

Harry and Ernest Aylmore

Brothers in arms



HMT ULYSSES – The ship that took them both to war
Courtesy Australian War Memorial

By John C. E. winch

Ancestry and Family.

The ancestry of Harry and Ernest reveals that their West Sussex roots go back well into and beyond the 18th century.

Their great, great grandparents were Willis Aylmore (1764 – 1842) and Ann LIGHT (1770 – 1852) who, together with their 14 children, were a family living and working at Newtons Farm, West Wittering, West Sussex (WS)

The 1851 census shows that one of Willis and Ann's sons, William, has left the farm and turned to the sea for his living and the census gives him as a Boatman and Tideman (one who rows his boat out to meet incoming ships) for H.M. Customs, based at Customs House West Itchenor, which can be seen today facing the estuary.

William married Leticia Letsey TERRY on 18 December 1826 at West Wittering and had a total of 13 children (William and Leticia are buried in West Itchenor churchyard, where the headstone is just about legible).

One of William and Leticia's sons was Porter Hero AYLMORE born January 1834 West Wittering, WS.

His first marriage was to Caroline Towes on the 1st March 1859 and they had seven children.

Following Caroline's death (January 1879) Porter married Mary Sophia Stark BLANN 3rd May 1879 and they had nine children. This makes a total of 16 children, two more than his father and grandfather, which shows that between them they created quite a dynasty.

Porter Hero becomes a coastal mariner and later in 1901 the census shows him as master mariner with two of his sons Alfred mate and Percy crew.

The second son of Porter Hero AYLMORE and Caroline was Porter AYLMORE, born February 1861 West Itchenor WS, who started his working life as a mariner.

On the 5th December 1881 he enlisted into the Royal Sussex Regiment at Chichester. He served in Egypt and India and was involved in the Black Mountain expedition of 1888. Following his discharge on the 4 December 1893 he went back to sea.

The fourth son of Porter was Willis AYLMORE born 9 February 1869 in West Itchenor, WS. He did not go to sea but worked on the railways and ended his working life as signalman at Ford junction WS.

He married Fanny Isabel ENTICKNAP on 13 May 1895, at Lyminster church and they had seven children. Harry being the eldest, born on the 27 February 1896, followed on the 14 March 1898 by Ernest. Both were born in Wick, WS.

On the 1901 census, they are with their parents, living at Norway Cottages, Wick, WS.

In the 1911 census they are at 8 North Street, Wick, WS. Harry is an assistant grocers boy, whilst Ernest is still at school.

In 1915 the family are living at Wallaby Cottage in Beaconsfield Road, Wick, WS. ¹

Military chronicle.

The brothers responded to the 'call to arms', but whether they presented themselves at a recruitment meeting in Littlehampton at the same time is not entirely clear.

The AYLMORE family believe that the brothers first went together, probably on the 3

Feb 1915 and whilst Harry was accepted Ernest was turned away being under age. However, there is compelling evidence to suggest that Harry may well have already been a territorial in the Royal Sussex Regiment (RSR).

Subsequent research at the West Sussex Records Office revealed a Roll of Non Commissioned Officers (NCO's) and men, from the 1/4th RSR, who left the UK and landed at Suvla on the 8th August 1915. In the section for 'D' company it shows that 1813 Pte AYLMORE H, enlisted 3 February 1914, which is well before the commencement of the war.

Similarly consulting a reference to the formation of the 4th Battalion RSR and the allocation of soldiers army numbers, states that this Territorial battalion was formed in April 1908, with the headquarters at Horsham.

By February 1914 it had been divided into eight companies. 'F' company having drill stations at Ashington, Littlehampton and Storrington.

It also states that the service number 1813 would have been issued to a man who joined about February 1914. ^{2 3}

Therefore, Harry probably found himself called for active service with the 1/4th Battalion of the RSR at an early stage of the war.

However, determined not to be thwarted Ernest presented himself at a recruitment meeting on 29th April 1915.

He lied about his age, giving his brother Harry's date of birth, thereby suggesting that they were twins.

Therefore on the 29th April 1915 Ernest underwent his Attestation into the 1/4th Battalion of the RSR at Littlehampton and thus from the 1st May 1915 started his engagement as No. 3226 - Private AYLMORE E. ⁴

Harry AYLMORE

Unfortunately Harry's service records were, like many others, destroyed during the Second World War. However, it has been possible to piece together a brief picture of his service.

