

Ernest Mitchell Meredith

Private

661

The Royal Buckinghamshire Hussars



Ernest Mitchell Meredith, was born into a large and prominent Kington family in 1883, one of fourteen children born to James and Winifred Meredith. James was a Kington man who in 1872 married a girl from Holloway in London, Winifred Mitchell. The couple were married in Islington and after the wedding the newlyweds moved back to Kington and the family ironmongery business operating from No.3 High Street. James also had a leading interest in the Meredith Iron Foundry at Sunset. Within a couple of years their first child was born and they rather aptly called her Winifred (1874). Winifred was followed by thirteen other children, three of which sadly died.

For the record it is worth recording here all their names since many of them were to lead exemplary lives in Kington and many of the boys served their country, two sadly never returning. Winifred was followed by James Henry in 1877, Frederick (1879), Arthur (1880), Eva (1882), Ethel (1883), the hero of this story Ernest (1883), Thomas (1885), Edith (1887), John (1888), Herbert (1889), Cyril (1890) and finally, the baby of the family, Dorothy in 1895. It is also worth noting that Ernest seems to have been named after his uncle, Ernest Mitchell, who had served in the 18th Mounted Rifles, in Kimberley, South Africa.

Initially Ernest was educated at Lady Hawkins' School and his name is included on the school's Roll of Honour. When schooling at Lady Hawkins' was complete Ernest's family had him board at Bancroft School in Woodford Wells, Essex. Bancroft School was a public school, founded by the Drapers Company in 1773, whose headmaster at



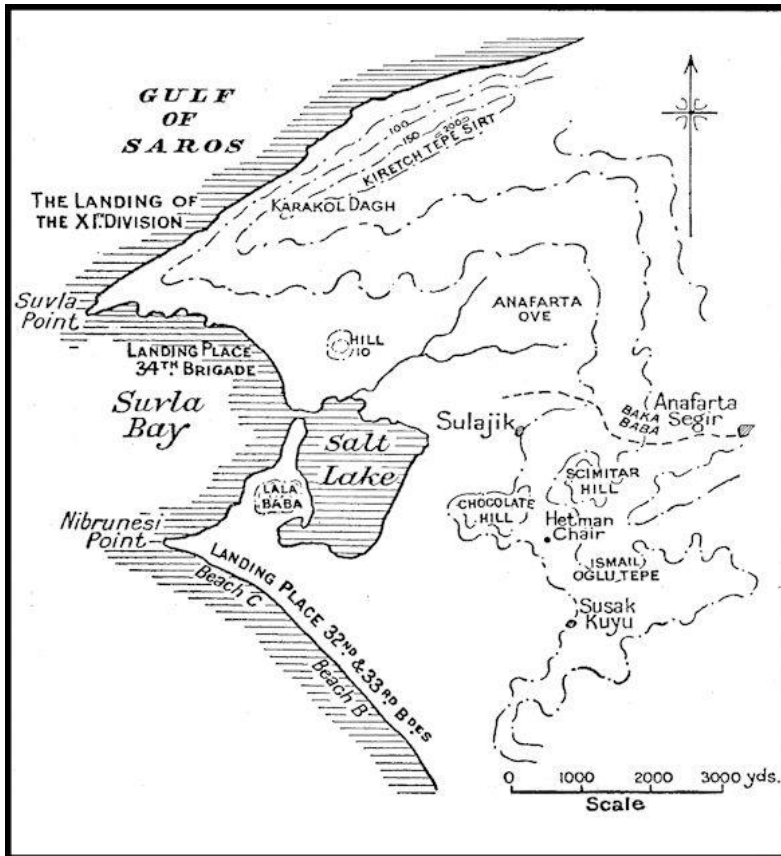
the time was a Reverend John Edward Symns who coincidentally was also born in Kington. It is quite possible the two families were acquaintances. Bancroft School is still in existence today and is now run as an Independent School. When Ernest left Bancroft he moved to Princes Risborough in Buckinghamshire where he was employed as a Surveyor for the Great Western Railway Company. It is from here that sometime in late 1914 early 1915 he enlisted at High

Wycombe, as a Private in the Household Cavalry, Royal Buckinghamshire Hussars, service number 661.

Like many of our brave men his service records no longer survive but we are able to research what happened to The Royal Bucks Hussars during the war and hence get an appreciation of what happened to Ernest. The Regiment were mobilised shortly after war was declared and in September 1914 and came under the command of the 2nd South Midland Mounted Brigade attached to the 2nd Mounted Division. At the outbreak of war the 2nd South Midland Mounted Brigade was assigned defensive duties on the Norfolk Coast based at Fakenham. This was soon to change and in March 1915 the Division were put on notice for overseas service. The Division left from Avonmouth in early April for service in Egypt and by the 21st of April they found themselves in Alexandria. The following month they were to move south and set up headquarters in Cairo. It was clear the Division were expected to serve in the Gallipoli campaign.

