

# Elijah Lowe

Private

11088

2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers



The story of the Lowe family is in many ways tragic. Not just because two sons, Elijah and Thomas James, lost their lives in the war but also because of tragic events which afflicted the family in general. The story must start with Robert Lowe who was born in Kington in 1875. Robert left Kington and moved to South Wales in search of work. Here he became a miner, to be precise a 'hewer', a task which meant he was actually at the coal face cutting coal from the seams. He married Edith Hill in 1895 with the marriage being registered in Merthyr Tydfil. Beatrice was their first child born in 1896 with Elijah Lowe the following year. The next child was Thomas James Lowe who was born in 1898 and we hear more about Thomas later. Herbert was born early in the new century in 1900 and in the 1901 census the family were living at 20 Mary Street in Merthyr Tydfil. It appears the family moved shortly after because Edith's last child, George born in 1903, was born in Abertillery.

The first tragedy to strike the Lowe family was in 1906 when sadly Edith died. This left Richard to bring up his five children alone while still working in the mines. However, as happens, Richard found happiness again with Francis Ellen Compton and married her, back in Kington, on the 20th April 1908. Francis herself also had a sad story to tell. As Francis Ellen Jenkins she had married George Compton in 1894. Frances and George had two children Agnes and George, but tragically George

Compton senior had died in 1896 leaving Francis to bring up her very young family alone. In many ways Robert and Frances's stories were very similar, both losing close partners and being left with young families. Francis struggled on for twelve years until she met Richard and happily they married in 1908. The 1911 census return shows the now large family living at 3 Bute Place, Cwmnanty Gynt, Aberbeeg in Monmouthshire. By now Francis had given Richard a sixth child with Richard Albert Lowe being born in 1910, again in Abertillery. Richard junior was swiftly followed, nine months later, by Francis Eliza Anne Lowe. 3 Bute Place was not a large house and there were now Richard, Francis and their nine children living all under one roof. By this time both Elijah and his brother Thomas are working in the mines and like their father they are both Hewer's.

At some point, probably to escape the mines, Elijah enlisted, in Wrexham, into the 2nd Battalion the Royal Welsh Fusiliers as Private 11088 Lowe. The 2nd Battalion RWF was a front line battalion of the regular army who, at the outbreak of war were based in Portland on the south coast and at 9pm on the 4th of August were mobilised. From this we make the assumption Elijah had enlisted before the outbreak of war. By the tenth they were in Winchester and the following day the regiment was entrained to Southampton ready for embarkation and transfer to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Below is a transcription from the battalion's official war diary, detailing what happened to Elijah and his Battalion from them leaving these shores and culminating in Elijah's tragic loss of life on the 25th October 1914.

## Elijah Lowe's War

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| 11th Aug | Sailed from Southampton at 2am   |
| 12th     | Rouen, billeted either side of the Seine   |
| 13th     | Started entraining Companies to Amiens   |
| 20th     | Whole battalion at Amiens  |
| 22nd     | Boarded train for Valenciennes   |
| 23rd     | Arrived Valenciennes 2am. Marched to Vicq  |
| 24th     | Vicq (Engaged in Battle of Mons)   |
| 25th     | Controlled retreat to Jenlain, on to Haussy. Arrived Le Cateau<br>Turned and made a stand, Battle of Le Cateau |
| 26th     | Left Le Cateau at 5:30am,  |
| 27th     | 2hr stop at Estresse   |
| 28th     | Ollezzy (38 mile march from Le Cateau)   |

