

Charles Edward Cordwell



Man Behind The Name Project

Edward Young 9A1

About Charles Cordwell



Charles Edward Cordwell was born in 1901. He was born illegitimately, to his mother (Elizabeth Ann Cordwell, born 1868) who was a domestic housemaid. He never knew who his father was (and neither do we). Due to the job of his mother, he had to be raised by his Aunts. He died in 1981 at the age of 80.

He was a very private man and never spoke about his time in the war, but when he was on morphine before he died he started to open up and speak to his daughter telling her stories from the war.

We aren't too sure when he enlisted. We think he enlisted around 1918 because on his discharge papers it shows his birth date to be 1900 which we know to be false so he must of lied about his age (See Below).

This wasn't unusual for young men to join up. Over 250,000 under-18s joined up, but so many under-18s were turned down so it is amazing how some enlisting officers accepted these young men into the army.

I know he served abroad, but this was only in a 'clearing up role'. This means that he didn't see any combat, as he was stationed in a



You can see the enlisting date of 1900 if you look closely.

How The War Broke Out



The years leading up to the war were quite strange. Britain had a humongous Empire. Spreading from Africa to Australia, Asia to India. They also had lots of allies. The allies were from Europe and they were strong. Russia, France, Spain, Belgium, to name a few. Britain couldn't have been in a better position.

Germany on the other hand was stuck between France and Russia, two of the biggest nations in Europe. Germany did have the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but Bosnia and Serbia were in the way. Could this be a problem for Germany? Germany did have a long term plan though that seemed like it was going to be effective. It was called the Schliffen plan.

The plan was to go through Belgium and to get to France. Defeat France and then focus on Russia. Germany thought Russia would take weeks to prepare their army. This plan was meant to give Germany the upper hand for when the war broke out. Except this plan didn't really work. The plan that was devised in 1897 failed on 30th July 1914, when Russia mobilized their army, as the Germans had been held up in Belgium for longer than they had wanted. Soon Germany and Russia declared war on each other, along with Britain as they had sworn on oath to protect Belgium. The Germans plan had failed miserably.

Another big arguing point about the outbreak of the war, was the assassination of Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand on the 28th June 1914 by Bosnian extremists in the capital city of Bosnia, Sarajevo.

Bosnia and the Austro Hungarian Empire had always been enemies due to wars and politics, and when this happened it created a massive knock-on effect. Franz Ferdinand was the heir to the Austro Hungarian Empire, who happened to be the enemies of the Bosnians and Serbians.

After the assassination it then also came out that Serbia had supplied the weapons for the assassination. The Austro Hungarian Empire then retaliated by invading Serbia and Germany supported them. When this happened the Schliffen plan came into action. Europe would never be the same again.



About The Regiment

My Great, Great Grandad was part of the Liverpool Scottish Regiment. The Regiment was relatively new when war broke out, as it had formed



in 1900. In the first year of recruitment there were 805 men who were part of the regiment. The idea was (to start off with) to have a regiment focused on Scottish men who lived in the Liverpool area. This Regiment was similar to the London Scottish Regiment.

The Regiment that my Great, Great Grandad joined was a unit of the Territorial Force which had its Headquarters at 7 Fraser Street, Liverpool (street plan from 1906 below).

This battalion had 8 companies in it (A-H). Companies had 80-250 men in them.



When the war broke out, the first three days of mobilization were dealt with swiftly. Soldiers were given equipment, health checks and inspected, all to prepare them for fighting. It was all a mad panic to

get everything ready. Captain Harrison (Transport Officer) had to collect horses for the K.L.R (Kings Liverpool Scottish). He collected a lot of horses but in the end he had to give them to the regular battalion.

Leading up to the 7th August all the soldiers stayed at their homes, but then a message came through from the headquarters that all ranks should parade at once.

Once the soldiers were there hard training took over. Training from 6:45-4:30 usually started with an hour of physical training. The training was similar to other Regiments as it included marching around Sefton Park (close to the headquarters), weapon training, drills, lectures and basic medical skills. Apart from this, the soldiers had to get supplies on and off ships that came into the Liverpool docks.

