

Private Francis George Kellow

Private Francis George Kellow Service Number 36984, who no doubt was related to the many Kellow's that had lived over the past century in Teffont and at the time of the 1911 census his family was living in the first cottage, known as Cookes Cottage today (Figure 1) on The Street.



Figure 1 - Cookes Cottage Teffont

He was born in Teffont, son of George and Beatrice Kellow, as were his seven siblings and by the age of 13 he had left school and was employed as a farm labourer. He may very well have worked on the same farm as Private James Mould, who in 1911, was a carter on a farm.

Using the same technique that we employed for James Mould, we can say with a reasonable degree of certainty that Francis Kellow arrived at the Worcesters Regimental depot (Figure 2), from the Wiltshire regimental depot around 13 October 1916, after enlisting in Salisbury.

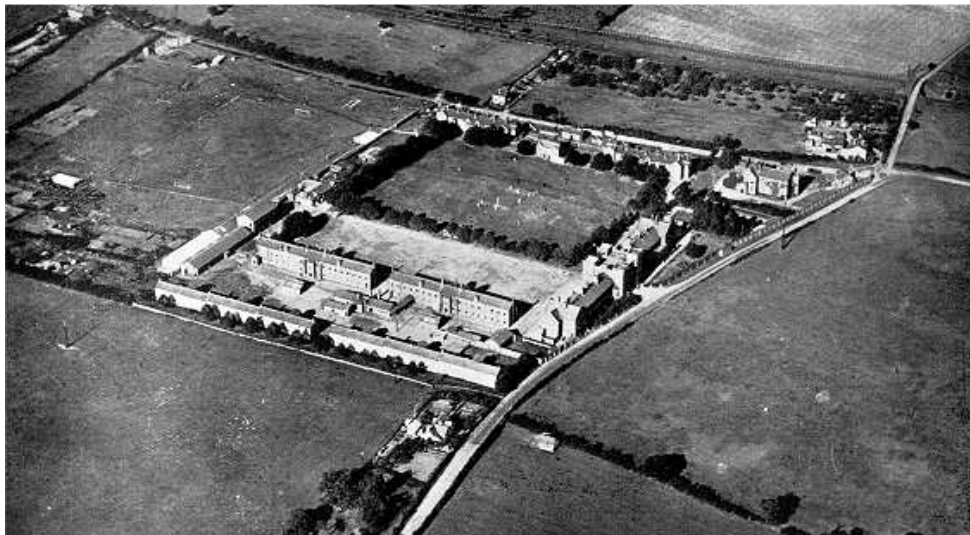


Figure 2- The Worcestershire Regiment Depot Norton Barracks (c1930)



Figure 3 - Norton Barracks Today

The majority of those arriving at this time and with similar Army numbers were actually deployed to France in about mid-March 1917. It would seem that those destined for the 10th spent at least a month in the Infantry Base Depot Rouen (Figure 4 and 5), because records show that the 10th Battalion received no reinforcements until late April and mid-May 1917.



