

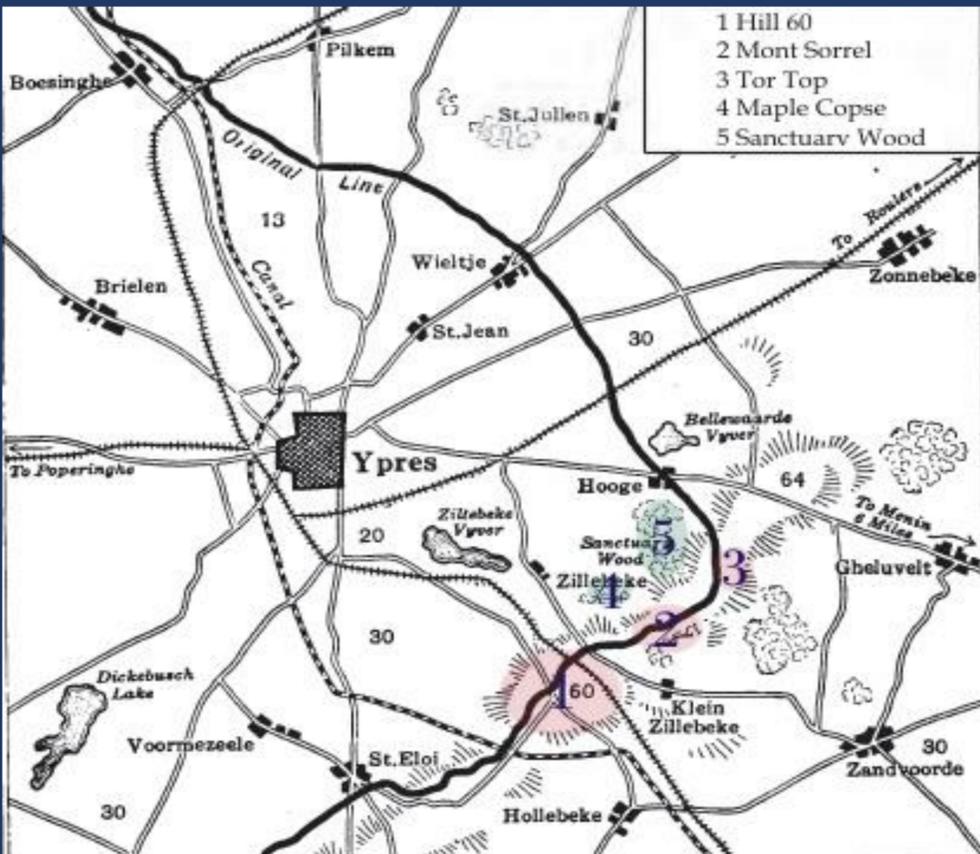
# The Edwards Brothers: Flanders and France

Sometime around 1887, the Edwards family settled in Tansor. Although they had previously lived in Yorkshire, the head of the household, George, was from Norfolk, and his wife Lucy Ann came from Wadenhoe. Two of George and Lucy Ann's sons went to war – James Alfred, born in Tansor in 1893, and his younger brother Francis George, born in 1897. Both boys went to school in the village. In 1911, James' occupation was recorded as a whitesmith, whilst Francis was a bottle-washer in a factory. The Muster Roll records that James enlisted with the Cambridgeshire Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion as a driver, whereas Francis signed up to join the 4<sup>th</sup> Northamptonshire Territorials, enlisting at Wellingborough.

In March 1915, James' battalion was billeted on the French-Belgian border at Boeschepe, close to Ypres. When not on the front line, duties included digging communication trenches and redoubts. Casualties are reported in the diary on an almost daily basis, giving some indication of James' proximity to the fighting. In early April, the men were moved closer to Ypres, taking over trenches vacated by French troops. The regimental headquarters was set up in Sanctuary Wood. James was wounded (and probably gassed) in what became known as the Battle of Hill 60, during the first Battle of Ypres. The hill had been captured by German forces in November

**1.3.15**  
 "...The question of defective rifles...brought to the notice of 27<sup>th</sup> Division. Several of these... failed to fire."

by French troops. The regimental headquarters was set up in Sanctuary Wood. James was wounded (and probably gassed) in what became known as the Battle of Hill 60, during the first Battle of Ypres. The hill had been captured by German forces in November

