

MY GREAT UNCLE'S WAR 1914 to 1917

My father Rowland Weekes landed with the first wave on Sword Beach Normandy on 6th June 1944 and survived the 2nd World War. My grandfather George Maltby fought in the 1st and 2nd World Wars before being rescued from the beaches at Dunkirk and living a happy family life until his death in 1972. Thus, with these relatives, my childhood was full of war stories though few from my grandfather who, like most WW1 veterans, found it difficult to talk about the war. George was born in Cambridge in 1899 into a large family of 11 children. There were five boys, all of whom enlisted into the army and all but one returned safely in 1919.

Having read much about WW1 and having been engrossed in the BBC 1963 WW1 series, my father Rowland and I decided in 1987 to visit the battlefields of Ypres and the Somme on a specialized tour. As I lived in Nottingham at this time, we booked the tour with Milestone Tours, a local operator run by a great military enthusiast Brian Keywood accompanied by an extremely accomplished guide David Ayres. Prior to departure my mother discovered an 'In Memoriam' Card (Figure 1) for my grandfather's brother, my great uncle Frank Herbert Maltby. This card showed that he was buried in a cemetery in France south east of Arras, the centre of the battle of 1917.

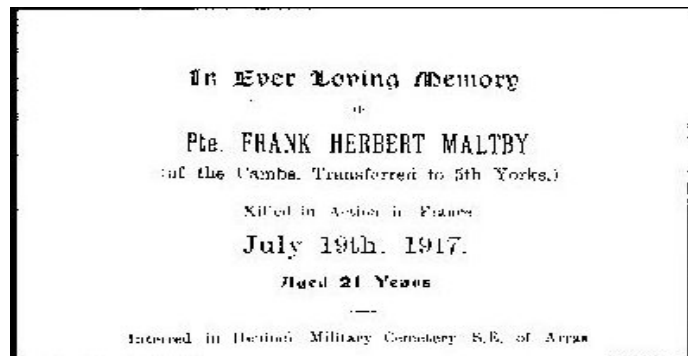


Figure 1

The Milestone Tour was a great success. Travelling back from the Somme, whilst other tour members had lunch in the magnificent square in Arras, the tour guide, my father and I travelled deep into the Arras battlefield to find the small Heninel Communal Extension Cemetery containing the graves of soldiers killed in the fighting between April and July 1917. Seeing this cemetery deep in the peaceful French countryside made it hard to imagine the hardships of the trenches. The mud, lice, and constant bombardment of the front line must have been so close to what was now the peaceful resting place for Frank and his pals from the Yorkshire regiment. There are 140 gravestones (Figure 2) all in military rows, laid out in the style of an English churchyard as Lutyens had insisted. Each gravestone was identical save for the name, age, regiment and in some cases family inscriptions.



Figure 2

Seeing the rows of gravestones I could not help but be emotional. It was very thought provoking. So many people of my age who have relatives who had fought, and in many instances died, in the Great War would like to find out about their lives and war experiences. It was certainly true for me! I now wanted to know more about this distant relative Frank Maltby who went to war caught up in patriotic fervour and died on 19th July 1917 a few weeks after his 21st birthday - a life that ended so young before any fulfilment of hopes and dreams.

So 1987 became 2007 when, having retired, I now had the time to commit myself to some real researches into Frank Maltby's war. I began in September 2007 with another trip to the Arras area and the Heninel Communal Extension Cemetery to visit the grave of private 242470 Frank Herbert Maltby of the 5th Battalion Yorkshire regiment. (Figure 3)



Figure 3

I followed this up in 2008 with basic researches armed with the advice gained from **the PRO guide Army Service Records of the First World War by William Spencer**.

An internet search of the WO363/364 Army service records drew a blank and even a visit to the National Archives in Kew and a morning of eye wearying searches through the micro film copies of these service records resulted in nothing. This confirmed what I had been told which is that it is difficult to find any of these WO 363 files as 75% of them were destroyed in 1940 by a German bomb. The internet did prove useful in confirming name, rank, number, battalion and regiment from the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission** website and **Soldiers Died in the Great war** website.

In addition, the searches of the National Archives at Kew did bring success in terms of finding Frank's **Medal Index card WO/372** (Figure 4) which showed that Frank was entitled to receive the Victory and British war medals in 1920 even though he died in 1917. *This medal index card does not say that he was actually in the Cambridgeshire regiment, however it does show that he had two regimental numbers. The first number – 5211 - was very obviously early in the war and appeared at first glance to refer to his time in the Cambridgeshires. The second number 242470 seemed to refer to his transfer to the Yorkshire regiment. I wanted to confirm these assumptions by later correspondence with Edward Nicholl, Bill Danby and Cliff Brown from their extensive knowledge of the regimental histories and numbering systems. (see below) The regimental numbering system is also clearly explained in Simon Fowler's Tracing Your First World War Ancestors.*

Name	Corps.	Rank	Regt. No.
MALTBY Frank.	York R. -11-	Pte	5211 242440
Medal	Roll	Page	Remarks
VICTORY	Off/101 Br	322	Dead.
BRITISH	do	do	
STAR			
Theatre of War Recd served in			
Date of entry therein			

K. 1350.

Figure 4

The other useful evidence found in the archives at Kew was the Medal Roll WO/329/952/ page 322 (Figure 5) for the 5th Battalion Yorkshire regiment, but again it makes no reference to the Cambridgeshire Regiment.

