

Pte E J Arthur – The Queen’s (Royal West Surrey Regiment)

Edward James Arthur was born in 1889, the son of Edward and Rose Arthur who lived at 10 Milton Street. He went to Dorking High School and later became a plumber.

After enlisting, Edward joined the 2/4th Battalion of The Queen’s, the first of the ten ‘service’ battalions created in the Regiment. It was formed at Croydon in August 1914. More service battalions were formed later to absorb the huge numbers of men who enlisted in response to Lord Kitchener’s ‘Your Country Needs You’ appeal for volunteers.

In April 1915, the Battalion became part of the 53rd Division and on 17th July sailed on HMT “*Ulysses*” to join the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. After calling at Malta, Alexandria and Port Said they arrived at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli, where a force had been landed on 6th August to support a breakout by the Australian and New Zealand forces from their beachhead at Anzac Cove 5 miles to the south.

Unfortunately the Suvla Bay landings were badly directed. Some troops had been put ashore in the wrong place; there was confusion, chaos and a lack of urgency. A week later the British Commander was dismissed. The Queen’s landed on ‘C’ Beach in the early hours of 9th August and were immediately in action. They were ordered to advance to a line south-west of a feature known as Chocolate Hill, and entrench. An hour later they received an urgent message ordering them to a different position and then to make a further advance 600 yards across open ground to Hill 70. Here the scrub was ablaze; they found themselves under gunfire from their own side and had to withdraw. By 1200 hours the Battalion had lost 8 officers and 250 men.

On 14th August the Battalion was relieved and moved to the reserve for recuperation. By 21st August they were back in the lines improving trench defences, and meeting occasional Turkish attacks before moving once again into reserve. This pattern was to continue through the ensuing weeks.

Edward Arthur died at sea on 11th October 1915 which suggests that he was on a hospital ship having been evacuated from Suvla Bay after being wounded or taken seriously ill. His name is on panel 30/31 of the Helles Memorial which is situated at the tip of the Gallipoli peninsula and bears the names of 21,000 British and Commonwealth servicemen who died in the campaign, and who have no known grave. He is also remembered on the Dorking war memorial.

After the initial landings the Gallipoli campaign quickly reached a position of stalemate and it became clear that it would not achieve its objectives. It was eventually decided to evacuate all allied forces and this was achieved with just two soldiers being wounded, the only success in a campaign where the men on both sides suffered appallingly. The 2/4th Queen's left Suvla Bay on 13th December 1915, two days before the evacuation from that area was completed. The final evacuation from Gallipoli took place from 'W' Beach, Helles on 9th January 1916.