

# NORMAN EXLEY MELLOR



**10th October 1918**

**1897-1918 Aged 21**

**Lieutenant 1/4th Battalion Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment (T.F.), seconded Royal Air Force.**

Although Norman Mellor fought on land and in the air, he died at sea, the victim of a German submarine. He was born in Halifax on 21st September 1897, the younger of two sons of Eli Exley Mellor. Although they were the sons of a farmer and grocer, Eli and his elder brother Thomas were both in business as drapers, in Halifax and Huddersfield respectively. In 1911 Tom was on the wholesale side, Eli the retail side of the trade. In 1888 Eli married Emily Jane Jeakins in Halifax. Norman attended a local school before he went to the Bradford Grammar School in 1911 shortly before he was fourteen. It is likely he was enticed by Head Master William Keeling with a scholarship. In Fourth Modern Upper, Fifth Modern Lower and then in the Matriculation Form for two years Norman showed good ability in Maths., Physics and Chemistry, and he also did well in French, History and English. He joined the new B.G.S. Officer Training Corps at the end of 1914 and was a member until he left school in July 1915. It appears he was also a golfer as he would later be commemorated at Halifax Golf Club.

Had it not been for the outbreak of the war it is possible Norman would have gone to University, but he was keen to enlist and with his education and O.T.C. experience he qualified for a commission. He applied when he was eighteen and on 2nd October 1915 he was appointed Second Lieutenant in the 1/4th Battalion West Riding Regiment, his local Territorial unit. As he was awarded the 1914-15 Star he must have proceeded to Belgium before the year was out, even though he would not be nineteen until September 1916. The War Diary refers neither to Mellor's arrival with the battalion nor to his departure, but he is likely to have served in the Ypres Salient in late 1915 and through the Somme Offensive in 1916. At the end of the year he was



seconded to the Royal Flying Corps. In April 1917 he became a Long Range Reconnaissance Officer, then a Flying Officer, serving with 70th and 71st Squadrons. He was injured in the air by a bomb and temporarily lost his sight.

From late in 1917, Norman was an instructor at home bases. A series of medical boards during 1918 passed him fit for Home Service only, and in August he was declared fit for General Service only in a warm climate. Instead in October he was posted to No. 25 Training Depot Station at Tallaght, near Dublin, in Ireland. On 10th October, a stormy day, Norman was one of 771 people on board the R.M.S. Leinster sailing from Dublin to Holyhead. The 695 passengers were mainly military personnel going on or returning from leave, but there were among them also 180 civilian men, women and children and twenty-two postal sorters. Shortly before 10 a.m. the German submarine UB-123 fired three torpedoes at the Leinster. The second hit the port side and the vessel turned back to Dublin, sinking slowly; a third torpedo caused serious damage and the ship went down rapidly. Officially 501 of those on board died but 529 dead have been identified, among them Norman Mellor. His body was recovered from the sea and was taken home to Halifax for burial. UB-135 struck a sea-mine on its return voyage and was lost with all hands. The great loss of life on the Leinster caused the U.S. President Wilson to reply to Germany's request for an armistice that there could be no peace while Germany continued to attack passenger vessels.



### Acknowledgements:

There is no known photo of Norman Mellor. The family was researched using Ancestry.com. His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1912-1915. *The Bradfordian*, November 1918, records his death on the Leinster. The London Gazette (16.10.1915) records his commission from the B.G.S. O.T.C. on 2.10.1915, the same date as his Medal Index Card records for his entry into the France and Flanders theatre of war. Several references in *Flight Global Magazine* record his service with the R.F.C. and R.A.F. with seniority from 9.12.1917 (<<https://www.flightglobal.com/pdfarchive>>). Mellor's Officer Service Record does not survive, but I have reconstructed his career from his R.A.F. Officer's file T.N.A. AIR76/6148 (<<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBM/AIR76/6148>>). There is a brief summary of his military service in *Hull Daily Mail* 12.10.1918. The 1/4th West Riding War Diary is available on Ancestry.com. I could find no reference to Mellor between October 1915 and August 1917.

I acknowledge the assistance I gained from Malcolm Bull's Calderdale Companion (<<http://www.calderdalecompanion.co.uk/mmm28.html>>) and the responses to a request for information on Mellor on the Great War Forum (<[https://www.greatwarforum.org/topic/127964-It-norman-mellor-raf/?\\_fromLogin=1](https://www.greatwarforum.org/topic/127964-It-norman-mellor-raf/?_fromLogin=1)>), especially the link to <<http://www.rmsleinster.com/sinking/sinking.htm>> (all accessed 2.10.2018).

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