

Lance Cpl Percy Smith WWI

Lance Cpl Percy Smith of the Wiltshire Regiment who was born in Teffont 1894 and was still living in Teffont at Beer house according to the 1911 census, the house having 8 rooms so perhaps it was the public house. His occupation at the age of 17 was given as a stable lad on a farm. However, in the late 1913 he travelled to Devizes (Figure 1)



Figure 1 Devizes Market

He then went on to Le Marchant Barracks (Figure 2) where he was enlisted on 26 September 1913 and completed his basic training.



Figure 2 Le Marchant Barracks

He joined the Wiltshire Regiment after completing his basic training at Le Marchant barracks and was posted to the first Battalion which was at that time stationed in Tidworth as part of 7 Brigade in the 3rd Division. Here we see a typical barracks in this case Aliwal (Figure 3) in Tidworth all of which were almost identical.

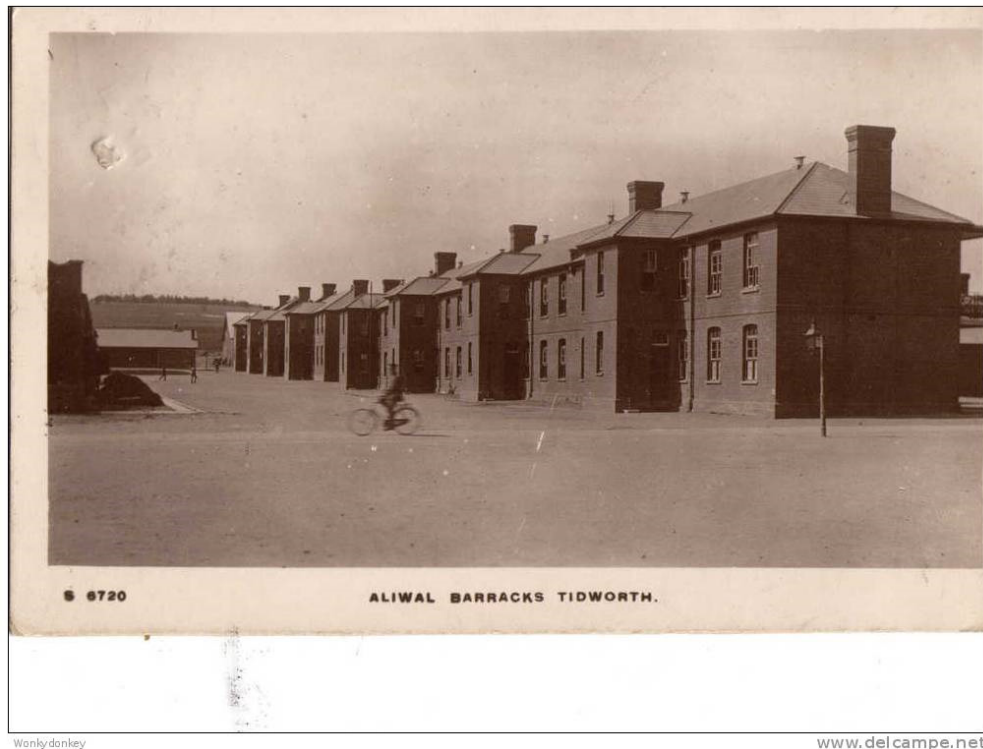


Figure 3 Aliwal Barracks Tidworth

And here we see a typical group photograph (Figure 4) outside one of the barrack blocks.



Figure 4 Typical Group Photo

The next photo (Figure 5) shows a typical training camp on Salisbury Plain in this case it is the RAMC, but it could just as well have been an infantry battalion at the time.



Figure 5 RAMC Training Camp Tidworth Park 1914

The Tidworth garrison church which you see in the (Figure 6) below was built in 1912 and it is almost certain that Percy Smith would have attended regimental church services in that church during 1914.



