



WFA SUFFOLK BRANCH

Branch Briefing

August 2024

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Tonight's talk

Steve Smith: Norfolk Regiment on the Western Front

FROM THE NEWSPAPER ARCHIVES Kelvin Dakin

Extract from an article in the Bury Free Press 12th August 1916:

BRAVE BURY SOLDIER
DCM FOR GALLANTRY IN THE FIELD
RESCUE OF WOUNDED COMRADES
LORD MAYOR OF BRISTOL PRESENTS AWARD

It must be very gratifying to the residents of our town to know that Bury St Edmund's "Soldiers of the King" are acquitting themselves with a spirit of courage and self-sacrifice worthy of the best traditions of the British Army and in keeping with the bravery which is driving back the hordes of Teutonic savages which have invaded the fair land of France...

The recipient of the award, **Pte Frank Polden**, was a patient at the Kingsweston (Gloucestershire) Auxiliary Hospital at the time of the presentation. No details of why he was in hospital and no "wound reports" have been found. The article goes on to describe the circumstances for which Private Polden was awarded the DCM:

"Private Polden who belongs to "C Company, 7th Suffolk Regiment was on the night of December 22nd 1915 acting as one of the stretcher bearers of his regiment at Givenchy. After rendering all the first aid required to his own company he went to assist the men of his regiment on the left, who were suffering heavy casualties from the enemy's bombardment and were at the time without any stretcher bearers. He not only dressed the wounds of two men who were hit and severely injured but carried them down a trench, which was badly blown in, to a place of safety. The distance traversed was over a mile, the greater portion of which was under continuous fire."

The official citation reads:

12576 Pte. F. POLDEN 7th Bn.

For conspicuous gallantry in rendering first aid to several wounded men of his company. He then volunteered to assist another company, dressed the wounds of several, and carried them on his back into safety under heavy fire. This is not the first time he has shown similar bravery and devotion to duty.

(15.3.16)

12576, Private Frank Polden (born 1884) was employed as a cattle loader for the Great Eastern Railway before enlisting on the 30th of August 1914. He lived at 53 Northgate Street in Bury St Edmunds and was married with four children. He crossed to France on the 30th May 1915 with the 7th Battalion.

The *History of the Suffolk Regiment 1914-1927* describes the period towards the end of 1915:

“The 7th Battalion, continuing to take their regular turn in the trenches passed the remainder of the year in the Hulluch-Givenchy sector amid a good deal of activity in the shape of mining, bombing, trench mortar fire and gas.”

The Battalion War Diary provides a little more detail:

21 December 1915

RESERVE. Battn relieved 9th Essex in trenches.

Enemy shelled GUNNER SIDING and railway killing two men.

22 December 1915

FRONT LINE. Last night quiet except for light shelling on the left of our front.

11 am. Rifle grenades sent over along the whole of our front, causing casualties, retaliation asked for & obtained & hostile fire ceased about 1pm.

1.30pm Hostile field gun fire opened along whole of our front, junction of KINGS ROAD & PICCADILLY receiving special attention.

3pm Hostile fire ceased

9pm Operations commenced as ordered. LR*

Report on operations. LS*

Total casualties during operations were 25.

(* Appendices “LR” and “LS” in the War Diary give an account of the operation which in essence was a gas attack along the brigade front on the German trenches)

Whatever the reason for his hospitalisation, Frank did not rejoin his battalion and went on to serve in the Lincolnshire Regiment (No 40319) and Royal Engineers (Nos 247672 and WR/266725). His DCM award is not recorded in the *History of the Suffolk Regiment 1914-1927*.

After the war Frank returned to work for the GER and in the 1921 Census, he is a Goods Porter still living at 53 Northgate Street with his wife Kate, plus children; Florence, Walter, William, Frank Jnr and Iris. He died in 1925 in Bury St Edmunds aged 41 years.

HUTTED HISTORIES — UPCOMING TALKS

Pinched from Taff’s latest Great War Huts newsletter, here is their speaker programme held on the 4th Wednesday of every month at Brook Farm Camp.

