

## Pte C.E.P.Wright – The Queen’s (Royal West Surrey Regiment)

Cecil Edward Pelham Wright was born in Westcott in 1895, the son of William and Alice Wright of 2 Watson Road. He enlisted at Guildford and joined the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Queen’s. On 31<sup>st</sup> August 1915 the battalion left camp at Blackdown on its way to France, landing at Boulogne early in the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> September. After a train journey to Montreuil, the battalion marched 12 miles to billets at Herly for a period of training. The weather was trying - very hot days interspersed with heavy rain - and the regimental diary records several days when the men were very tired.

Three weeks after landing in France the battalion was engaged in the Battle of Loos which was the British contribution to a major offensive on the western front, designed to relieve pressure on Russia in the east. Loos was a mining area with a few small villages, slag-heaps and pit-heads scattered across a flat and exposed landscape; the British commanders felt it was not favourable for an attack. Nevertheless they went ahead at the insistence of the French who simultaneously attacked in Champagne further to the south. The hope was that the attacks would break through the German defences and lead to a major advance.

The battle began on 25<sup>th</sup> September after a four day artillery barrage on the enemy defences. During that day 8<sup>th</sup> Queen’s moved up from Bethune through the village of Vermelles to trenches west of Le Rutoine Farm where they were ordered to prepare for an attack to the south of the village of Hulluch. The regimental diary records that *‘no written orders and no time for the attack was given. For a time we lose contact with W. Kents owing to darkness and difficult nature of the country which is a maze of trenches.’*

On the following day, 26<sup>th</sup> September, the diary records that *‘the C.O. called to Brigade Headquarters at 9.45 to receive orders for the attack, returns at 10.30 am with them. Attack begins at 11.5 am and the battalion advances under heavy machine gun fire in lines of platoons in extended order. As the advance continues over the Lens-La Basse road, the machine gun fire from the flanks was very heavy. On reaching the enemy trenches it was found to be protected by barbed wire which had not been cut and it being impossible to get through, the brigade retired. There appeared to be no panic and the men walked back still under machine gun and shrapnel fire. The battalion suffered 439 casualties, including their Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. F.H Fairtlough, who was killed.*

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records state that Cecil Wright died on 25<sup>th</sup> September, but the Queen’s regimental diary records

**that no casualties were sustained that day. It is likely that he was among those lost in the action of 26<sup>th</sup> September. His name is recorded on Panel 13-15 of the Loos Memorial which commemorates some 20,000 men who died in that area during the war and who have no known grave. He was 20 years of age.**

**The Battle of Loos was discontinued on 28<sup>th</sup> September. The action was a disaster for the British Army who suffered over 50,000 casualties, of whom 7,766 died including three Major-Generals, three Brigadier-Generals and 28 Lt. Colonels. Sir John French, the British Commander-in-Chief, was heavily criticised for his poor direction of the battle. He subsequently resigned and was replaced by General Sir Douglas Haig who continued as Commander-in-Chief for the rest of the war.**