermittent shelling whilst digging communications trench. On 14th heavily shelled by HE and gas shells. New sneezing gas. In shelling on Zillebeke at 6pm on 15th 4 ORs were killed and 4 wounded. On 16th heavy shelling.

17 – 22 Jul 1917 two platoons of D company and 3 platoon of A company stayed in line to support Canadian tunnellers. Rest of battalion were relieved and went to camp at Chateau Segard, cleaned up and formed working parties. Camp was shelled.

23 - 24 Jul 1917 to Ottawa camp. On 24th received preliminary orders for coming offensive [start of 3rd battle of Ypres]

25 – 30 Jul 1917 training and on 28th a cricket match, gas shells that night. Heavy thunderstorm on 29th. On 30th moved back to Chateau Segard area.

31 Jul 1917 [Start of first phase of battle of Ypres] British heavy artillery started firing at 3.50am after breakfasting at 5.20 platoons **moved up to Ritz trenches**. At 8.50 the men were encouraged to get some sleep! At 10.15 the attack being made by the 30th division was halted and the battalion was ordered back to Chateau Segard. They were shelled on their return journey but without casualties. At 4pm the battalion was reported ready to go forward at shortest possible notice.

Casualties 6 – 21 Jul: Officers: 3 killed, ORs: 31 killed (7 from D company), 60 wounded (16 from D company), 1 missing.