

## Percy Thomas Wooding

By Daniel Dawes – Great, great, nephew



Percy was born in April 1892 in Turvey, Bedfordshire <sup>[1]</sup>, but soon relocated with his family to Royston, Hertfordshire. By the time of the First World War, Percy was living in Banyers Lodge and working as a Barman in the Banyers.

In December 1915, Percy volunteered to join the army under the Derby Scheme, attesting in Hitchin on December the 10<sup>th</sup> at the age of '23 years 8 months'. His medical examination that day in Royston described him as being '5 feet 7 inches' in height, 146 pounds in weight and as having 'good' physical development. After attestation in Hitchin, Percy was placed in Section B Army Reserve in Group 6 (for unmarried men born in 1892), and returned to Royston.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1916 Percy, along with the other men in Group 6, was mobilized and assigned to D Company of the 4<sup>th</sup> 'Extra Reserve' Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment with service number 20628. Percy was stationed at Landguard Fort in Felixstowe, Suffolk, where he completed his basic

training. Percy returned to Royston in April 1916 to marry Deborah Walford, with the service taking place on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month at the St John's Baptist Church. With Deborah, Percy lived at 13 Huntingdon Terrace.

On 26<sup>th</sup> June 1916, Percy was transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment (which was also stationed at Felixstowe), adopting the service number 23432. Less than a week later, on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916, Percy was sent to the 25<sup>th</sup> Divisional Base Depot in France.

From the 25<sup>th</sup> Divisional Base Depot, Percy was deployed to the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment— a unit which had suffered heavy casualties at La Boisselle. It is uncertain when Percy joined the battalion, but it is likely that it would have been on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1916 when the regimental war diary stated that '28 other ranks', joined the unit.

Percy's battalion completed several tours of trenches in the Somme region in August, suffering dozens of casualties. On August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1916, Percy once again found himself on the frontline in trenches at Ouiller-La-Boisselle. Percy did not complete this tour, as on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1916 he was shot through the left forearm. Percy was one of 6 men killed and 56 men wounded in the battalion between the 29<sup>th</sup> of August and the 6<sup>th</sup> of September. Percy was evacuated from the frontline and was taken back to England to the County of Middlesex War Hospital Napsbury, St Albans.

Percy spent the next 123 days in Napsbury War Hospital recovering from his wound. He was not discharged until the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 as, according to his hospital record, an "infection affected [his] recovery". During his time in hospital, Percy's wound was reported in the 'Herts and Cambs Reporter' on Friday the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1916:

Private Percy Wording, of the Manchester Reg., elder son of Mr. and Mrs. Thos. Wooding of Royston, was wounded in the left arm on Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup>. He arrived in England on Sept. 7<sup>th</sup> and is in hospital in Napsbury, near St Albans, where he is making satisfactory progress. He was employed by Mr. James Howard, and enlisted in December 1915, and was sent out to France in July of this year. He is a married man, and his wife is living at 13, Huntingdon Terrace, Royston. Mr. and Mrs. Wooding's other son is in the Herts. Yeomanry, and has been serving in Egypt, but has since been transferred to France.

Percy was mistakenly believed to have been attached to a battalion of the Manchester Regiment, presumably by the hospital staff at Napsbury. This mistake was not realised until January 1917 when a Major of the RAMC at Napsbury wrote to the Infantry Records Office in Preston, saying:

*With reference attached af.w3076, this man was understood to be attached to the Manchesters Reg. It is now found that he was attached to the L. N. Lances. The error is regretted.*

By January 1917, Percy was once again deemed fit for duty, and was given leave in Royston from the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 to 17<sup>th</sup> January 1917 – the last time he saw his wife and parents.

His service record stated that Percy returned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment at Felixstowe on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 1917 and remained there for a number of months. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1917 Percy committed the following offence, after being given only a “2 days pass”:

Overstaying his pass from 9.30 pm and remaining absent until reporting himself at 8 pm on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April (3 days).

Percy’s trial took place on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1917, and he was given the punishment of “7 days CB [confined to barracks]”.