- 29th Arrived Pontoise via Novon, 32 mile march, regrouped
- 30th Pontoise(Bridges over River Oise blown) retired 19 miles to Couloisy
- 31st Left Couloisy at 7am, marched through Compegne Wood to Fresnoy
- 1st Sept 5am retired through Verberie, bivouacked outside Fresnoy
- 2nd Left Fresnoy heading for Dammartin
- 3rd Left Dammartin retired to Lagny, east of Paris on the Marne River
- 4th Bivouacked all day in Lagny
- 5th Left Lagny at 2am, arrived Grisy at 9am (Battle of the Marne)
- 6th Left Grisy at 2am and advanced to Jossingy then on to Villeneuve St Denis
- 7th Marched to La Haute Maison (Running battle with enemy) drove enemy back, bivouacked at La Haute Maison
- 8th Left La Haute Maison at 4am, advanced guard heavily shelled at Signy Signets, advanced to La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre on south side of the Marne River. Street fighting and heavy rifle fire from enemy across the river.
- 9th Street fighting continued La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre, relieved and retired to Signy Signets, bivouacked. Left Signy Signets at 7:30pm, marched to Les Corbieres
- 10th Left Les Corbieres at 4:30am and marched back through La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre. Crossed river on pontoon bridge, main bridge having been blown. Continued march on north side of river to Chamigny (Men exhausted)
- 11th Marched at 7am, forcing Germans back, headed for Marizy St Genevieve. Men wet-through and exhausted, billeted there.
- 12th Moved off at 6am, advanced very slowly. Arrived Buzancy, south of Soissons. Heavy shelling from across the Aisne.
- 13th Moved off at 12:30pm toward La Carriere Levie Que Ferme, bivouacked there. Heavy shelling from across the Aisne. (That evening 1st Battle of Aisne began)
- 14th Advanced to north-west of Venizel. Heavy shelling by enemy all day.
- 15th Moved off at 2.15am and took up position to the south east of Venizel. Few casualties but very heavy rain throughout the night.
- 16th to 19th Remained South East of Venizel, engaged with enemy.
- 19th At 1pm moved from Venizel to Septmonts. Shelled again while moving.

# Elijah survived for two months in France

Elijah Lowe 'Killed in Action'  
in the trenches at Boutillerie  
23rd October 1914



