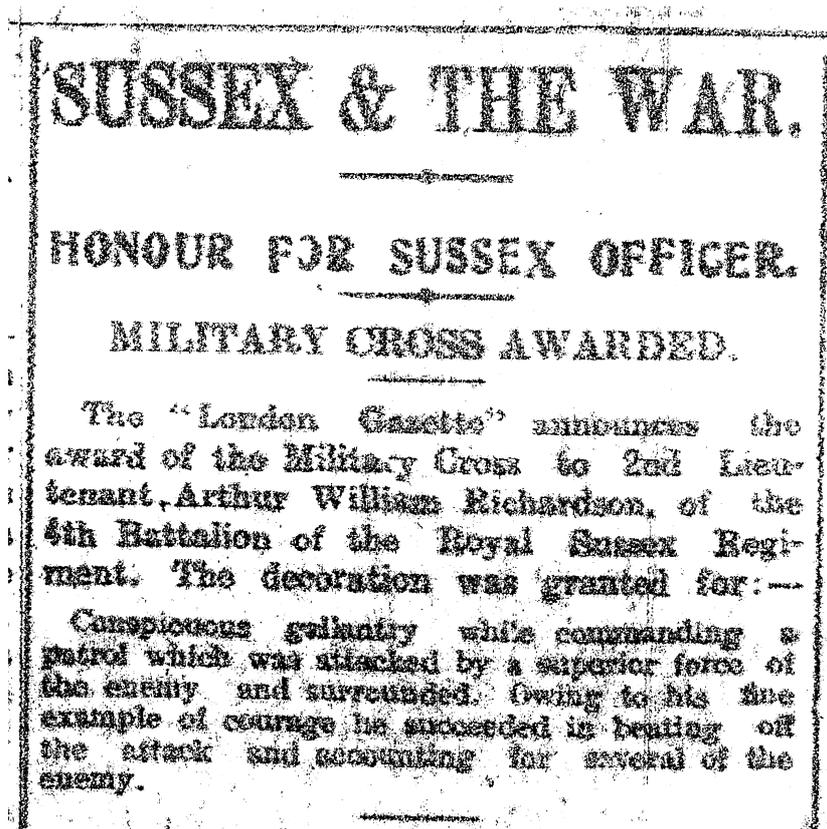


Arthur William Richardson



Sussex Daily News 9 December 1918

By Jaqui Ball

Summary

Captain Arthur William Richardson received the Military Cross for his part in the action at Kemmel, Belgium, in September 1918. His award was reported in the London Gazette on 9 December 1918 and in the Sussex Daily News of the same date (see title page.) This is the story of his heroic action.

Background

It has proved difficult to establish background details for Arthur William Richardson. His Service Records have not survived and it has not been possible to establish where he lived before the War or to find him conclusively in Census 1911. The only address I have for him is Wayside, Pembury where he lived after the war, but local historians have confirmed that he was not a resident of the village prior to the War.

Nevertheless, it has been possible to piece together some detail of his service life and the records held in West Sussex County Archives include his personal account, in his own handwriting, of the events of 1 September 1918 on the battlefields of Kemmel.

Details

Arthur William Richardson joined the Inns of Court Officer Training Regiment (OTC) on January 17 1916. The training of sufficient numbers of officers was key to the war effort and a number of officer training corps existed for this purpose. The Inns of Court OTC was originally part of the London Territorial Force and consisted mainly of men connected with the Law courts in the City of London and The Strand. The Corps came to Berkhamsted on 28th September 1914 and did not leave until June 1919. Around 14,000 men passed through the Corps with over 11,000 gaining commissions.

At Berkhamsted, the Inns of Court OTC provided basic and officer training. Subjects practised were route marching, map reading, digging trenches, wiring, bombing, musketry, field tactics and strategy which took the form of complete battalion exercises in open warfare. Lectures covered a whole range of subjects from leadership, billeting, welfare and trench sanitation.

According to the local *Gazette*, the Inns of Courts OTC dug 13 linear miles of trenches, mainly as a rehearsal for the forthcoming experience of real trench warfare on the Western Front and partly as fitness training for these young volunteers, some of them barely out of public school. The trenches were also to provide valuable experience in modern trench layouts, based on the real trenches in France and from hard lessons learned there.

Three Victoria Crosses were awarded to men from the Inns of Court OTC, besides numerous other decorations including the Military Cross awarded

to Arthur Richardson. A total of 2,147 men lost their lives and are commemorated by a Memorial, which stands on the Golf Course at the road junction from Frithsden Road into Berkhamsted.

An official history of the Corps, written by Colonel E.R.L. Errington in the 1920s provides some interesting details:

"The situation of our camp at Berkhamsted was ideal, pitched in the field on the north side of the station and sloping gently up to Berkhamsted Place. The Squadron, both men and horses, were in the Brewery. Lord Brownlow placed at our disposal his private waiting-room at the station and also a covered-in shelter, both of which were used for Quartermaster's office and stores. The proximity of the station did away with all transport difficulties. On the west side, we had ample room for expansion, and on the east side another large field, subsequently given the name of "Kitchener's Field", made an admirable drill ground. The surrounding country was the best imaginable for training, being so varied



Insignia of the Inns of Court Regiment
 Image from [Wikipedia](#)

... To the north lay the big common, later intersected by some 13,000 yards of trenches, then Ashridge Park, undulating and beautifully timbered, placed entirely at our disposal by Lord Brownlow, and so away to the open downland of the Chiltern Hills. To the south, hilly and enclosed land leading to Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons. To the east, farms and enclosures admirably adapted for night operations; and to the west the private grounds of Rossway and Champneys, always open to us; with woods, farms and enclosures to and beyond Tring. We went where we liked, and did what we liked. The big landowner, the small landowner, and the farmer were all equally ready to help.