Shortly afterwards on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1917, Percy once again embarked for France to the 25<sup>th</sup> Divisional Base Depot. From there, he returned to the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion at some point between the 18<sup>th</sup> April and 6<sup>th</sup> May when the unit was stationed near Neuve Eglise. His service record detailed him as then being transferred to the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1917. The 10<sup>th</sup> battalion had suffered badly throughout April having taken part in the Arras Offensive. This offensive resulted in 21 officers and 478 other ranks reported killed, wounded or missing (according to the battalion war diary).

May proved a fairly quiet month, consisting mainly of training exercises. The battalion moved into the frontline on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 1917. The five day tour was an eventful one which is detailed in the battalion diary. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, a night-time patrol revealed a German working party digging trenches about 250 yards ahead of the British line. Upon the return of the patrol, Lewis guns were immediately opened up on the area concerned. On the next day, a six man patrol ran into about 20 enemy soldiers digging trenches; “bombs were at once thrown and took effect, but the patrol had to retire owing to the vastly inferior numbers”. Later that evening, another patrol identified two “dead Germans in a shell hole, both of whom had been shot in the back”; these were casualties of the earlier skirmish. An epaulet was taken of one of the dead men and the soldiers were identified as having belonged to the 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Foot.

June also proved a quiet month, with the battalion staying out of the trenches. A stint in the frontline near Kemmel featured an eventful raid by two platoons of the Loyal North Lancs on the 23 July 1917. At 07:00, the raiders advanced towards Rifle Farm with the object of capturing prisoners and gathering intelligence, but they came under heavy machine gun and rifle fire. The war diary stated that the raid was successful, even though the battalion suffered 8 men killed and 21 wounded.

Percy was in and out of the frontline throughout August, which incessant rain had turned into “one big mud heap” (as entered in the war diary on the 26<sup>th</sup> of that month). Aside from sending out regular working parties and enduring enemy shelling, the battalion diary suggested that the men had little to do during their time in the line. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1917, at 01:00, the Germans launched a particularly heavy artillery barrage on the trenches while the battalion was being relieved. The diary entry recorded,

Heavy shelling with mustard gas and shrapnel and H.E. We have to keep our helmets on for some time. Impossible to get through the barrage.

The battalion retired to Corunna Camp and remained there for the next week. The men were inspected by Brigadier-General Irvine on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, and by the Divisional General on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Fighting kit was issued to the men on the 20<sup>th</sup> in preparation for a move into the line. Two days later, on the 22 September

1917 at 17:30, the battalion was ordered to relieve the 1<sup>st</sup> Cambridgeshire Regiment in the trenches. While moving up to the front, the battalion was caught by shellfire. Percy was seriously wounded, along with two officers and nineteen other men, and was evacuated to the advanced operating centre at Westoutre which was staffed by the 63<sup>rd</sup> Field Ambulance RAMC. Percy died the next day on the 23 September 1917 and was buried in the village churchyard.

Percy's death was not reported in the Herts and Cambs Reporter until the 7 December 1917. Percy's widow, Deborah, was sent his personal belongings which was listed in his war record as including "1 identity disc, letters, photographs, cards, 1 pipe, 1 pocket book, silver watch, chain and locket, 1 belt, 1 tobacco pouch, 1 cigarette case (silver mounted), 1 leather wallet". Deborah was awarded a pension of 13 shillings 9 pence a week which took effect on the 8 April 1918 – six and a half months after her husband died.

Deborah never remarried and lived in Royston for the rest of her life. She died in 1971 at the age of 82.



PRIVATE PERCY T. WOODING.

Private Percy Thomas Wooding, of the Loyal Lancashire Regt, elder son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Wooding, of Royston, was wounded in action and died in France on September 23rd, 1917. Private Wooding, who was 26 years of age, was a married man and his wife is residing in Huntingdon Terrace, Royston. He enlisted under the Derby scheme in February, 1916, and was sent out to France on 1st July, the same year. He was wounded in the left arm on Sept. 3rd, 1916, and was in hospital at Hemel Hempstead for five months. He was sent out again to France on 18th April, 1917.

*Reprinted from the "Herts. & Cambs. Reporter" of December 7th, 1917.*