Figure 4- YMCA Hut at a Rouen Base Depot

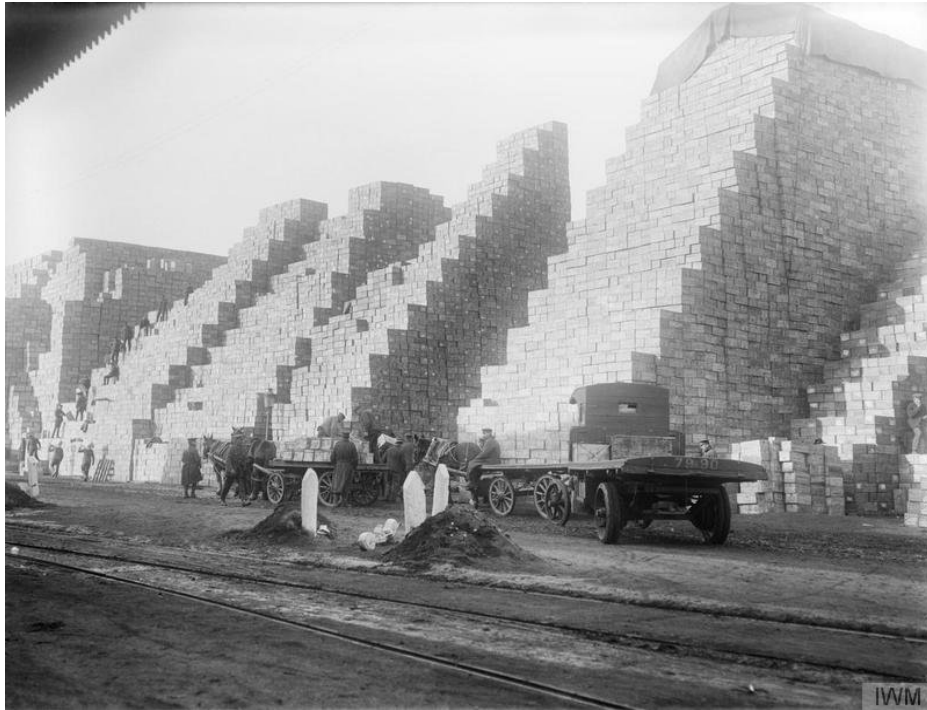


Figure 5- Rouen Rations Supply Depot

We can say, I believe, with some certainty that Francis Kellow would have been in the 10th Worcestershire's by mid May 1917.

If so he would have undergone a period of training with the Battalion, followed by a spell in the trenches and then on 7 June his first major battle, that of the Messines Ridge which a year later was to be the location of his death. His Battalion was in reserve but what would have had the greatest impact upon him was the detonation of the enormous mines that preceded the attack. Quoting from the Worcs regimental history:

"Suddenly all other sounds were drowned by the most appalling explosion (Figure 6) ever known on a battlefield. Under the enemies trenches 19 great mines exploded like so many volcanoes. That awful and unexpected explosion paralysed the troops in the British front-line. The whole ground heaved and shook and even the war hardened veterans were for a moment unnerved. Deafened and blinded by the storm around them the leading platoons reached the shattered mounds (Figure 7) which represented the German front line trench. Very few of the enemy remained in the front-line, and those survivors, utterly, bewildered at once surrendered. In seven minutes the front line had fallen without a blow."

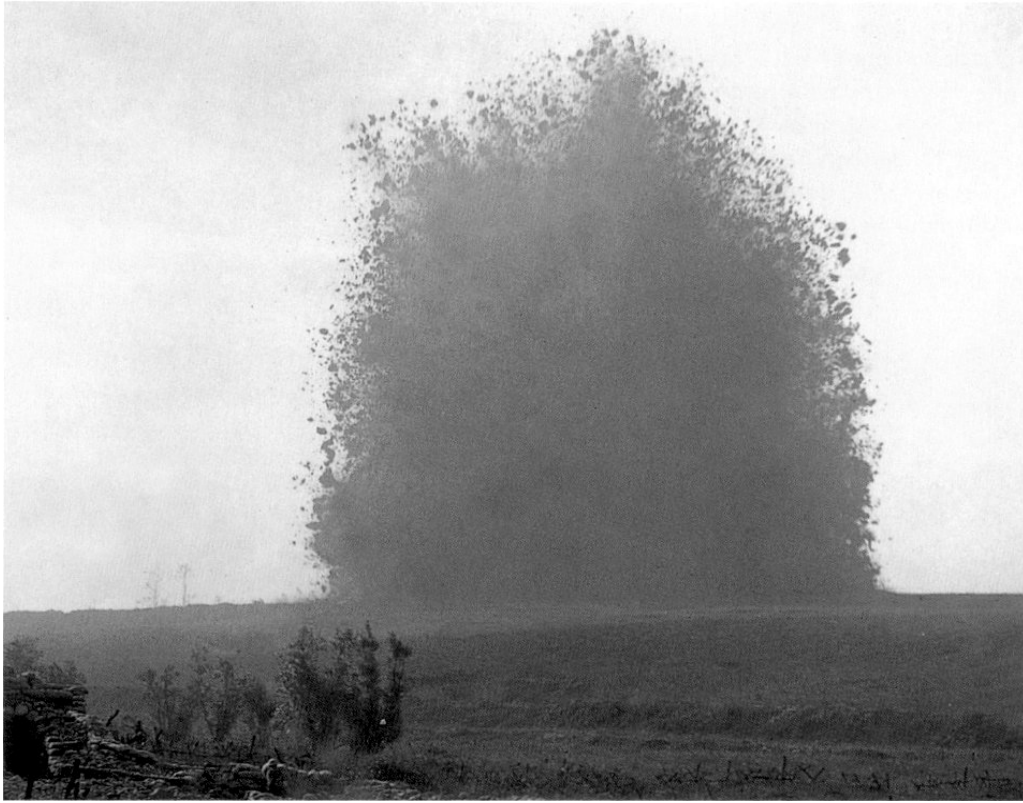


Figure 6 - One of the Messines Ridge Mines Exploding (Early hours 7 June 1917)



Figure 7- Messines Ridge Mine Crater (10,000 Germans Died in the 19 Mine Explosions)

The 10th Worcestershire's were pushed through from the reserve and achieved all their objectives for the loss of 70 casualties.