On 2nd November 1914 the 10th battalion were mobilized and preceded to France. They landed at Le Havre and joined together with the Liverpool Scottish 3rd battalion. When the 1/10 went to France they were one of the very first Territorial Forces to do so. They sailed to France aboard the S.S Maida, which can be seen below.



There was a couple of ways you could join the army. You could volunteer at the age of 18, and then at the age of 19 you would've been sent abroad. Or like in the latter parts of the war you could be conscripted.

This was basically when you were forced to join. In 1916 conscription was introduced to all healthy 18-41 year olds and a few months later

married men started to be conscripted. If you refused to fight for religious reasons, you were called a conscientious objector.

Over 750,000 men appealed against being forced to join up and most were granted exemption of some sort. Only 2% of the men who appealed were conscientious objectors and despite the legacy of that group some of them were sent to prison (over 6,000). 35 received death sentences but these were removed for 10-year prison sentences.



Uniform

The uniform did change over the years. At the start of the war caps called 'glengarrys' were worn on the heads of soldiers (see top left). These glengarrys had the regimental badge on the top of the hat (see my Great,



Great Grandads below). This Regiment wasn't the only one to wear glengarrys as most kilted regiments wore them until 1916 when steel helmets were used for protection.

The steel helmets wouldn't protect you from bullets, but it would protect you from shrapnel and other dangers in the trenches.

Kilts were worn in the trenches. Some kilts would have khaki aprons on top of them for warmth and protection. The bad thing about the kilts was when they got wet the tartan took a while to dry, which created problems in winter when the damp areas around the edge of

the kilt would freeze which meant it would cut and chaff soldiers legs.

On the leg, boots were worn with puttees (wrap around cloth strips that offered protection). When the regiment first went to France they wore civilian shoes with gaiters. As you can probably tell, the soldiers didn't have much protection against cold and damp. Unfortunately for soldiers, they wouldn't have boots until 1915, which created problems such as trench foot (will go into later). The soldiers would also have their entrenching tool (e.g spade and shovel), a few days of emergency rations (with a water bottle), their Lee Enfield rifle (the British had been using these since November 1895) with a bayonet and basic equipment such as spare socks, mess tin, greatcoat. All of the basic equipment was stored in a pack. When weighed all this equipment came to about 61lbs. However, spare boots and some underwear was left in a soldiers kitbag at the base in care of the store man.

Officer's uniforms differed little from those of regular soldiers. Unlike regular soldiers, officers would have bought their own uniform that would have been tailored to them. On the cuffs there would have been rings that were braided to represent his rank. The pocket buttons were covered in leather and above these pockets were where the officer would keep his holster for his pistol and where his whistle would hang. The officer would use his whistle to signal to his men for an attack. He would blow on it when he and his men would go over the top of the trenches. Next to his whistle he would have had a gas mask. This mask would protect you from all sorts of gas such as mustard and chlorine gas. As you can see from the photo below there is also a lot of different pockets and straps. These were to carry rations and other supplies like bullets and other ammunition.



The reason you carried rations was because fresh food was difficult to get to the trenches. It would take (on average) 8 days for a fresh piece of bread to get to the trenches, by that time it was stale. Sometimes an officer would have body protection from a bulletproof vest that was worn underneath their tunic. In an attempt to keep officers warm in the winter they would also be given big winter coats, normally with sheep or goat skin. Officers were expected to carry a compass with them at all times. They also would have had a telescope or binoculars on their belt or in a pouch. Officers were armed with a sword and a pistol. The choice was left to the officer, the only requirement being that it had to carry Government ammunition.

At the start of the war soldiers got a pound of meat and bread and eight ounces of vegetables a day but during in the later stages of the war there started to be a food shortage. In 1917 there was a meat shortage and instead of getting a pound of fresh meat you would get 6 ounces of bully

beef (now known as corned beef). If you were on the front line you were even unluckier, as the chances are you got less than that.

Maconchie's meat stew and hard biscuits was one of the meals that soldiers ate, though it wasn't the nicest of meals. Most of the meat was fat and the biscuits were rock hard. Along with the fatty meat the soldiers were given fruit that was rotten and old which made soldiers ill.