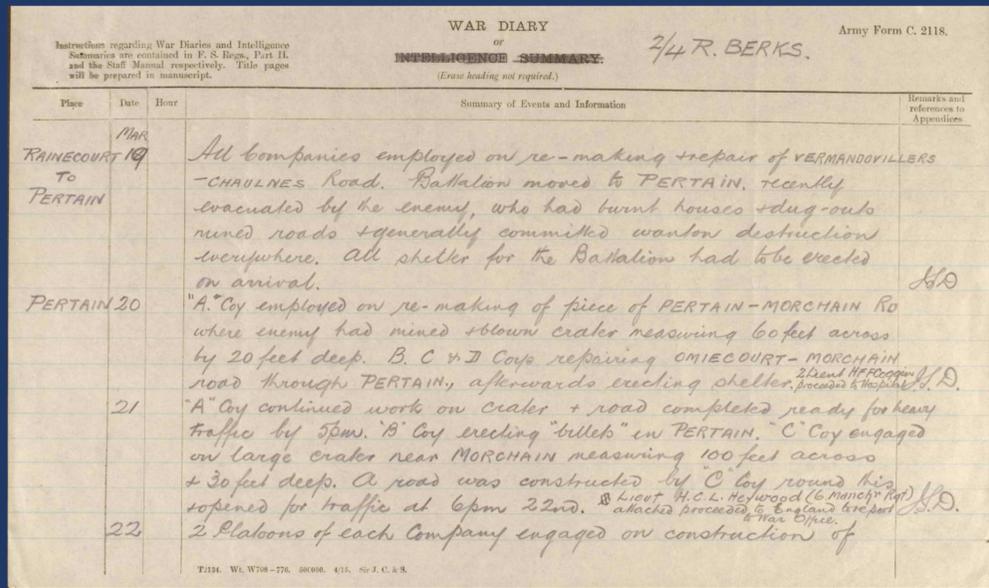


The Battle of Hill 60, Ypres, Flanders, April-May 1915

1914, and Allied troops attempted to oust the Germans in April 1915. Although the Allies captured the hill, by early May it was regained by enemy troops, who used gas shells against Allied fighters. On 28<sup>th</sup> May 1915, James Edwards was reported in the Cambridge Independent Press as being wounded in this operation on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1915. The extract from the war diary for that day has been transcribed in full (left). Eight men were killed, and 32 wounded, of which James Edwards must have been one. The Muster Roll records that James was 'wounded and gassed [in] 1916', but since there are suggestions that the Germans used gas to retake Hill 60, and James was undoubtedly a casualty, it seems likely that this should have read 1915.

**6.5.15**  
 "One company...ordered in support of 5<sup>th</sup> Division, who were heavily attacked. This company came under heavy artillery fire when proceeding to occupy an old line of trenches N[orth] of Hill 60. They were withdrawn at 2 a.m. next morning."

Nothing is known of Francis' time with the Northants Territorials, although we do know that at some point he was transferred to Princess Charlotte of Wales' Royal Berkshire Regiment, 2/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The 2/4<sup>th</sup> was a territorial battalion, but nevertheless, after the Military Service Act, the unit saw front line action.

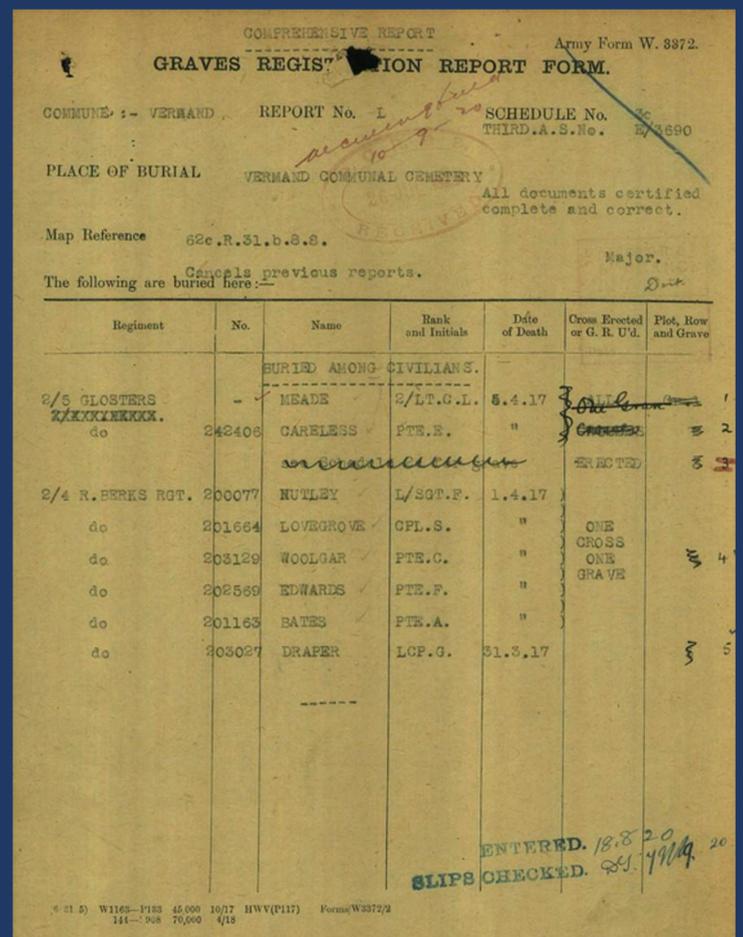


Extract from Royal Berkshire Regiment 2/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, March 1917

At the end of March 1917, the battalion arrived at Caulaincourt in France, close to the Hindenburg Line. The village had been demolished by the German army, which was still close by. The next day, the company advanced on Vermand, three miles away, having been ordered to hold the cemetery. By 4 a.m. on 31<sup>st</sup> March, the battalion had captured the

village. The war diary for 1<sup>st</sup> April 1917 makes it clear that the German army had not retreated far, and the company spent the day consolidating their position. The scribe offers a simple, somewhat terse description of the battalion's activities. The final sentence, however, underlines just how frightening it must have been: 'killed – 5 other ranks; wounded – 15 other ranks; shellshock – 1 other rank'. Francis Edwards was one of the 'other ranks' killed that day. He is buried in the cemetery that he had been under orders to capture and hold the day before he died. He was buried in a grave alongside three of his comrades, and his grave report confirms that he was 'buried among civilians' (below). Francis had not long turned twenty when he was killed.

**14.3.17**  
 "Code for relief: 'Limber has come!'"



Francis George Edwards, Graves Registration Report