If there was any trouble, Major Mead at once got on his horse, rode over, and smoothed things out. For the squadron, long treks without touching a road, wide movements, distant reconnaissance; for the infantry, wood fighting, canal crossings, river crossings, big fights on the open commons and downs, local fighting among the enclosures, every form of open training was available. In the neighbouring villages, Nettleden, Little Gaddesden, Aldbury, Ashley Green, Bovingdon, the awakened villager turned to sleep again with greater security when he realised that the outburst of firing, and the swift rush of feet through the village street, betokened nothing more than a night raid of the Devil's Own... As soon as we moved into billets the Rector, Mr Hart Davies, placed the Court House at our disposal for an Orderly Room ... Through the kindness of Lady Brownlow we were able to begin by using her hospital at Ashridge."¹

The Medal Rolls Index indicates that Arthur William Richardson joined the Royal Sussex Regiment and was sent to France on May 4 1917. There is no record of his early service career but the Record of Service of Officers in the 4th Royal Sussex Regiment records that he joined the Reserve

Battalion with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant on April 22 1918. Three months later, on July 31 1918 he joined the British Expeditionary Force and on August 5 1918 he joined the 4th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment, again with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant.

The papers relating to Captain Richardson, held in the West Sussex County Archives include his hand written account of the action at Kemmel, for which he was awarded the Military Cross and copies of Army Orders, dated September 26 1918 listing recipients of awards "for gallantry and devotion to duty in action."

This is Arthur Richardson's own account of the action at Kemmel, Belgium for which he received his Military Cross:

"On the evening of Sept 1st my company was ordered with others to go forward through another battalion and occupy a certain line. Advancing 800 yards we were held up by M.G. fire and snipers and found no support on either flank, the others having failed to come forward. The company therefore dug itself in – 1 platoon on the left, with Coy HQ in rear, my platoon on right of that and two platoons 100 yards in rear in support. About 4.30 a.m. 2nd I heard movement and crawling about for about an hour I found a party of the enemy about 20 strong in the right rear of my platoon about 10 yards from me. I crawled back to my 5-26 sections????and about turned them and ordered them to open fire – the enemy at the same time doing the same at 20 yds range. I called on my Lewis gun to give flanking fire but got no response, but No 9 platoon opened fire from my then right flank and the enemy ran. I got two with my revolver and my servant was shot through the head. The enemy used rifles, two automatic rifles and ?? bombs, but fired too high. I then returned to my Coy commander and was ordered to bring my platoon back about 20 yards to a trench. I then went out to do what I could for my servant – I found he was dead and brought in his personal belongings but was unable to get his body in. I then went out a second time and recovered one of my Lewis Guns, two ???part bags and 15 full magazines, my team having retired with the two support platoons, afterwards saying they had orders to do so. I tried to get out a third time to get identification of the enemy but owing to the no. of enemy snipers and M.G.s was unable to do so. One of my lance corporals was also wounded when my servant was killed. I had 7 boys, my servant, an old soldier and two others with me out of a total of 27."

The War Diary (RSR MSN 4/64) provides the following account of the action, first reporting that as of September 1st, the strength of the battalion was Officers 40, other ranks 919.

September 1st 4 p.m. Orders were received to advance through the L.N. Lancs who had reached a line BEAVER HAT N.23 – N23 central and occupy a line PETIT-BOIS WARSAW CRATER (N.24.c) The advance commenced at 5 p.m. and the leading company reached a line...it was not considered advisable to advance further owing to the presence of a large number of machine guns in Petit Bois and to the fact that the troops on either flank

had not come up. A number of patrol encounters took place during the night, but no serious fighting."

On 2nd September, the War Diary reports: "The line was held. Owing to its advanced position the forward company suffered considerable inconvenience from machine guns on either flank. The Battalion was relieved in the evening by the 1/1st Herefords and moved into Brigade reserveCasualties during these operations. Killed 2nd Lieut. BYRNE, 7 Other ranks. Wounded 2nd Lieut Mackelvey, 17 other ranks. Missing 1 Other rank.

The citation in the London Gazette of December 9th 1918 tells of:
"Conspicuous gallantry while commanding a patrol which was attacked by a superior force of the enemy and surrounded. Owing to his fine example of courage he succeeded in beating off the attack and accounting for several of the enemy."

Conclusions

Arthur William Richardson survived the War and returned to England a hero. His was a short but glorious war in many respects. It is fascinating to consider how much his officer training, in the trenches of Kitchener's Field in rural Berkhamstead helped him when under enemy fire on the battlefield at Kemmel.

His address on the Medal Roll is given as Wayside, Pembury and it is noted that his medals were sent to him there in 1922.

Arthur William Richardson's Military Cross is now in the Royal Sussex Regimental Museum.

References and Sources

RSR MS 4/86 September 1918 Papers of Captain A.W. Richardson, 4th Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment

RSR MS 4/64 War Diary 16 July 1915 – 1 August 1919 Typescript of official War Diary of the 4th Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment

RSR MS 4/60 Record of Service of Officers in 4th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment

British Army World War 1 Medal Rolls Index Cards

¹ "The Inns of Court Officer Training Corps during the Great War" by Francis Henry Launcelot Errington