Regt No.	Rank	Name	Service No.	From	To	From	To	From
242423	Pte.	FLANNERS Fred	5/York.R. 242423					
			4/York.R. 242423					
			6/York.R. 242423					
242431	Pte.	DOUGHERT James H.	5/York.R. 2171.Pte.					
242432	Pte.	EDWARDS Frederick W.	5/York.R. 2178.Pte.					
242470	Pte.	MALTBY Frank H.	5/York.R. 242470					
242471	Pte.	MALTBY Samuel	5/York.R. 242471					
242472	Pte.	MARSHALL Charles L.	5/York.R. 242472					
242473	Pte.	MUNDY James H.	5/York.R. 242473					
			4/York.R. 242473					
			4/York.R. 242473					
242474	Pte.	PALMER Walter	5/York.R. 242474					
242481	Pte.	PEARL Reuben	5/York.R. 242481					
			9/York.R. 242481					
			8/York.R. 242481					
242482	Pte.	PENNEY John T.W.	5/York.R. 242482					
			4/York.R. 242482					
242483	Pte.	PREKETT Richard H.	5/York.R. 242483					
			8/York.R. 242483					
			4/York.R. 242483					

I certify that according to the Official Records the individuals name

Place: 13 FEB 1920

Date:

Figure 5

So by the end of 2008 I had made some progress since first viewing the data on Frank's headstone. I am sure that this reflects the experiences of many people looking for evidence of distant relatives. With the loss of the WO 363/364 records the search for other ranks with no conspicuous valour awards is extremely frustrating and it is probable that many people give up at this point.

I was not going to do that. I had found out that Frank Maltby was in the 5th Battalion Yorkshire regiment so I had to contact someone with information about the Yorkshire Regiment. I used the internet and found the **Yorkshire Regiment WW1 Remembrance site produced by Edward Nicholl**. This confirmed Frank's details from his records but again no mention of whether he was in another regiment before the Yorkshires. However it did report that some 70% of the regiment came from outside its traditional recruitment area. Edward Nicholl had details of the 28 men from the Yorkshires who were all buried in the same cemetery as Frank showing that three of them had come from the Cambridge area .

The next step was to go back to the internet to find information about the Cambridgeshire regiment. I found this from the Regimental website and some correspondence with a very helpful and knowledgeable man, Cliff Brown. His records told me that Frank probably enlisted in late 1915 and went into the Cambridgeshire home service battalion. A large group of Cambridge men were sent to France on 30th August 1916 and posted to the 4th and 5th Battalions of the Yorkshire regiment that was probably severely undermanned by its recent losses somewhere on the Western Front. At last I had found a real link with the Cambridgeshire regiment! Furthermore, Cliff Brown referred to newspaper articles published in Cambridge in August 1917 that reported Frank's death on 19th July 1917. He had been killed along with others in the same trench, by a shell, a very common occurrence. These articles are held in the Cambridge Central Library and so I contacted Sue Slack, senior library assistant at Milton Road library Cambridge, who informed me that I could purchase photocopies. These articles and the photographs captured the mood of the period in 1917 when local newspapers reported with pride the loss of their sons with LOCAL ROLLS of HONOUR.

So now I had a photograph of my great uncle (Figure 6) and knew more family details. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Maltby of Norfolk Street, Cambridge. His father had been a robe maker to the aristocracy and Frank had worked for the Central Meat Co. in Burleigh Street, Cambridge where he had been highly regarded. He had joined up as early as November 1914, not 1915 as I had previously thought, into the Cambridgeshire 2/1 battalion only transferring to the Yorkshire regiment when he was sent to France in August 1916.

The article from the CAMBRIDGE CHRONICLE 01/08/1917, finishes with a tribute from his company officer

He was killed whilst doing his duty during a critical period and he died the death of a true British soldier with his face to the enemy. Arrangements have been made for the body to be interred in an English cemetery and a cross will be erected over his grave .

That cemetery is HENINEL COMMUNAL EXTENSION CEMETERY which was begun in APRIL 1917 and now contains the graves of FRANK MALTBY and 27 other members of the Yorkshire regiment.



Figure 6

So my next question was why Frank, who had joined up as early as November 1914, did not see active service until August 1916? What did he do for twenty-two months when the typical period of UK based training was one month? I contacted Cliff Brown on the Cambridgeshire museum website to see if he had any records that might provide an explanation.

It appears that in November 1914, Frank joined the 2/1 Battalion Cambridgeshires which was a training unit formed in September 1914. In 1915 this unit was being prepared for the Gallipoli campaign. The campaign developed into a military disaster and with the need to supply troops to the western front the 2/1 Bn became a reinforcement supply unit. Thus, Frank spent most of his army service in various training camps up and down the UK.