Figure 6 Garrison Church Tidworth

After spending the first half of 1914 in Tidworth; Percy's battalion was warned on 5 August 1914 to mobilise and on 13 August only eight days later they sailed in two steamships to France one being the SS South-Western (Figure 7) and the other the SS Princess Ena (Figure 8)

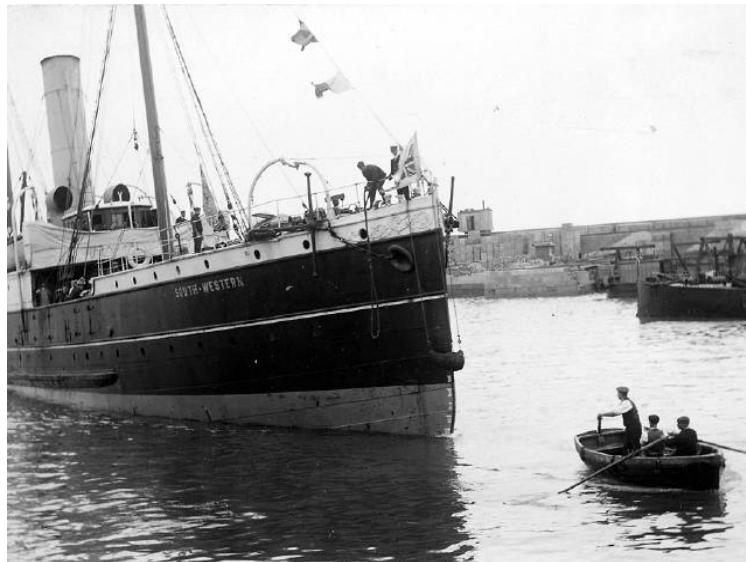


Figure 7 SS South Western



Figure 8 SS Princess Ena

It is probable that Percy being in D company would have sailed on the second sailing in the St Ena. The St Ena now resides in 40 metres of water between Jersey and St Malo. The two sailings arrived in Rouen on 14 August and after spending one day in a camp in Rouen they took a train up to the area of all Aulnoye (Figure 9).



Figure 9 Aulnoye

There followed at least a month of marching against the Germans then retreating back towards Paris and eventually on 6 October they took the train to Abbeville and by the beginning of November they had moved into a position that would become part of the first battle of Ypres but by this stage 1 Wiltshires had already lost 26 officers and 1000 men so the entire strength that they started with of just over 1000 men had already been replaced so perhaps Percy Smith had lead a charmed life up until this point.

The first battle of Ypres officially started on 19 October and ended on 22 November. The first Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment was dug in at Hooze a couple miles east of Ypres which you can see you in (Figure 10) below.

