

Men of the Ox and Bucks Light Infantry

Hello, my name is **Oliver Glenister**. I lived at Heath End and was one of 15 children! Three of my brothers also fought in the Great War but I was the only one to die.

I enlisted in the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry in 1914 and as far as I was concerned it was the best regiment of the lot, and I wasn't the only one to think so because quite a lot of men from the village also enlisted with the regiment.

The Ox and Bucks raised 12 battalions during the war, and they fought on the Western Front, Italy, Macedonia and Mesopotamia.

Most of us men on the war memorial were members of the 2nd and 5th Battalions and we were the ones who went to the Western Front. **Ernest Wilks**, died in France along with **Ernest Barton** – they were both killed on the same day. **William Why, Edgar Lewis and Philip Adams** also died there. Poor William died at the Battle of Delville Wood only three days after arriving at the front. Then of course there was **William Rogers** who was killed at the Somme just a month before his brother Owen of the Hampshire Regiment was killed in Israel. You'll hear more about the Rogers boys later this evening.

I was sent to France in May 1915 – that was the year trench warfare commenced with both sides developing impregnable defences. At the Battle of Festubert in May the Ox and Bucks suffered almost 400 casualties – a huge number. Then the Ox and Bucks saw action at the Battle of Loos and took part in the subsidiary attack at Givenchy on 25th September with *another* 263 casualties! That was the day I was wounded and I was sent back to England to recover.

I went back to France in February 1916. That year we saw extensive service during the Battle of the Somme which lasted from July to November and I was wounded again on July 30th and sent to Rouen Hospital for 5 weeks before returning to the Front.

Fortunately, the New Year of 1917 brought with it a period of severe weather conditions on the Somme which led to an unofficial truce between 'us' and 'them'. More battles commenced at the end of March and the 2nd Ox and Bucks moved from the Somme and took part in the battles of Arras, Arleux and Passchendaele sustaining yet more casualties. Finally I had my first leave at the end of August 1917. Ten whole days which I spent at home! The Battalion then took part in the Battle of Cambrai at the end of 1917 which saw the first large-scale use of tanks by the British.

In March 1918, the regiment yet again sustained heavy casualties as part of the defence of the Somme that saw the Germans achieve significant gains. The 2nd battalion were in fact forced back across the old Somme battlefield to the 1916 line on the Ancre. On 21st March 1918 I wrote home to say I would be home on leave again soon but my luck ran out and I was taken prisoner three days later at a village called Villers-sur-Fleurs just behind Cambrai. I was reported missing that May and my family would no doubt have been very worried as to what had happened to me.

After I was captured I was taken to the Sedan-Osfeld POW Camp in North Eastern France. It was a very unhappy experience because the camp was run very harshly and severe punishments were meted out for any disobedience. I was told that some prisoners there had been executed. Certainly if we refused to do work which would support the enemy on the front line, such as rebuilding their trenches, we would soon find a gun aimed at us which had the effect of making us change our minds pretty swiftly. You see there was no one in authority looking out for us and all our officers were in another camp.

By now the food rations were very limited and we only stayed alive with the help of food parcels from families back at home and the Red Cross. Prisoners were expected to work long hours doing building work, or road or rail repairs and such like. If you were lucky you might get work on a farm where the food was a bit better than the chunk of bread made from bran and potatoes and the bowl of weak soup which we usually had to survive on.

Living conditions in the camps were usually very bad. It was not unusual when you first arrived to find yourself sleeping on an earth floor with your boots acting as a pillow and your trenchcoat as your blanket. Some poor fellows died of the cold. Others died from exhaustion because of the insufficient nourishment to work the long hours expected of them. Others, like myself died from the poor sanitation. Our toilet was just a simple pit in the ground with a plank on top with a hole in it. When the pit was full another one was dug. So diseases spread rapidly. And weakened by the poor diet we were in no condition to fight off anything that we caught.

I sent two cards to my family to say that I was a POW which I hope they received. I also wrote to my mother on the 5th October telling her that I was all right - I didn't want to worry them about the poor conditions, and indeed if the guards had found out that I had written anything bad about the camp I may have been severely punished. It was the last letter I was to write to her. I died of dysentery on the 29th October, two weeks before my twenty third birthday.

Apparently my family did not get to hear of my death until April the following year. I hate to think that I put them through so much worry.

5,878 officers and men of the Ox and Bucks Light Infantry lost their lives during the Great War. After the end of the 'war to end all wars', the regiment commissioned a war memorial to commemorate its fallen. It stands on Rose Hill in Cowley and was unveiled in 1923 and is now a grade II listed building. You should go and see it.

5 mins