Firstly the 2/1 Bn was part of the 69th Division but then the battalion was sent to the 54th Division. That Division went to Gallipoli in April 1915 although the 2/1 Bn Cambridgeshires was spared this, going instead to Norwich and Peterborough before rejoining the 69th Division around Thetford in June 1915. The 69th was earmarked for overseas service but yet again the 2/1 Bn missed out on this and after various other reorganisations the 2/1 Bn ended up in Harrogate in June 1916.

It was ironic that only two months later Frank and a lot of others from the 2/1 Bn. were posted to France and they found themselves drafted into the Yorkshire regiment. This was the point in the history of the British army when the Pals' battalions had been devastated by the slaughter of the trench war fare on the Western Front. The 5th Battalion Yorkshires were recruited mainly from the Scarborough area and the 4th Battalion from the Middlesborough region. Both needed fresh fighters and it was the Cambridgeshires who provided that in August 1916.

Cliff Brown was also able to clear up the confusion of the two regimental service numbers on his Medal record card. The first number 5211 was the one given to him when he first joined the Yorkshire regiment in August 1916. Then in April 1917 the army changed to a six figure system for the territorials hence 242470 became his service number. Unfortunately there appears to be no records of his Cambridgeshire service number although Cliff Brown's records show that it was likely to be in the late 2000's as he joined up in November 1914.

The website of the 1/4th Battalion Yorkshire regiment by Bill Danby has proved invaluable in giving me information about the movements of the 5th Yorks during 1916 and 1917. This is because both the 4th and the 5th Battalions were in the 150th Brigade and part of the 50th Division (Northumbria). *It told me that the 4th and 5th battalions Yorkshire regiment had been fighting in the Kemmel area of the Ypres salient until late July 1916 when they were transferred to the Somme area to prepare for another offensive.*

So I had been able to trace the first part of Frank Maltby's war story. I know when he joined up and when he went to France. I know that he spent almost two years in the 2/1 Cambridgeshire regiment being trained but never going overseas with them. *Then in August 1916 he and many men from Cambridge were shipped to France to fill the gaps in the 4th and 5th Battalions of the Yorkshires - the Green Howards-in preparation for another offensive on the Somme.*

How did these men from East Anglia feel as they joined a battle-hardened group from the North Riding? Did they resent having to leave the Cambridgeshires? How well prepared were they for the battle that kicked off in September 1916? Whilst Frank had been training for 22 months did it truly prepare him for the sights of the Somme with its fields and woods laid bare by the constant bombardments of the shells and the frightening sounds of the battle?

Frank's active service on the Western Front lasted from 30/08/1916 to 19/07/1917 during which time he took part in the September Somme offensive with the first tank attacks before transferring to the Arras area to take part in the most bloody battle of the whole war measured in terms of daily casualty rates. As the article of 8th August 1917 in **the Cambridge Chronicle** says;

He went to the front in August (1916) and had seen some of the most desperate fighting in the recent big battles. About a week before his death he spent his 21st birthday in the trenches



Figure 7 FRANK HERBERT MALTBY in the uniform of the
CAMBRIDGESHIRE REGIMENT NOVEMBER 1914

I am continuing my researches into my Great uncle's war and will follow his involvement in the 1916 and 1917 campaigns. This will be achieved by using the war diaries of the 5th battalion Yorkshires as well as other sources and visits to the battlefield sites in the Spring and Summer of 2009.

ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE 1

'IN MEMORIAM' card issued by Mr and Mrs Samuel Maltby of 41 Norfolk street Cambridge following the death of their son Frank Herbert Maltby in July 1917 .

FIGURE 2

Photograph of Heninel Communal Extension Cemetery September 2007

FIGURE 3

Photograph of the author and his father at the grave of Frank Maltby in Heninel Communal Cemetery extension October 1987

FIGURE 4

Medal Index Card for Frank Maltby - National Archives

FIGURE 5

Page 322 from the Medal Roll for 5th Battalion Yorkshire regiment - National Archives

FIGURE 6

Photograph of Frank Maltby - Cambridge Independent Press 17/08/1917

FIGURE 7

Photograph of Frank Maltby - Cambridge Chronicle 08/08/1917

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Army Service Records of the First World War - William Spencer

British Regiments 1914 – 1918 - Brigadier E. A. Jones

Cambridgeshire Libraries

Cambridgeshire Regiment Museum website - Cliff Brown

Commonwealth War Graves Commission - website

1/4th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment website - Bill Danby

Green Howards Museum – Richmond, Yorks.

Milestone Tours - Nottingham

National Archives - Kew, London

Soldiers Died in the Great War - website

The Long, Long, Trail - The British Army 1914—1918 - website

Tracing Your First World War Ancestors - Simon Fowler

Yorkshire Regiment WW1 Remembrance – website - Edward Nicholl