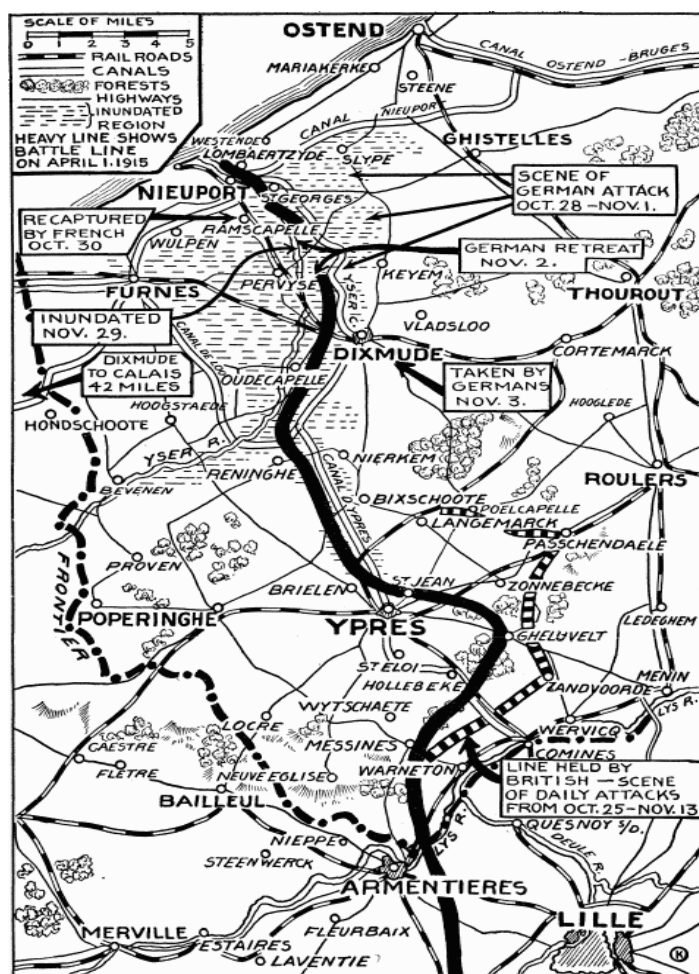


Figure 10 Ypres Map

On 17 November however, Percy Smith was killed in action and the regimental diary said the following for that day: "Shelling started about 9am. Infantry attack about 10.30am. At noon about 150 Germans got into D Coys advanced trenches, at 12.10pm a platoon of D Coy executed a bayonet charge against them, and drove them out killing about 50 Germans, and, wounding many others. They then started to shell D Coy very heavily, also using a mortar. Major Roche killed by a shell. Lieut Browne seriously wounded. 2nd Lieut Chandler killed by bullet wound. Lieut Goodhart took over duties of Adjutant vice Lieut Browne wounded. 11 killed, 15 wounded."

There is no known grave for Percy Smith but the war diaries do make reference to the company commander Major Roche being buried at Hooze and when you look at the photo in (Figure 11) of what Hooze looked like in 1919 you can understand perhaps why some of these bodies were never found again.

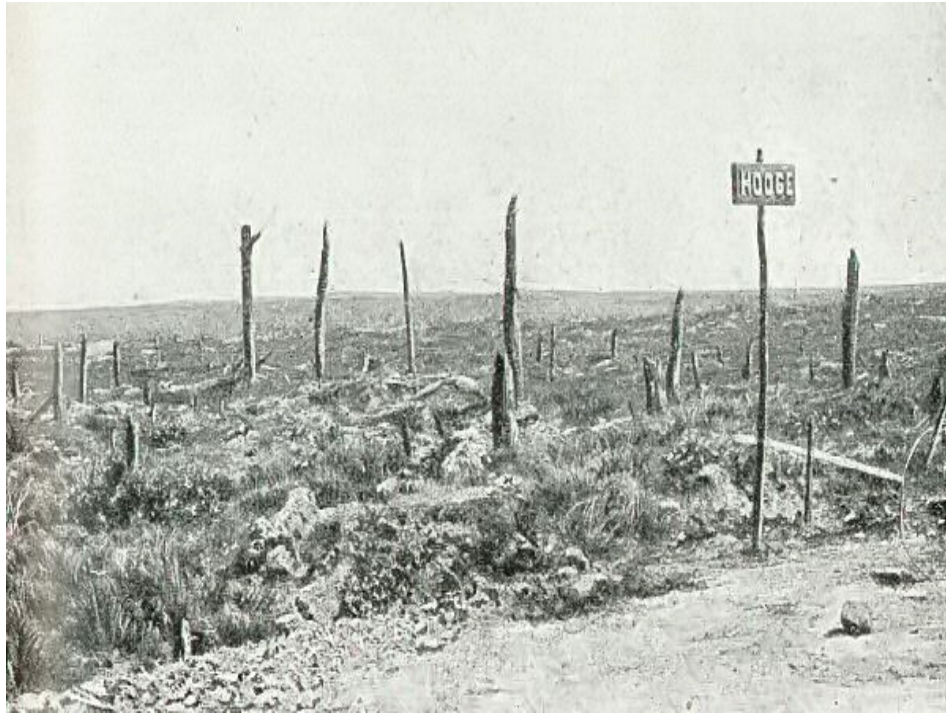


Figure 11 Hooge

Percy Smith's name is inscribed on the wall of the Menin Gate Memorial shown in (Figure 12) and inside Menin Gate Memorial (Figure 13). During the evening ceremony that takes place every day at the Menin Gate.



Figure 12 Menin Gate Memorial



Figure 13 Inside the Menin Gate Memorial