By 1917, the British had developed a system of front-line trenches, support trenches and reserve trenches. Battalions rotated regularly every few days through one of these lines of trenches and reasonably frequently would be withdrawn out of the trenches for rest and training. The 10th Worcestershire's routine followed this pattern and moved every couple of days, frequently returning to previous locations.

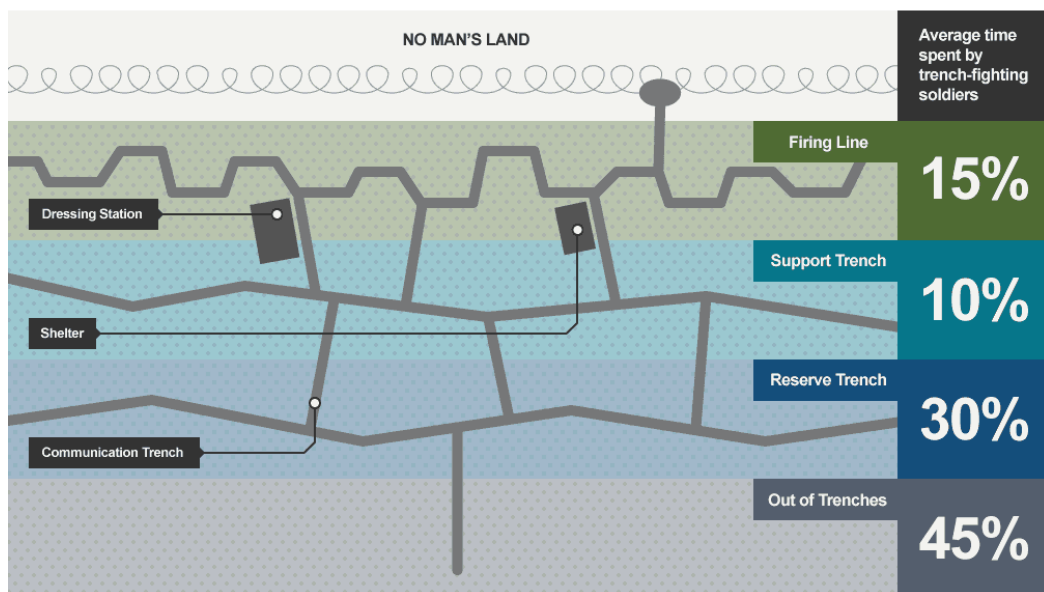


Figure 8 - Trench Rotation System

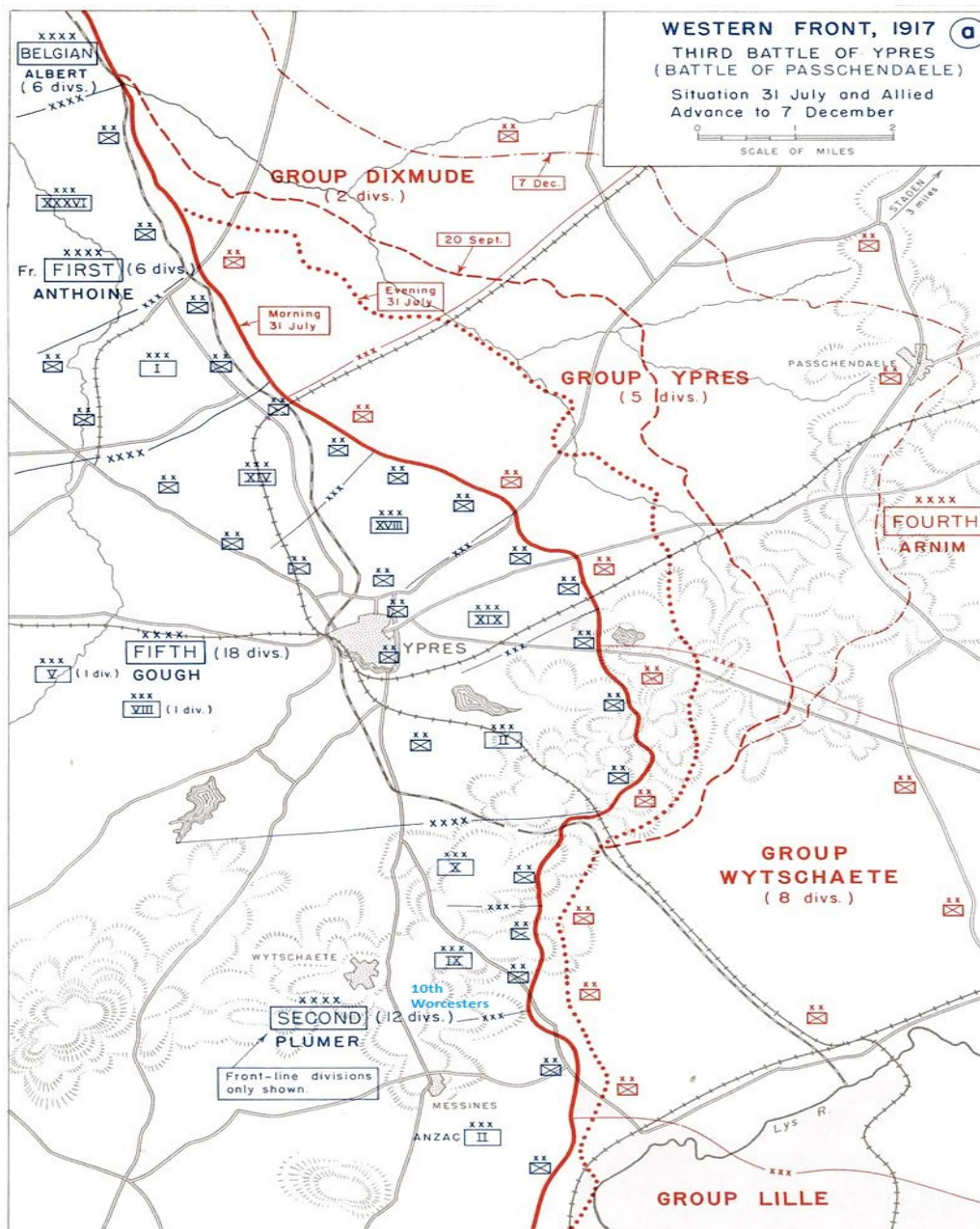




Figure 10 - Menin Road Battle Casualties



Figure 11 - The Mud!

Three and half months of the 3rd Battle of Ypres and after 250,000 casualties the furthest gain was about 4 miles.



Figure 12- Passchendaele Village (Aerial View Before & After the Battle)

At the beginning of December, the Battalion was moved south to the area of Albert and the location of the Somme. January and February 1918 followed the pattern of rotating between the trenches, recuperation and training. Whenever in the trenches there was always a steady trickle of casualties.

By mid-March there were clear indications of a major German offensive and the 10th Worcestershire's were in trenches to the South West of Cambrai. In the early hours of 21 March the attack came with an enormous bombardment, including gas and for the next five days the Worcestershire's fought a fighting withdrawal with great gallantry, slowing the enemy considerably until west of Bapaume. There is no record of the casualties sustained by the Battalion, but they must have been considerable and Francis Kellow, one must assume took