What Charles Edward Cordwell did?



We aren't overly sure what role my Great, Great Grandad played in the First World War, as we don't know if he did fight in the trenches. We do know that he was positioned in Antwerp in the year 1918. He could of seen action but he could of also been involved in a clearing up role. We think that he did feature in the clearing up role as we think he would have been too young to fight. You can also see him pictured above with some of his friends at the camp that he was based at.

We don't have lots of information on the camp, but I will try to explain from what I've been told.

Antwerp was the headquarters for the Liverpool Scottish. It was easy for all the shipping to be done because there was a shipping port in Antwerp. The camp itself was where all the equipment would've been kept when the troops were coming off the front line.

When the Armistice was declared on 11th November 1918. Most troops were stationed in the base at Antwerp for 10 months before the majority of them got demobilized in England on the 14th

September 1919. The feeling around the camp was one different to what it would have been on the front line of the Trenches. Men would have drills like training but there was more time to relax, and enjoy the moment. Soldiers would play Tennis and organize football games to play between battalions. In Antwerp, the soldiers performed ceremonial duties as well as handling all the material and equipment that needed to be taken back to Britain.



There were also many horses to care for, all of which were kept underneath tin huts. Theses huts spread over a great distance. Men also stayed in well made barracks for the duration of their stay.

The ceremonial duties varied depending on the time you stayed in Antwerp. One of, if not the biggest ceremony was the funeral of Captain Fryatt. He was British mariner who was executed by the Germans for attempting to ram a U-boat in 1915. He was captured and court martialed in 1916, although he was civilian non-combatant. After the funeral in Belgium, his body was took back to England and reburied.



Also when the regiment were serving in Ypres, they were there when the whole town got flattened, including the Cathedral like building. It

was said that If you stood on one side of Ypres, you could see the Germans trenches on the other side, due to it have being flattened by shellfire.





Trenches



As you can tell from the picture above, the trenches were a hard place to be. The average life expectancy of a soldier in the trenches was a tiny 6 weeks. Over 6,000 men died (on average) per day in the trenches, you can already tell from these statistics that it wasn't a nice place to be at the best of times.

As said by Colonel A.M McGilchrist "there was no trench system, the frontline was the only line, support trenches did not exist." This was correct at the start of the war, but as the war started to move on, and the war was turned into a stalemate trenches started to become stronger and heavier fortified. This was when systems started to come into play.

In 1915 the design of the trenches had been improved. It was now split into three main parts. The main communication and the reserve trenches. The main trench was the front line. It had a fire step to shoot from. Trench boards which were wooden slabs with a sump to collect water. The top of the trench was called the parapet. It was dangerous to put your head above the parapet and that was the main cause of death for new soldiers. The only protection on the parapet were sandbags, aimed to stop bullets. On the back of the trench there was a machine gun post. This was the most important defensive feature, and the most feared. In front of the parapet was the place where most men's lives ended prematurely. No-mans land. We will go into this in more detail later. Due to the stress that the soldier was put through, you would've only spent up to a week on the front line.

About 100m away from this trench were the communication trenches. This was the part of the trench where soldiers could be quickly deployed to the front line if they were needed. Think of it as a place where soldiers were stationed to be ready to fight. You would spend 3 weeks in this trench.

300m behind the communication trench were the reserve trenches. This was where the new recruits spent there opening 8 weeks. Food, ammunition and weapon depots were also kept behind this trench, along with artillery.

All trenches after 1915 had a zigzag design. This wasn't so it was just aesthetically pleasing; it also served an important purpose. If an explosion went off it would mean that the damage would be limited as there was dirt in the way, unlike in a straight trench, where the explosion would destroy most of the line.

However, in 1918 trench systems were no more. This was due to increased mobility and the lack of manpower. The once amazingly effective trench system became disconnected, with gaps spanning over 400 meters.

Trenches were roughly about 35 yards apart. This meant if there was any damage, it had to be repaired at night. This was a dangerous job as you would've of been constantly being shot at by enemy snipers who "wore the same uniform and managed to crawl up close". There was also a lot

going on around you. A quote from Frank MacDonald's war diary stated that "we saw an air battle today, a bosche (German) plane was brought down in flames".