As previously shown Harry is with the 4th Battalion of the RSR and the events regarding this battalion before he went into active service, shows that at the outbreak of war in August 1914, the eight companies mentioned above were brought together as one battalion.

The 4th became Army Troops in the Home Counties Division Territorial Force. At the same time the 4th became the 1/4th Battalion, and a 2/4th and 3/4th were also formed later on.

On 24 April 1915 the 1/4th battalion was posted to the 160th Brigade, 53rd (Welsh) Division in Cambridge.

On 17 July 1915 the 1/4th Battalion embarked, at Devonport, on HMT 'Ulysses' (see picture on cover) to join the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF).

On 28 July it arrived at Alexandria, where it left for Port Said on the 30th. It arrived at Port Said the next day, and left for Gallipoli on 4 August 1915, arriving off Mudros Bay on 7th August. ⁵

There is no record of his time in the Balkans, however, it is very probable that during 1916 he was wounded and was returned to the UK.



His medal card states that he entered the Balkan Theatre of War on the 3rd August 1915.

It is well documented that at the end of 1916 an Army Council Instruction was promulgated regarding the renumbering of Territorial Force infantrymen. By 1 March 1917 these measures were to take effect.

The four figure army numbers, that were allocated at the outset, were changed to six figure numbers.

Harry's four figure number (1813) originally allocated was not replaced by a six figure number by RSR, therefore it can be safely assumed that he was with RSR whilst he was hospitalised and up to March 1917.

Following his period of hospitalisation he is transferred to the 17th Essex Regiment (ER) and is given a six figure number 400947.

Harry AYLMOORE

Kind permission of the Aylmore Family

The AYLMOORE family contacted the Essex Regiment (ER) museum at Chelmsford in February 2011 to enquire as to when Harry might have joined the 17th ER, their reply is as follows:-

I regret that that there is little that I can tell you about your man other than that he was born at Lyminster and lived and enlisted at Littlehampton. The Medal Index Card at the National Archives has him as entering the Balkan Theatre of War on 3 August 1915 with the 1/4th Royal Sussex Regiment. This unit landed at Mudros and then went on to the Gallipoli Peninsula on 9 August.

I can't say when he transferred to the Essex Regiment but his Essex number is for the 17th Essex Regiment which was based on the North Norfolk Coast near Weybourne. He may well have been posted to this unit and then passed over to another, such as the 4th (Reserve) Battalion which was at Halton Park, Wendover, prior to August 1917 and thereafter at Crowborough, Sussex.

Other information regarding the 17th Battalion is that on the 1 January 1917 the 67th provisional Battalion became the 17th ER. It had been formed in June 1915 from Home Service personnel. They had moved to Weybourne by July 1917. Therefore, from the above it would seem that Harry joined the ER sometime between March and July 1917.

We know that he was passed on to the 9th Battalion of the ER who took part in the Cambrai Operation.

This being one of the first battles to fully utilise Tanks, expectations of a successful campaign, amongst the military hierarchy, had been high. However, as often happened unforeseen forces conspired against them and many men perished on the field of battle, unfortunately Harry AYLMOORE was amongst those Killed in Action. ⁶

Part of his Memoriam reads - Died on the 20 November 1917 aged 21. ⁷

The AYLMOORE family found that the engraving of Harry's name, on the Louverval War Memorial, had been incorrectly spelt, the 'L' had been omitted. The grandnephew of Harry went to great lengths in providing legal documents to have the Commonwealth War Graves Commission have the name altered. It now stands out corrected on the wall panel number 8. The Family visited the Louverval memorial in 2007 and have left a photograph of Harry (that shown above) together with a dedication.

In passing it is worth noting another fact that the Aylmore family chanced upon. A local man from Cambrai, Philippe Gorczynski, decided that more should be done to create a fitting memorial to all those who were involved in the Battle of Cambrai. To this end he has created a new memorial, sited on a hill and overlooking the valley where the battle commenced on the 20th November 1917. This being outside the village of Flesquieres. He has also created a Tank Museum with artefacts found in the area, including a British tank used in the battle. More information can be found by searching his name on the internet.