part and survived this terrible onslaught. The Worcesters' brigade was withdrawn into reserve and in order to recuperate was dispatched northwards to their old stamping ground south of Ypres. They departed from Doullens station where the gallant little remaining band of the 10th Worcesters were selected to

represent the Brigade and were closely inspected by His Majesty King George V, so there is a very good chance that Francis Kellow would have met the King, albeit in an inspection line.



Figure 13- The King Inspects at Doullens 30 March 1918



Figure 14 - The King and Train Departing Doullens

What was supposed to be a period of recuperation turned out to be jumping from the frying pan into the fire as the second great German offensive kicked off in the Ypres area just 10 days later.



Figure 15- German Spring Offensive 1918

At this point we turn to the regimental history of the Worcestershire Regiment for an account of The Battle of Messines, 1918.

The 10th Worcesters were holding a sector of the front line east of the Messines Ridge. The three weak battalions of the 57th Brigade were covering a front of about 3,400 yards. The front and the support lines of defence consisted of isolated posts, neither strong enough nor sufficiently well manned to ensure a long resistance. The reserve line was somewhat stronger, but even that was only a line of half-completed redoubts, not yet connected by a continuous trench. Worse still, the wide front of the Brigade absorbed every platoon of the three weak battalions in the mere occupation of the defences, leaving no reserve available for counter-attack.

