

THOMAS MARTIN ELLIS



18th April 1915

1882-1915 Aged 32

Captain, 2nd battalion Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment. Thomas Martin Ellis was born on 30 April 1882 at Shipley Old Hall. His father William Henry Ellis was a GP, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, a magistrate and Chairman of the West Riding Bench; his mother Jane was born in Adelaide, South Australia. Thomas was their seventh child. How long he spent at BGS is unknown. As with other OBs, it was the Boer War (1899-1901) that led him to volunteer for an Army career. Ellis joined the "Bradford Rifles", a Volunteer Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment, before he was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion West Riding Regiment, the 'Dukes', in September 1901. Promotion to Lieutenant and Captain followed, and from 1909 to 1913 he was Adjutant to the Bradford-based 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Territorials) where he encountered many other OBs. In 1911 he was living with his by then widowed father at Carleton-in-Craven. At the start of 1914 he re-joined the 2nd Dukes in Dublin leaving a reputation as "a well-informed and smart officer ... popular with all ranks." He never married.

The 2nd West Riding disembarked at Le Havre on 15th August 1914 as part of 13th Brigade, 5th Division of the BEF. Nine days later they lost a quarter of their strength posted "missing" in the Battle of Mons. Ellis's B Company held an exposed position in advance of the canal which formed the British front. Although his company eventually pulled back under cover of darkness, Ellis with others went through the German lines. They were unable to rejoin the BEF and were posted missing. For several days they were sheltered in barns by Belgian peasants who smuggled them to the coast at Ostend, whence Ellis took ship for Britain. He enjoyed a few days rest at his father's house in Manningham, Bradford. Whilst there his valise, containing clothing to the value of £5, was stolen by Walter Wood,



labourer, of the Salvation Army Shelter, while drunk. He was sentenced to three months hard labour.

Ellis returned to his battalion, now at Ypres in Belgium, with a draft of 200 reinforcements on 2nd December 1914. The 2nd Dukes spent the next four months in and out of the line south-east of Ypres. At 6 am on 18th April they were called up to relieve troops who had captured part of Hill 60 the preceding evening. They held the lip of three mine craters which had been detonated under the German trench. The opposing lines were very close, which resulted in heavy casualties from German hand grenades. Shortly after leading his company to reinforce the crater position, Ellis was killed by a grenade. His body was buried in Perth Cemetery (China Wall), three miles east of the centre of Ypres.

Ellis's death was announced in the West Riding Court where his father was chairman of the bench. Sir James Roberts remarked that he had known the soldier for most of his life and "he was a true Briton in this respect that the path of duty was always pursued by him whatever the dangers might be."



Acknowledgements:

The Bradfordian; Ancestry was used to consult the census records for 1891, 1901, 1911. There are versions of Ellis's story on several websites: www.shipleyww1.org, <http://www.cpgw.org.uk/viewDetail.cfm?SID=051-01> (Craven's Part in the Great War), and <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/great-war-people/remember-on-this-day/2398-18-april-1915-capt-thomas-martin-ellis.html>.

The War Diary of the 2nd West Riding (WO-95-1552-1_1) confirms that Ellis served with them both at Mons and at the time of his death (contrary to the WFA post). His photo is available on the internet. *Compiled by Nicholas Hooper (NAH@bradfordgrammar.com/Nhooper1956@googlemail.com) 2015.*

This aerial photograph shows the craters blown under the German position at Hill 60 on the night of 17th April. The British lines are at the top of the photo, the German lines below the line of craters. Hill 60 consisted of soil from the railway cutting which runs diagonally across the lower left of the photo. © In Flanders Field Museum, Ieper, Belgium.