Ernest AYLMOORE

It would seem that Ernest, like many other young men, fired up with patriotic fervour and having lied about his age declaring that he was 19 years and 1 month, wanted to join his brother and fight the good fight. He seems to have been lucky for the aforementioned Roll of NCO's and men who left the UK, shows that 'D' company included 3226 Pte AYLMOORE E. However, it also indicates that he was 'left behind in Egypt'.

Fortunately, we do have Ernest's service documentation, which gives us a more detailed account of his time with the MEF. The more significant events are as follows:-

- 17.7.15 - Embarked for MEF on HMT Ulysses from Devonport.
- 14.8.15 – Disembarked Port Said.
- 5.8 15 – Encamped Alexandria.
- 17.8.15 – Embarked on HMT Canada at Alexandria.
- 30. 10. 15 – Joined 1/3 W.F.A. for duty. Servant to Lt. Borrer – Gallipoli.
- 17. 11.15 – Rejoined unit – Gallipoli.
- 19.12.15 – Disembarked 'Haverford' at Alexandria & encamped Beni Salama Egypt.

From this date until 3.8.16 he appears to have been in various places in Egypt including El Agba and Ismailia, and at sometime incapacitated. However on this date he rejoins the battalion at El Ferdan with whom he remains until the 26.3.17 when he is reported as being 'Wounded in action' at Gaza.

He had received gunshot wounds to the face and left leg and was returned to Cairo on the 1.4.17.

He is returned to the unit 10.8.17 where he remains until 17.6.18 when he embarks on H.M.T. Maliva at Alexandria and disembarks at Taranto, Italy 22.6.18.

From his records it is not clear as to his movements from this day until he is shown to leave Boulogne France for Shorncliffe UK. ⁸

However according to some family papers he was at Soissons, Mount Kemmel & Wytshaete Ridge and Lys.

He is finally demobilised on 13. 3. 1919.

His conduct sheet shows that he was not ecstatic about army discipline as he has a number of offences for insubordination. However, considering he was still a teenager is not altogether surprising.

For his service he was awarded the 3 British campaign medals, referred to by some as Pip Squeak and Wilfred i.e. The 1914 - 15 Star, British War Medal and The Victory Medal.

Conclusion

Many of those who served in the Great War carried the burden, that the trauma had inflicted on them, for the rest of their lives. Ernest seems to have coped better than most with this aspect. However, he was left with a much bigger affliction to bear for the rest of his life.



The gunshot wound to his head left him totally deaf whilst the leg wound did not seem to have any lasting effect on his mobility.

Remarkably he was able to make light of his misfortune by giving an account of how he came to be wounded in this way.

It seems that having suffered the gunshot wound to the leg he was left to await for the medics to arrive and treat him as necessary.

Impatient for their arrival he foolishly put his head up above the trench to see if they were coming and was hit in the face by a snipers bullet.

He was also known to offer a 'look at his leg wound' should the topic of the war be broached.

Nevertheless, the deafness did have a major impact on his quality of life.

Ernest AYLMORE

Kind permission of the Aylmore Family

He never heard his children, grand children and other family members voices, and naturally could not communicate with those nearest and dearest. This manifested itself in intense frustration and he would resort to shouting. However, for the most

part he was very cheerful and optimistic. His daughter – in - law explained he would make people laugh with his acute sense of humour. After his demob he worked for the railways, carriage cleaning, but this did not last long and he then became a labourer on building sites. Interestingly, during the Second World War he would travel daily up to London to assist with bomb damage clearance. Having been a hard worker throughout his working life, when he retired he turned his hand to gardening. He married twice firstly in 1927 and had two children a daughter and son. His first wife died in 1960 and he remarried 1961.

Even though he was a heavy smoker he lived to the ripe old age of 92 passing away in 1990 only a few miles from where he was born.

Acknowledgements

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¹ Ancestry UK Birth Marriage & Death Records and England Census 1841 to 1911 . - <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>

² RSR4/72 Roll of NCOs and men who left UK & landed at Sulva Bay 8Aug 1915 held at the West Sussex Records Office Chichester.

³ <http://armyservicenumbers.blogspot.co.uk/2009/05/royal-sussex-regiment-4th-battalion.html>

⁴ Ancestry UK Military Records. - <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>

⁵ <http://battlefields1418.50megs.com/4sussex.htm>

⁶ http://www.1914-1918.net/TF_renumbering_infantry.htm

⁷ Commonwealth War Graves Commission web site - <http://www.cwgc.org/>

⁸ Ancestry UK Military Records. - <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>