MESSINES 10TH APRIL, 1918

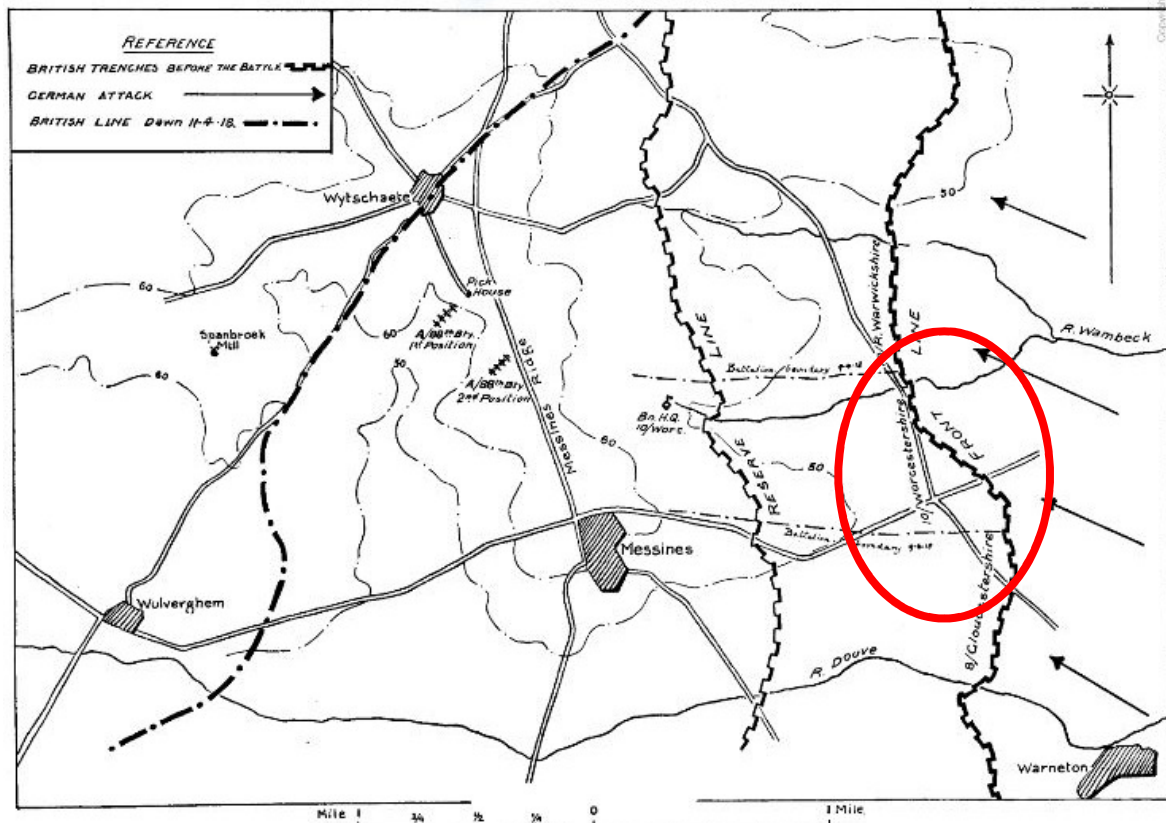


Figure 16 - Situation 10 April 1918

Dawn of April 10th was shrouded in a thick white mist. The first light had hardly found a way through that mist when, at 5.30 a.m., a terrific barrage crashed down upon the defences of the Battalion. For half-an-hour the storm raged! Then behind their curtain of bursting shells the German infantry came flooding forward. On the front held by the 57th Brigade, the German attack was made by no fewer than thirteen battalions; two of which were "Stosstruppen" or Storm-troopers (Figure 17) picked fighting men specially trained.

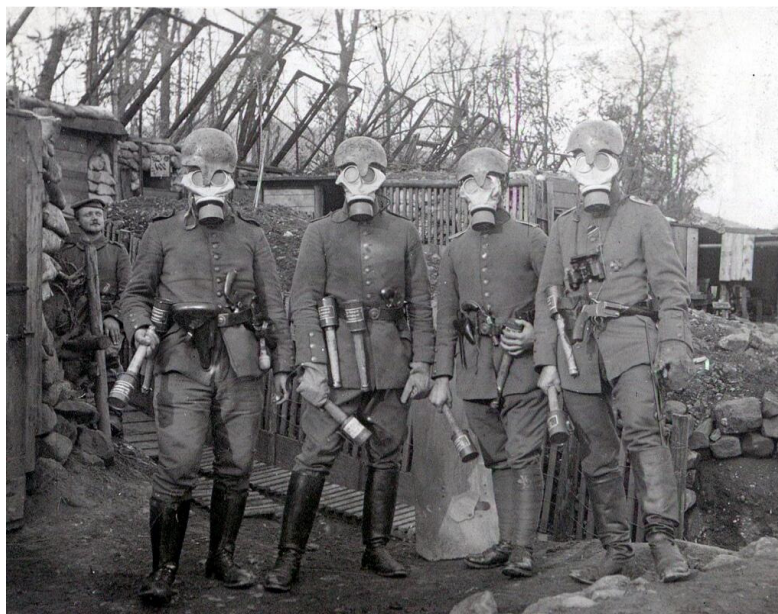


Figure 17- German 'Stosstruppen' Storm Troopers

The dense waves of the attack poured forward in the mist, surged through the gaps between the defensive posts of the British battalions, and then flooded over the defences from flank and rear.