If you were un-lucky enough to get wounded in no-mans land, the chances are that you wouldn't get back. As you can see from the picture above (taken by a member of the Kings Liverpool Scottish regiment) no mans land was full of destruction and devastation. On the picture you can see dead and wounded soldiers on the battlefield, and if you look closely towards the right hand side of the photo you can see a flag in the ground. This was to signal how far the soldiers had got, so the man at the front would pick up the flag and place it to the furthest place he got to, though it wasn't that easy.

Before the war no mans land would've been the same as any other patch of ground, green with lots of life, but that all changed when the war started. Shellfire and dead bodies filled the ground, and after each battle the bodies would be collected and buried. Sometimes there wasn't enough time to bury the bodies, so they had to be disposed of differently. Frank MacDonald said in his diary that they didn't have time to bury the German bodies after a fight, so they had to be burnt instead, sad but war was.

The tactics that were in place during the war were stupid. Sides used to take it in turns to run at each other with nothing other than machine guns, this was real fear. Men were viciously cut down and when they did capture another trench it has been a great sacrifice. The reason it was real fear was because as the men clambered up the ladders into no mans land, they knew they might not make it back.



One man who was part of the Kings Liverpool Scottish regiment was Noel Chavese. He was a British medical doctor, and also an Olympian. He was rewarded with the Victoria Cross, which was a medal for heroic action. When he was awarded it in 1916, Chavasse was hit by shell splinters while rescuing men in no-man's land. He got as close as 25 yards from the German line, where he found three men and brought them back to the trench throughout the night under a constant rain of sniper bullets and bombing. He performed similar heroics in the offensive at Passchendaele to gain a second VC and become the most highly decorated British officer in the war.

Unfortunately he died of his wounds in 1917. Another thing that Noel Chavasse did was make sure that everybody in the regiment would change socks often, this was in the hope that it would prevent trench foot, and it did!

If you were lucky enough to get back to the trenches, the conditions weren't great. When the mud got thick, the trenches clogged up and filled with water. There are some tales of people drowning when they slipped into water that could be up to 2 foot high.

If you were killed in the trenches, your body would've been buried either in a hole with other dead bodies, which sounds brutal but it would've had to be dealt with quickly or buried in a cemetery. That would very rarely happen and it would only happen if you were an officer. Most men whose bodies were found would've of had a headstone and this would have been put in a big cemetery/ memorial with lots of other headstones. Unfortunately if your body wasn't retrieved, or they didn't know who the body belonged to there was nothing that could have been done except have your name engraved on a memorial. Your family would have been sent a notice saying that you had been killed and action, and that was the end of it. At the end of the war when the armistice was signed, approximately 16 million people had died.

Another way that you would've of been killed is if you had run away from battle, or deserted. It basically meant that you had run away from battle for a few reasons. It could have been because you were suffering from shell shock. This meant that all the loud noises and the things that

you had seen would have made you body almost paralyzed. We now know it as post traumatic stress disorder.

If you were caught you would have been sentenced to death by a firing squad. The problem with this was that you would have had your own friends shooting at you, and if they didn't kill you they would have been in trouble. It wasn't until 2006 when all 306 men who were killed for desertion or 'being a coward' were pardoned.

At the End Of The Great War



“Then there were big parades in honour of France and Belgian, we marched down streets strewn with flowers between thousands of cheering people. We have had leave. I managed to get Paris Leave and Home Leave and in June I even wangled a few extra days and went down to the Meuse and on to Luxembourg. Now all this is finished and in a few days time I shall be demobilized, then it is back to the land again, I wonder how I shall take to civilian life again”

Those are the words of Frank Macdonald describing the end of the war. Everyone who was part of the Kings Liverpool paraded around the streets, including my Great, Great Grandad. When the soldiers got demobilized in 1919, the thing on everyone's mind was thank God it's over.

Bibliography

Bbc.co.uk

www.warhistoryonline.com

ww1facts.net

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk>

liverpoolscottish.org.uk

The Liverpool Scottish 1900-1919

By A.M McGilchrist

Special thanks to Major Ian Riley for all his knowledge and helping me with my research.