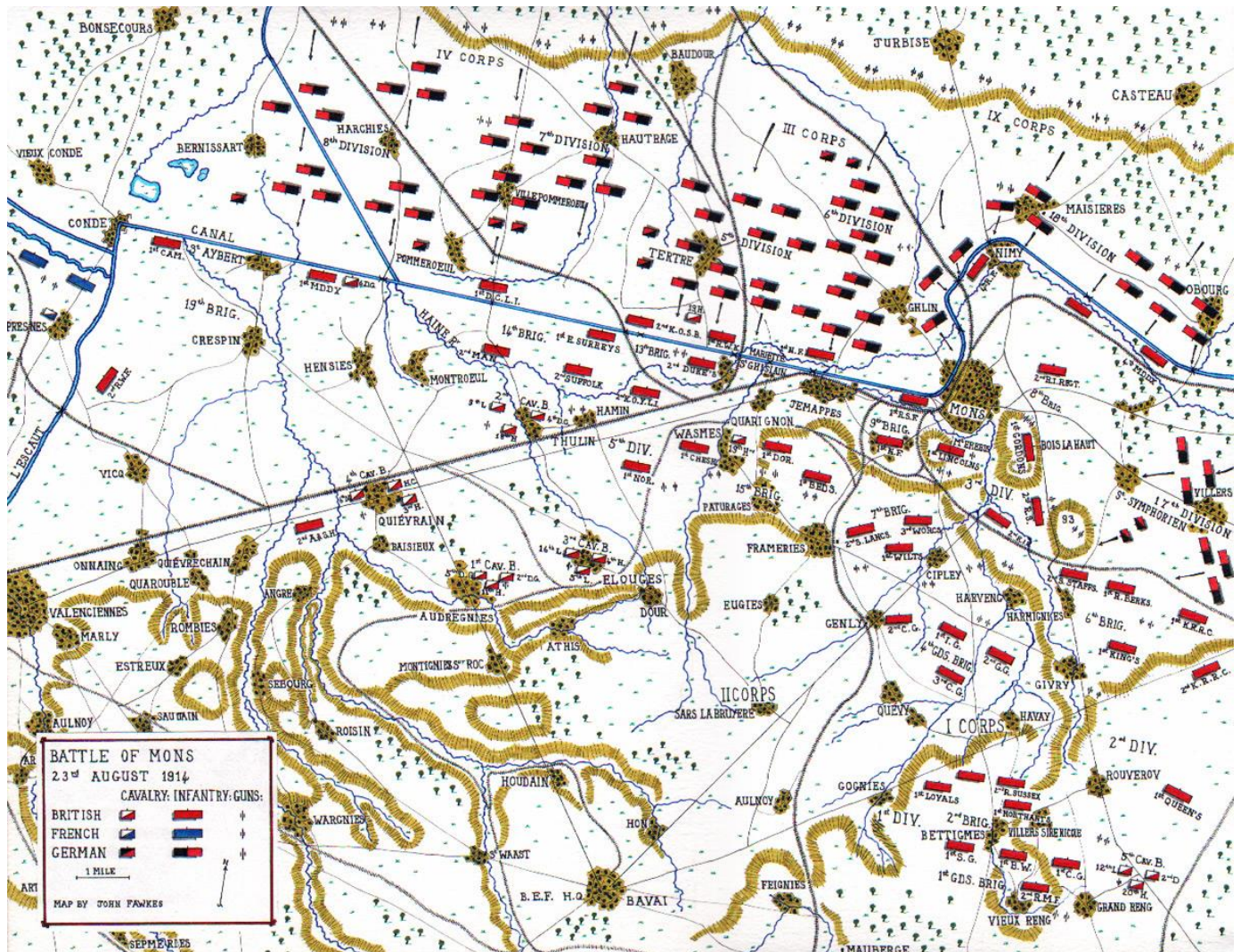
- 20th to 27th Entrenching duties north east of La Carriere, returned to billets at Septmonts at night.
- 28th Barracaded roads around Septmonts for Motor Spies. Returned to billets at Septmonts at night.
- 29th to 4<sup>th</sup> Oct Remained at Septmonts on trenching duties.
- 5<sup>th</sup> Oct At 7:30pm marched to St Remy
- 6th Arrived St Remy 2am. Bivouacked all day in St Remy, moved off at 7:10pm for VEZ.
- 7th Remained bivouacked at VEZ until 5:30pm, moved out and marched to Bethisey Saint Pierre.
- 8th Marched through Verbiere, over the Oise and on to Longueil Sainte Marie station.
- 9th Moved out at 8:30am, marched to Estrees St. Dennis. Bivouacked there.
- 10th Entrained on two trains at 6am, proceeded via Montdier, Amiens, Abberville, Boulogne, and Calais. First train arrived at St Omer at 10pm.
- 11th 2nd train arrived St Omer at 6:30am. Whole battalion marched to Renescure and into billets.
- 12th Moved into positions at St Sylvestre, facing enemy.
- 13th Moved off at 7:15am and rejoined the rest of 19th Brigade and moved to a position of readiness north-west of Strazelle.
- 14th Moved off as advance guard for 19th Brigade. Passed through Strazelle and Bailleul and halted at Le Lenthe, slight opposition from enemy.
- 15th Moved down the Bailleul-Nieppe road toward Steenwerk. Entered town and drove enemy back. Bivouacked in Steenwerk overnight.
- 16th Moved off at 12:45pm and billeted at Vlamertinghe.
- 17th & 18th Billeted all day at Vlamertinghe
- 19th Moved off by bus at 1:30pm heading for Laventie, arrived 1:15am and into billets.
- 20th Moved forward to Fromelles and into trenches. French troops to left and right.
- 21st In trenches at Fromelles. Some shelling.
- 22nd At 1am retired to La Boutillerie. Left there at 6am and took up positions around La Cordonnerie Farm
- 23rd In trenches all day, some sniping and shelling.



- 24th In trenches all day, enemy attack repelled, sniping and shelling all day. Heavily attacked at 6:30pm, enemy beaten back.
- 25th Attacked at 1:15am and 4am, both attacks driven off, heavy shelling all day, again attacked through the day. All attacks driven off but losses heavy. One officer and ten rank and file killed. Twenty three rank and file wounded.

When regiments arrived in France there was an imperative to get them from the coast across to the likely fighting area as quickly as possible. In the rush to get the 2nd Battalion to the Belgian border and hence the frontline they were not allocated to a Brigade until they arrived at Valenciennes on the 23rd of August at which time they were attached to the 19th Infantry Brigade. They in turn were not attached to a Division so in the early days of the war the 19th Brigade was what is known as 'an independent command'. On the day the Battle of Mons started, 23rd August, the 19th Brigade were located on the left of the 5th Division and facing the formidable 1st Army of General von Kluck across the Conde Canal. The 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers were located on the left of the Brigade, facing the River L'Escaut and defending against any outflanking manoeuvre made by the enemy.