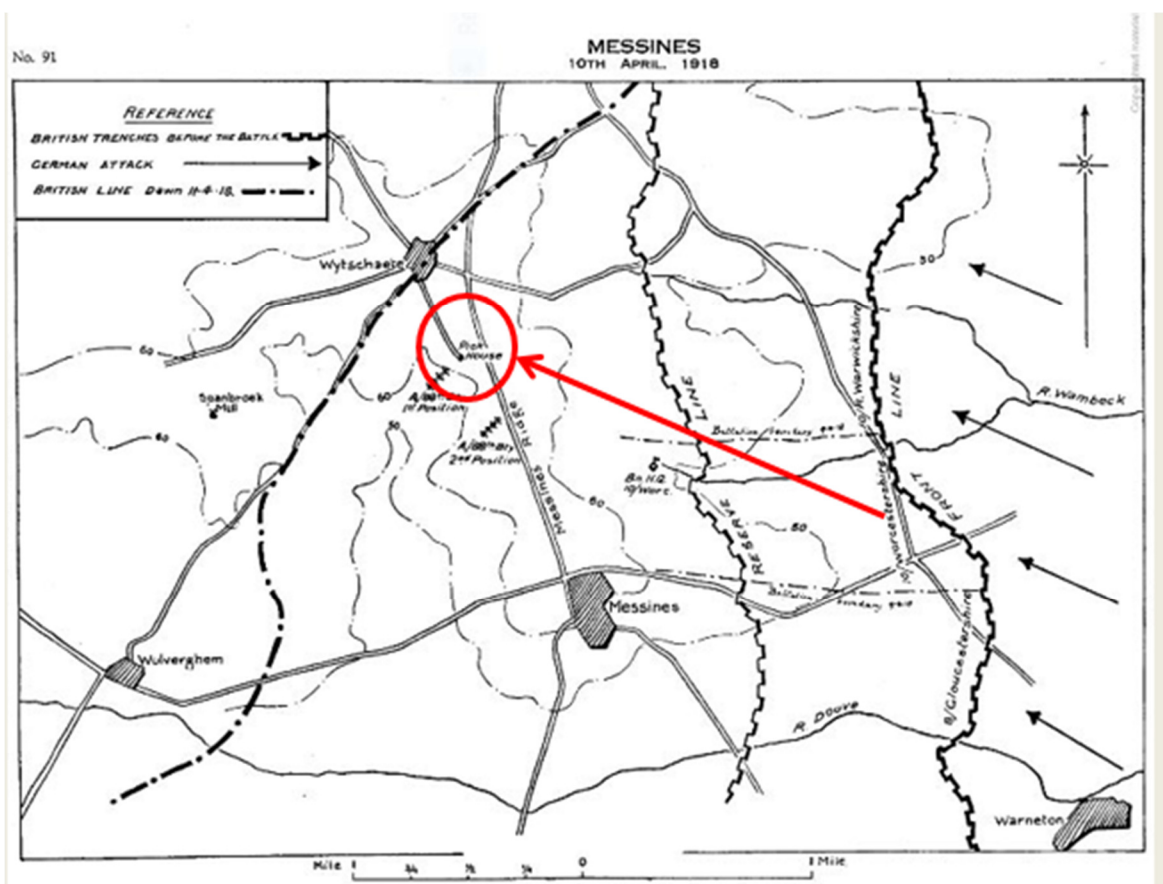


Figure 18- 10th Worcesters Fighting Withdrawal 10 April 1918

There were many desperate struggles in the mist as the little groups of defenders fought back-to-back until finally overwhelmed. The regimental officers went down fighting at the head of their men. After all the officers of the two forward Companies had fallen, Company Sergeant Major S. W. Brush and Company Sergeant Major F. Yeates took command and inspired the remnant of their men to resist as long as defence was possible. Inspired by such leaders the platoons fought on, selling their lives at bitter cost. Soon after half-past six the last defences of the forward zone had fallen and the enemy came crowding up the slope through the fog to storm the reserve trenches of the Brigade. Those trenches had already suffered severely from the bombardment; but their garrisons held them desperately fighting 'to the last man against great odds. Eventually the sheer weight of the attack carried it forward. The grey wave swept over the reserve trenches, killing most of the defenders and breaking the line. The survivors fell back as best they could through the mist up the slope to the crest of the Ridge. In the centre of the Brigade line some fifty leaderless soldiers of the 10th Worcesters made their way up to the high ground south of Pick House.