28th August: Andrew Thornton - The Old Contemptibles

25th September: Roy Larkin - London Buses at the Front

16th October: Tim Godden - Understanding British War Cemeteries

27th November: Helen Frost - Women's Land Army

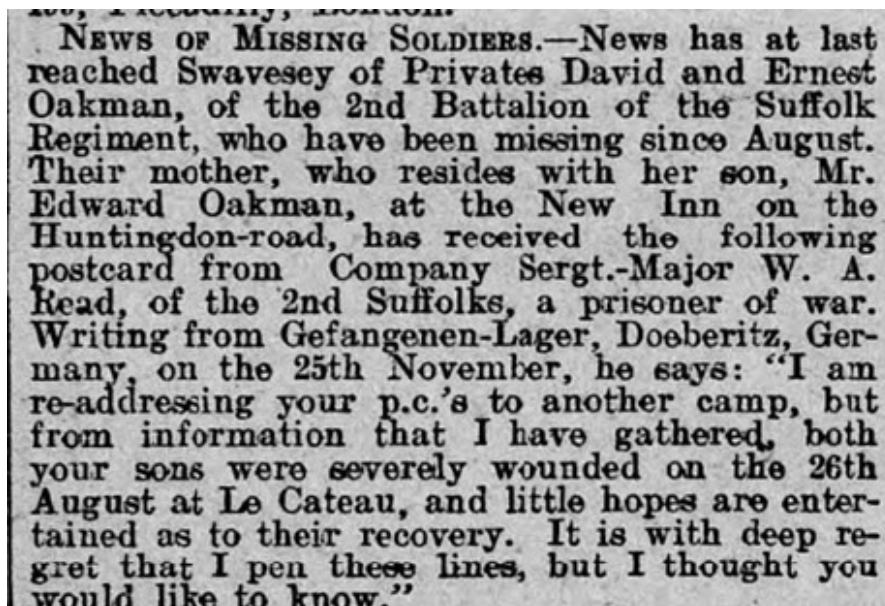
LEST WE FORGET Kelvin Dakin

**8814, Private David Oakman and 8785, Private Ernest Oakman,
both of "C" Company, 2nd Battalion, Suffolk Regiment**

"Death presumed on or since 26th August 1914"

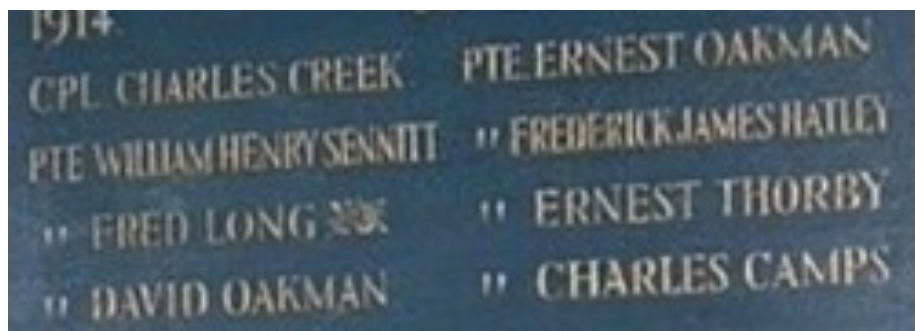
Ernest was born in 1897 and enlisted in 1913 aged about 16 or 17. He was shortly followed by his brother, David, who was born in 1895. They were the sons of Henry and Mary Jane Oakman who, in 1911, were living at Wigdham Farm, Dullingham, Cambs. Henry was described as a farmer and dealer in the census but had died in October 1913.

The brothers crossed to France with the battalion on the 15th August 1914 and went missing at the Battle of Le Cateau on the 26th August. Following enquiries the family had received some information from CSM Read* in December 1914 (see below) but official enquiries into their fate appear to have continued at least into 1915. They were both eventually officially declared as having been killed in action on the 26th August 1914.



NEWS OF MISSING SOLDIERS.—News has at last reached Swavesey of Privates David and Ernest Oakman, of the 2nd Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment, who have been missing since August. Their mother, who resides with her son, Mr. Edward Oakman, at the New Inn on the Huntingdon-road, has received the following postcard from Company Sergt.-Major W. A. Read, of the 2nd Suffolks, a prisoner of war. Writing from Gefangenen-Lager, Doeberitz, Germany, on the 25th November, he says: "I am re-addressing your p.c.'s to another camp, but from information that I have gathered, both your sons were severely wounded on the 26th August at Le Cateau, and little hopes are entertained as to their recovery. It is with deep regret that I pen these lines, but I thought you would like to know."

(Published in the Saffron Walden Weekly News - Friday 11 December 1914)



Both are commemorated on the La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre Memorial and the Swaffham Fen Methodist Chapel War Memorial

Photo from IWM © Nicola Martin (WMR-46548)



Pictures of David and Ernest from a post on the Great War Forum by Alan Walker 12th June 2012

*Footnote

4450 CSM (Temp RSM) William Arthur Read was awarded the MSM:

“Gazette Issue 31759. M.S.M.

His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Meritorious Service Medal to the undermentioned Warrant Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Men, in recognition of devotion to duty and valuable services rendered whilst prisoners of war or interned, which services have been brought to notice in accordance with the terms of Army Order 193 of 1919. To be dated 5th May, 1919.”

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD

**Talk at the Norwich Branch
Tuesday 3rd September
Simon Shephard - Artillery conquers, infantry occupies.
British Artillery at the 3rd battle of Ypres.**

**Our next month's talk
Wednesday 11th September**

Andrea Hetherington : Deserters of the First World War - The Home Front

Please send any contributions for the **Branch Briefing** to:
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Next Committee meeting: tba
Approach a committee member if you want any issue raised.