

Sergeant Harry Wells VC, 2nd Battalion the Royal Sussex Regiment (1888-1915)



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By Chris Loader

Harry Wells VC was born in Herne Bay in Kent in 1888, the son of Samuel and Emma Wells. Wells was born into a poor family background the son of an Agricultural Labourer. In the 1891 Census, Wells was living in Kent in the village of Herne with his family, it seems that the area that Wells grew up in, was very lower class, with poor wealth and a large family he had a tough childhood growing up in rural Kent. In 1901 the census showed that the Wells family had moved from the village of Herne to another village close by called Hoath. By 1901, Harry was the eldest and responsible child of the Wells family as some of his siblings had died as children. Even though Wells had not been in the army by 1901 the signs of him winning a VC can be seen by looking at the 1901 census. The Victoria and George Cross association believe that servicemen from difficult upbringings where responsibility as a child occurred especially of a family is a key characteristic shared by many Victoria Cross winners and this was a theme uniting some of the recipients. Between 1901-1914, little is known about Harry Wells it is known that he served as a reservist in the Royal Sussex, and was a Police Constable in the Kent Constabulary. However with the outbreak of the First World War, Wells was called up to serve in the 2nd Royal Sussex and headed for the Western Front. Wells saw action in the early encounters of the war with the 2nd battalion at Aisne and Ypres. In 1915 at the battle of Auber's Ridge after the 2nd Battalion had suffered heavy casualties Wells was promoted through the ranks to Sergeant. However it was at the Battle of Loos that was the most important for Wells. On the 25th September 1915 was the day that Wells died and earned his Victoria Cross the London Gazette, the official recorder of all Victoria Cross winners described the circumstances which Wells received his VC. "For the most conspicuous bravery near Le Rouloire on the 25th September 1915. When his platoon officer had been killed, he took command and led his men forward to within 15 yards of the German wire. Nearly half the platoon were killed or wounded, and the remainder very much shaken, but with the utmost coolness and bravery, Sergeant Wells rallied them and led them forward. Finally when very few were left, he stood up and urged them forward once more, but whilst doing so he was killed. He gave a magnificent display of courage and determination". Wells was awarded the VC posthumously and as a result gave the ultimate sacrifice for his men and country.



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This painting of Wells is a depiction of the action which gained him the VC made famous by Ernest Ibbotson.



This is the grave of Harry Wells who is buried in the Dud Corner Ceremony in Loos in Belgium. Wells' legacy still lives on with him being inscribed on the Herne Bay memorial in Kent and a street named after as well in Herne.