At the summit of the Ridge those hunted stragglers met an unexpected reinforcement. A British field battery, "A" Battery of the 88th Brigade Royal Field Artillery, had originally been in action on the reverse slope south-west of Pick House. Warned by the bombardment and knowing the weakness of the line east of the Ridge, the battery commander, Captain Eric Dougall, M.C., had boldly run his guns forward on to the crest of the high ground, to give close support to the troops in front. The sight of the ordered battery rallied the retreating soldiers. They closed in on the guns, turned about and threw themselves down in some dismantled trenches on either flank. Captain Dougall took command of the little force, lent them his battery Lewis-guns, armed his spare gunners with rifles and sent them to aid the defence.



Figure 19- Captain Dougall VC & Remnants of the 10th Worcesters

The pursuing Germans came stumbling up the slopes through the mist. The guns blazed out over open sights at point-blank range. The stricken enemy fell back, reorganised and moved to encircle the battery; but the survivors of the 10th Worcesters opened, rapid fire, and the advance was checked. The mist, which hitherto had crippled the defence, now proved their salvation, veiling the battery from the enemy's overwhelming artillery. No shells struck near them, although the battery position was soon swept by the fire of the enemy's rifles and machine-guns.

Despite the bullets the gunner captain walked about as though on parade and calmly gave his orders. "So long as you stick to these trenches I will keep my guns here," he said to the Worcestershire lads; and thus encouraged they held firm. Attack after attack was repulsed. At that short range the effect of the gun-fire was very great, and the attacking enemy hung back, waiting for reinforcements or for the mist to lift; but providentially the mist hung low along the Ridge during the whole of that dull day. The morning passed, noon passed, afternoon drew on towards evening, and still that lone battery and its little group of supporters held the crest of the Messines Ridge.

Behind them a new line of defence was being formed with desperate haste. Wytschaete village was securely held, and a new line had been established from that village southward to Wulverghem.