### Disposition of forces at the Battle of Mons 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1914



By the end of the day it was clear that the BEF and French were going to be unable to withhold the German advance and a managed retreat began. 2nd Battalion were tasked with providing rear-guard defence while the bulk of General Smith-Dorriens, 2nd Corps retreated to La Cateau. It was here, in defiance of his Commander in Chiefs (Sir John French) orders, that Smith-Dorrien turned his Corp and engaged the pursuing enemy. As it transpired this was a superb piece of individual thinking which held up the German advance and gave the rest of the BEF breathing space to retire in some order. 19 Brigade were heavily involved in the Battle of Le Cateau and when Smith-Dorrien again turned his army south he had the 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers providing rear-guard defence.

What followed for the 2nd Battalion was a long march back toward Paris. The retreat only halted when the army was on the outskirts of Paris and they were turned to face the enemy at the Battle of Marne on the 5th September. Allied forces then started to push back against the immense German army, pushing all the way back to the Aisne River. Here the Battle of Aisne started on the 13th of September. The Brigade and indeed 2nd battalion RWF stayed in the area of Soissons and Compiègne until the 10th of October until they were entrained to the battlefield on the Western Front.

On the 12th of October the 19th Brigade were taken under the wing of the 6th Division who were immediately thrown into the Battle of Armentières which started on the 13th of October. On the 20th the battalion found themselves in the trenches at Fromelles just to the south of Armentières and facing the German sixth army. They had French troops on their left and right and were constantly shelled and sniped at by the enemy. On the 22nd they retired to La Boutillerie and at 6am took up positions around La Cordonnerie Farm. They were right in the front line here and were constantly shelled and sniped at and on the 24th were heavily attacked by the enemy. They managed to fend off the attack and held their positions. On the 25th the enemy attacks continued but at each one the battalion held their ground but inevitably took heavy losses. On that day one officer and ten other ranks lost their lives. Elijah Lowe was 'killed in action' on the **25th of October 1914**.



Elijah and ten other soldiers killed on that day are buried at Pont-du-hem Military Cemetery, La Gorgue, grave reference XI.C.3. Pont-du-Hem is a hamlet situated on the main road from La Bassee to Estaires. The Cemetery was begun, in an apple-orchard, in July 1915, and used until April 1918, by fighting units and Field Ambulances. After the armistice British bodies were brought in from surrounding battle sites and small cemeteries. Elijah, being in XI plot may indicate that he was one of the last to be moved in to Pont-du-Hem. There are now 812 identified casualties in the cemetery. For his bravery and unflinching resolve Elijah was awarded the Victory, British War and 1914 Star with Mons Clasp. The 1914 Star was awarded to all men and women who served in France and Belgium between the 5th August 1914 and the 22/23rd November 1914. For those who served under fire between those dates they were



additionally awarded a bar clasp inscribed 5 Aug – 22 Nov 1914. It was necessary to apply for the issue of the clasp so we assume someone, perhaps his family, did this on his behalf. This combination is more usually known as the Mons Star.

For Richard and Francis, back in Kington, events went from bad to worse. They had lost their son Elijah and a second son Thomas James Lowe was also killed in the war. As if that wasn't enough life had one further tragedy to afflict the Lowe family after the war had finished. This next account has been drawn from the pages of the Kington Times. After the war Richard and Francis's marriage hit hard times and in September 1922 Francis appeared at Kington Petty Sessions requesting a separation from Richard. This request was granted in the following August. Richard moved out of the family home in Mill Street and rented a shed in Coopers Yard from George Graham the bicycle agent at 21 High Street. Mr Graham was happy for Richard to sleep in the shed for a short time but then required him to leave the area. Richard had reached rock bottom and the Kington Times reported in its 24th May 1924 edition that Richard Lowe, chimney sweep of Kington, had committed suicide, by hanging himself, in the shed rented to him by George Graham in Coopers Yard. For the Lowe family, the war and subsequent events had been unbelievably tragic.



Mons Star Trio