

GODFREY FRANK MACKWOOD LING



24th May 1918

1896-1918 Aged 22

Captain, M.C. and two bars, 2/7th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, attached 185th Trench Mortar Battery.

Frank Ling was the elder son of Dr. Harold Charles Ling and his second wife Catherine Mary Godfrey. Charles was from Burniston, near Scarborough, where his father was a blacksmith, publican and maltster. Charles qualified as a Physician and Surgeon and by 1891 he was practising in Keighley. His first wife was Evalina, with whom he had a daughter named Doris Mary. After she died he married Catherine, who came from Thealty in Lincolnshire, and three more children were born: Frank, Billy and Mary. Frank was born on 1st February 1896. He was twelve when he started at the Bradford Grammar School in 1908. In his three years in the Classical forms he was near the bottom of the form in most subjects. His results improved when he moved into the Matriculation Form and after leaving in 1913 he started to train as a doctor. In October 1914 he passed the London University M.B. matriculation exam in the Second Division.

However, Frank had already interrupted his studies to join the Leeds University O.T.C., in which he held the rank of Lance-Corporal. He was subsequently commissioned in the West Yorkshire Regiment in April 1915. Some precise details of Ling's career are lacking. He served in the 'Leeds Rifles' (2/7th West Yorks.), which went to France in January 1917 (185th Infantry Brigade, 62nd Division), and he was attached to the Trench Mortar Battery. He became its second-in-command in June, with promotion to Lieutenant, and in October 1917 commander of the battery in with the rank of Captain. Trench mortar officers were often not popular in the front line because their fire attracted retaliation, but their weapons gave important firepower to the infantry. There is no doubt that Ling was an effective officer and he was also renowned for being 'brave and fearless'. He was awarded the Military Cross, probably in the fighting at Bullecourt in May 1917, for 'conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty' while supporting an attack and breaking up a German counter-attack despite being under heavy fire from



machine guns and shells. He was awarded the same honour at the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917 (a 'bar' to his first medal). The citation reads: 'When an attack was temporarily held up and heavy casualties occurred among the infantry, he at once brought his section into action. He then collected a few men and charged a strong point, being the first to enter it, and killing the officer in charge and two men. But for his great dash and initiative the whole advance would have been seriously delayed.' He received this honour from the King at Buckingham Palace.

Ling disregarded the dangers of his job but his luck eventually ran out. On the night of 23/24th May 1918 he was giving supporting fire to 2/7th Battalion while it conducted what the War Diary called 'a minor enterprise' against a German post near Bucquoy. It continued that 'Enemy trench mortar and Field Gun retaliation ... was severe.' One shell hit the ammunition for Frank Ling's mortars causing it to explode. He was killed with two of his men, and was buried where he fell. After the war's end his body was reburied in Gommecourt Cemetery. One officer wrote to his parents of Frank's 'extreme courage and cheerfulness'; another described him as 'one of Britain's bravest men'; a third added that 'never thinking of danger' he 'gave others confidence who were with him.'



Acknowledgements:

The photo was supplied by Andy Wade from the Men of Worth project to whom I am grateful. For the circumstances in which it came to light see http://www.keighleynews.co.uk/news/11108539.Men_of_worth_Group_identifies_photo_as_a_heroic_army_captain/?ref=rss, <http://burtonstatherheritage.org/roll-of-honour/27-godfrey-ling>; http://www.keighleynews.co.uk/news/11157723.Men_of_Worth_The_heroism_of_an_unknown_soldier/ accessed 7-5-2018. The latter also includes an account of Ling's life. The quotations from the letters are taken from here (and presumably were originally published in the Keighley News in June 1918). The cap badge is the officer's version of the Leeds' Rifles badge; on his left shoulder is the yellow circle identification cloth badge for 2/7th Battalion; the medal ribbon over his left breast pocket is that of the M.C. (information thanks to Richard Marshall). The family was researched using Ancestry.com. For his years at B.G.S. see B.G.S. *Annual Report* 1909-1914; The Bradfordian December 1914 also reports he passed the London University Matriculation exam.

Frank Ling's Officer Personal Record is T.N.A. WO374-42277. It is the source for his death having occurred on 24th May, *contra* C.W.G.C., *Soldiers Who Died in the Great War* and his Probate Record, which have 23rd. Page 35 is a minute which asks 'Which date can we accept please?', to which the later date was the response. Unfortunately his Attestation sheet and application for a commission are not included. However, the London Gazette has multiple entries for Ling (9-4-15; 9-5-16; 14-7-17; 17-7-17; 4-9-17; 28-9-17; 1-6-185-7-18). These included the citations for the award of his M.C. and one bar. There does not appear to be a citation for the second bar which he won according to S.D.G.W. Something of the circumstances of the first award can be found in Everard Wyrall, History of the 62nd (W.R.) Division 1914-1919, (The Bodley Head, London, 1925), I, 54-5 and 65-7 (http://www.generalist.org.uk/ocr/BK_09084_cc_38_VOL_1.txt), which specifically refer to 185th T.M.B. at Bullecourt. For his death, I consulted the 2/7th Battalion West Yorks. War Diary, T.N.A. Piece 3082, fol. 667 (see also ff.485, 490) available on Ancestry.com. For trench mortar batteries, I consulted <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/the-british-trench-mortar-batteries-in-the-first-world-war/>, and Richard Holmes, Tommy. The British Soldier on the Western Front 1914-1918, (Harper Collins, London, 2004), 369-70.

The Bradfordian list of July 1915 states he was a Second Lieutenant in the 13th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. There is no other record for this statement. Frank was re-buried in Gommecourt British Cemetery No.2, Hebuterne, IV.H.21/22 in 1920. Frank's younger brother Godfrey William H. Ling ('Billy') served with the R.A.F. (Bradford Weekly Telegraph 31-5-1918).

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in May 2018. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>.