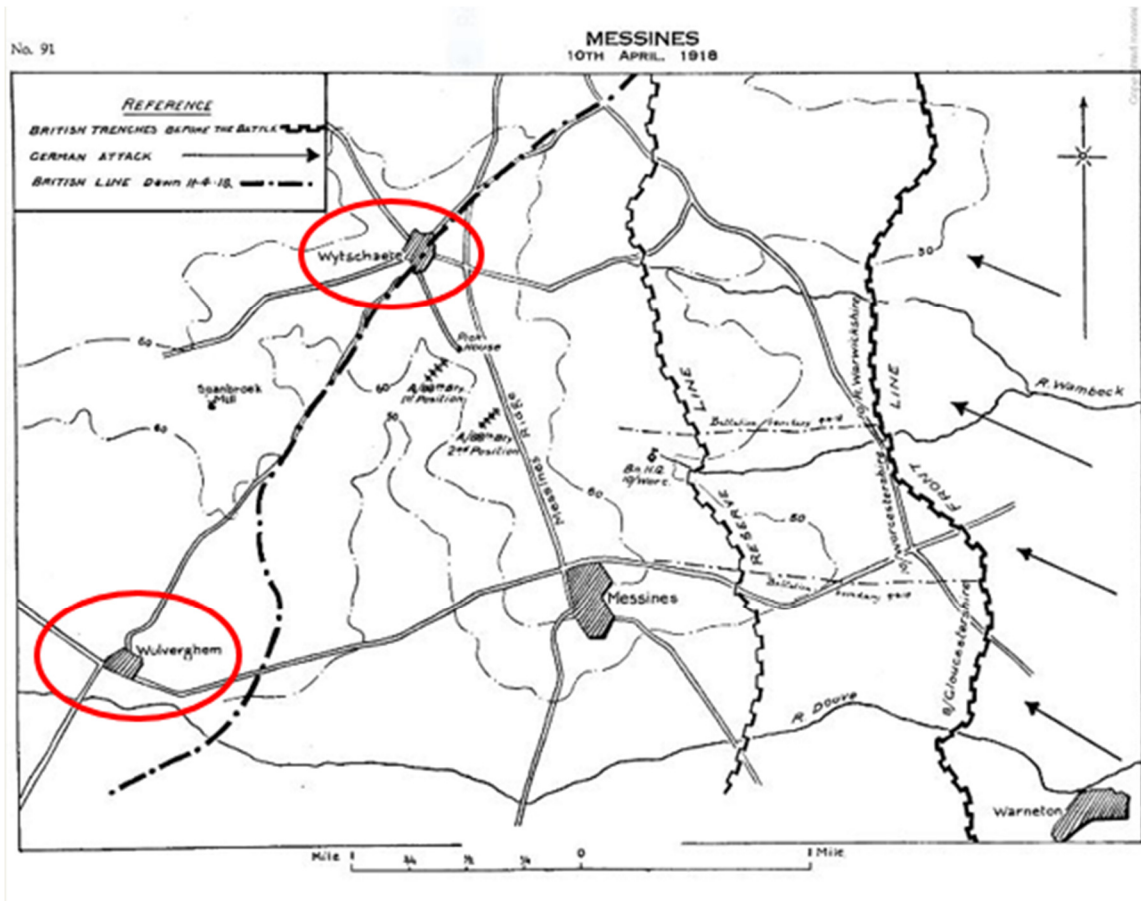


Figure 20- New Defensive Line 10 April 1918

The crest of the Messines Ridge could safely be relinquished. Dusk closed in and orders came to withdraw. The guns of Captain Dougall's battery were manhandled out of their position and down the shell-torn slopes. The survivors of the 10th Worcesters covered and aided that withdrawal till the guns had been worked back to the road behind. Then the battery limbered up and rumbled off into the darkness, and the little party of tired foot soldiers tramped away to search for the Headquarters of their Battalion.

Captain Dougall's fine defence with the 10th Worcesters actually saved the 19th Division from destruction, and Captain Dougall was awarded the Victoria Cross. Unfortunately he was killed a few days later; and, in view of the heavy fighting and continuous losses of the following weeks, there seems to be little hope now of learning the identity of any of those brave men who, under his command, so well maintained the honour of the Worcestershire Regiment.

While we have no way of knowing for sure, there is a possibility that Francis Kellow played a part in the fighting withdrawal to Pick House, or indeed its defence. What we do know is that he died on that day 10th April 1918 age 20 and his body was never recovered. He is commemorated in the Belgium Tyne Cot Memorial on panel 76 (Figures 21, 22).



Figure 21- Tyne Cot Memorial

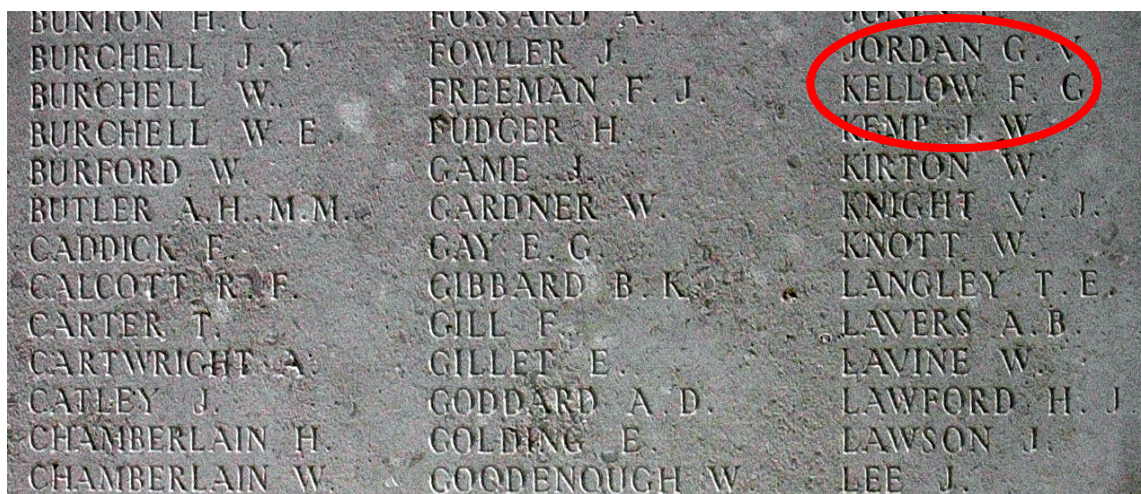


Figure 22- Tyne Cot Memorial Panel 76

PRIVATE
FRANCIS GEORGE KELLOW

Service Number: 36984

Regiment & Unit/Ship
Worcestershire Regiment
"B" Coy. 10th Bn.

Date of Death
Died 10 April 1918
Age 20 years old

Buried or commemorated at
TYNE COT MEMORIAL
Panel 75 to 77.
Belgium

Country of Service United Kingdom

Additional Info Son of George and Beatrice Mary Kellow, of Teffont Magna, Salisbury.

COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES

We are in the process of collecting an
image of this casualty's headstone

Today we salute gallant men from Teffont who made the ultimate sacrifice.