Originally the Turkish, Ottoman Empire had taken a neutral stance on the war in Europe. This meant that the Russians, who were pressing the Germans on their western flank, could be serviced through the back door and their ports in the Black Sea via the Dardanelles. However once the Turks sided with the Germans and started mining the Dardanelles, this was no longer possible and the grave fear was that the Russian's would be starved of military support thus forcing their assault on the Germans to falter. To alleviate this situation Allied Command devised a plan to assault the Gallipoli Peninsula, force the Turks off the Peninsula and thus re-open the supply route through the Dardanelles and again back into the Black Sea. In April the Anzac's landed at Anzac Cove and the British and French at Helles. For many reasons the desired success of the original operation was not achieved and Allied Command were forced to conceive a second assault. This landing was to take place at Suvla Bay, just five miles north of the original landing, the objective being to join up with the troops in the south and then on a combined front force the Turks off the Peninsula. The second landing was planned for mid-August and the Royal Buckinghamshire Hussars were to be part of this offensive. Clearly mounted troops were of no use in the rocky peninsula terrain so on the 10th of August they were

reorganised, 'dismounted' and prepared for service at Gallipoli. The Division were moved by train back to Alexandria on the 13th of August and sailed the following day arriving at the island of Mudros, just south of the Gallipoli peninsular, on the 17th. That night they were landed at Suvla Bay.



The initial Suvla landings on the 9th and 10th August, had not gone well so a plan was hatched for a second assault to be made to dislodge the entrenched Turks on high ground to the east of the British beachhead at Suvla Bay. As it transpired this assault was to be the last major assault made by British troops during the Gallipoli campaign. From their entrenched positions high up on the hills above Suvla Bay the Turks commanded unimpeded views of British positions and hence had to be dislodged. The main objectives of the assault were to take and hold Chocolate Hill and then to advance and storm Scimitar Hill. It is not difficult to understand why these hills attracted their names. The soil

on Chocolate Hill was a dark brown colour and Scimitar Hill was said to be in the shape of a Scimitar. It was imperative that these two commanding high points be taken. In his book, *'Fighting for the Bucks'*, E. J. Hounslow writes about the initial failures at Gallipoli and that on 14th August of Lord Kitchener's intension was to sack all his senior officers as a result. Hounslow then continues 'What happened next was blind stupidity or pig-headedness from the British Commanders and for this, Hamilton [Sir Ian Hamilton, Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force] has to accept much of the responsibility. He reinforced failure by bringing up a war weary 29th Division from Helles and the inexperienced 2nd Mounted Division, which included the Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Dorset Yeomanry regiments, from Egypt'.

The 29th Division was given the task of storming the two hills with the 2nd Mounted Division held in reserve in the relative safety of Lala Baba on the far side of the Salt Lake. The attack was planned for late afternoon on the 21st of August when the sun would be setting and hence directly in the eyes of the Turks. This may well have been perceived as an excellent plan, unfortunately the sky was cloudy and the dazzling effect of the sun was not realised. In addition, the initial artillery barrage did not produce the desired effect on the well dug in Turkish positions. When the 29th Division advanced, the Turks were ready and cut them to pieces.

The 29th Division achieved the first Turkish trenches but when they advanced to the next trenches they were cut down by flanking fire. They were forced to retreat back to the first enemy trench around Chocolate Hill and reserves were called for. What happened next must have made for a stirring sight but for the British troops was fatal. At 5pm the troops of the 2nd Mounted Division were called forward from their reserve positions at Lala Baba. As darkness fell the Brigade emerged from their cover and started a long march across the Salt Lake toward the fighting. In open formation, rank upon rank of Yeoman advanced across the dried up lake. With no cover whatsoever they were an easy target for the enemy. It took one and a half hours for them to cross the Salt Lake and all that time under heavy fire, losses were dreadful. Led by their commanding officer Brigadier-General Lord Longford, they crossed no-man's-land and assaulted the slopes of Chocolate Hill. Past burning bushes and scrub, passing their fallen comrades, they surged on in a 'forlorn hope' charge. Despite heavy casualties they made and took the enemy front line. After regrouping the Brigade then made a second charge for the Turkish stronghold at the top of Scimitar Hill. They managed to overrun the heavily fortified position and achieved their objective but in the process had suffered grievous losses. They were in no position to hold the hill and eventually were ordered to fall back to Chocolate Hill in their rear. Brigadier-General Lord Longford lost his life that day as did nearly all the Divisions officers and sixty percent of the other ranks. What was left of the 2nd Mounted Division was quickly merged with other depleted Yeomanry Divisions in order to make one viable unit. Ernest Mitchell Meredith lost his life in this brave assault. It appears initially he was reported missing but later it was accepted that he had died on that day, the 21st of August 1915. His body was never recovered.



Memorial in Princess Risborough Church

Ernest's death is commemorated at the Helles Memorial, panels 16 and 17, on the Gallipoli peninsula. He is also commemorated on Princes Risborough Church memorial. For his brave actions on the 21st of August 1915 Ernest was awarded the 1915 Star, Victory and British War medals.

Britain had clearly lost a highly intelligent and capable young man but his family had lost a beloved son. At that time the family were not to know that before the war was over they would lose a second son, Arthur. Probate of Ernest's estate was resolved on

27th November 1916, his estate of £65 11s 10d was passed to his father James. A popular saying springs to mind 'Lions led by Donkeys', I need say no more.

