

## **Frederick Joseph Hearn**

### **Corporal 10642, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment**

**Frederick Hearn**, the oldest of William and Annie Hearn's eight children was born in 1894 in Buckland, Bucks. By the 1901 Census, when he was six, his father, William, was working away from the family home, employed as an engine driver at Lodge Farm, Chenies. Frederick, a schoolboy, was living at Hawridge, Bucks with his mother and brothers, Albert George (5) and John (3). By 1911 the family had grown to include Edith Rhoda (9), Harold William (6) and Elsie May (4) and were living together in Finch Lane, Amersham Common. John had died in 1903 and the couple had also lost 2 other children. William was employed as a tractor engine driver, Frederick as a farm horseman and his brother Albert George a farm labourer.

Frederick served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment, which was an unusual regiment for a young man from Amersham to have joined. He enlisted in London. The East Lancashire Regiment had moved from Colchester, where it was formed, to Harrow on 18 August 1914 and had been sent to France. They disembarked at Le Havre on 22nd August. This was the date that Frederick's Medal Roll Index Card shows he first joined the Theatre of War. He was posted as a Private, Number 10642, but at some stage during his war service, Frederick was promoted to Corporal.

Because Frederick J Hearn served for more than three and a half years from 1914 to March 1918, with one regiment, he took part in many of the most severe and critical battles of the First World War. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the East Lancashire Regiment was part of the original British Expeditionary Force, which fought on the Western Front. They became known as 'The Old Contemptibles'. They fought in **the Battle of Mons** in August 1914 and made a stand at Le Cateau, before the BEF was forced to retreat. The 1<sup>st</sup> Btn of the East Lancashire Regiment also took part in the **Battle of the Marne** on 6 September 1914, and were the first British unit to cross the Marne at Le Ferte-sous-Jouarre. Later they crossed the River Aisne and became entrenched for a protracted period of stalemate in the fighting.<sup>1</sup>

The BEF then moved to Flanders and the 1<sup>st</sup> Btn of the East Lancashires captured the village of Le Gheer, near Ploegsteert Wood on 21 October 1914 and held that position until they left for Ypres in April 1915.

The **First Battle of Ypres** was the graveyard of much of the pre-war professional army, and the East Lancashire Regiment suffered terrible loss of life.

From the Lancashire Infantry Museum web-site:

*"The Regular battalions of the East Lancs Regiment (including 1<sup>st</sup> Btn) passed the winter of 1914 - 15 in shallow muddy trenches, enduring great hardship and a steady drain of casualties with stoicism and humour."*

In the **Second Battle of Ypres** (22 April 1915), the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion took part in the heavy fighting. Frederick was to witness the first use of poison gas as a weapon of war by the Germans. For the next month the Lancashire Regiments "*struggled to defend the Ypres salient, wearing improvised cloth masks soaked in urine as partial protection from the choking gas.*" The 1<sup>st</sup> Btn of the East Lancashires was involved in particularly severe fighting around Shell Trap Farm.

---

<sup>1</sup> All the information regarding the service record of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the East Lancashire Regiment is taken from the web-site of the Lancashire Infantry Museum at [www.lancashireinfantrymuseum.org.uk-the-regiments-in-the-great-war-1914-18](http://www.lancashireinfantrymuseum.org.uk-the-regiments-in-the-great-war-1914-18).

**The Battle of the Somme** (1 July – 18 May 1916). “... in order to take pressure off the French, the British Army began that immense and costly succession of attacks, known collectively as the Battle of the Somme... Over half a million men and 1537 guns were allocated for the British Offensive. The Infantry assault was to be preceded by a massive and sustained artillery bombardment which, it was confidently predicted would smash the German defences and cut the wire.”

On the 1 July, when the artillery lifted, the British Infantry advanced towards the German trenches. “...machine guns opened fire from behind the largely unbroken wire and cut down the attackers in swathes.” Some 57,470 men lost their lives in a single day. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the East Lancashire Regiment attacked to the north of Beaumont Hamel. “Despite rapidly mounting casualties, the East Lancs moved steadily forward, as if on parade, until they melted away under fire.” Within a few hours the East Lancs. suffered more casualties than on any other day in its history. Out of 720 officers and men of the Battalion who went into action, only 237 were present at the roll call. Corporal F. J. Hearn had survived another massacre.

**The Battle of Arras** (1917) – the 1<sup>st</sup> Btn East Lancashire Regiment was engaged in fighting in the Arras area around Gavrelle.

Corporal F. J. Hearn’s luck was to run out, however, in the last great German offensive of the war.

**The March Offensive – The Battle of the Somme 1918** “ In the foggy dawn of 21 March 1918, the Germans launched a massive offensive on a narrow front using overwhelming artillery fire power, gas and other tactics which penetrated thinly held Fifth Army positions on the Somme, causing widespread disruption and heavy casualties. A confused mobile battle ensued in which the British Front buckled and was forced back by weight of numbers, fighting a series of bitterly fought rear-guard actions but did not break.” The 1<sup>st</sup> Btn of the East Lancs. was fighting around **Bullecourt**. In the thick fog, where soldiers could not see the Germans advancing towards them, Corporal Frederick Joseph Hearn lost his life on 21 March 1918 (aged 24). His body was never identified. He was awarded The British War Medal, 1914-18, The Allied Victory Medal and the 1914 Star with clasp. (A bar clasp inscribed ‘5 Aug to 22 Nov 1914’ was given to all those who served under fire. This was attached to the ribbon of the 1914 star.)

Frederick Joseph Hearn is remembered with Honour on the  
Memorial at Arras, Bay 6<sup>2</sup>



**The Arras Memorial** adjacent to the Arras Cemetery commemorates more than 35,000 servicemen from the UK, South Africa and New Zealand who died in the Arras sector between the Spring of 1916 and 7 August 1918 and who have no known grave. The most conspicuous events of this period were the Arras Offensive of April-May 1917 and the German attack in the spring of 1918.

*Photograph by courtesy of Hazel Garas, 2011*

---

<sup>2</sup> For details of the memorial and engraving, see the chapter on Memorials to the Missing