



WORLD WAR ONE – ROLL OF HONOUR

FREDERICK WILLIAM DOGGETT

Private (12249), 7th Battalion, Wiltshire Regiment

Killed in Action, Doiran, Salonika, Greece – 24 April 1917

Frederick William Doggett was born in East Grafton, Wiltshire on 30th April 1895, the son of James Doggett and Rosa Doggett (nee Jackman), who had married in 1893.

Frederick's father, James, was a Grocer and is also recorded as being the village Postmaster in East Grafton at the time of the 1901 census.

Frederick was the oldest of 5 children – there being three sisters (Dora, Kathleen and Edith) and a younger brother Thomas Herbert. Unfortunately, Edith was born prematurely and died within a few hours of her birth at East Grafton on 20th July 1902. His only brother Thomas was also to be a casualty of the war.

On the 1911 census, Frederick is recorded as living with his parents, his father James now being the Innkeeper at the Barge Inn at Honey Street Wharf in the Parish of Woodborough. Frederick, now aged 16, was a carpenter and painter working at the timber yard at the Wharf.

Frederick enlisted at Devizes, almost certainly shortly after the outbreak of war in 1914, and served in the 7th Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment. The 7th Battalion was also known as the 'Shiny Seventh'.

The 7th Battalion was formed at Devizes in September 1914 undertaking initial training at Codford before being billeted in Marlborough over the winter. The initial training was much improvised as equipment and khaki uniforms were not available until early spring 1915. Final training was undertaken at Sutton Veny before proceeding to France, arriving on 23 September 1915. On arrival the Battalion was initially billeted at Gentelles to the south east of Amiens.

Frederick was with the 7th Battalion on their arrival in France, as the medal cards record that he qualified for the 1915 Star on 21 September 1915.

The Battalion stayed in the Amiens area until the 10th November and, being held in reserve, saw no action in France. On 11th November 1915 the Battalion embarked for Salonika, Greece, via Marseilles, arriving on 21st November.

The transfer to Salonika (now Thessaloniki) had been intended to aid Serbia, who had been under threat from Bulgarian troops. Unfortunately, the British and French troops arrived too late, as Serbia had been overrun by 22 October, but Bulgarian troops were now positioned on the Greek border in the hills approximately 50 miles north of Salonika.

The 7th Battalion spent the winter of 1915/16 in Greece helping to construct defences around Salonika against an anticipated Bulgarian attack. After a spell in reserve, and further road construction work, the 7th Battalion was moved to the front line near Lake Doiran on 30th July 1916.

On the 9th August 1916 the allies commenced a bombardment against Bulgarian troops, with an assault by allied troops following the next day. The aim was to capture Bulgarian positions on Horseshoe Hill. The Battle of Horseshoe Hill was to last until the 18th August, the Hill ultimately being captured by the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. Although the 7th Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment was located on the front it was not directly involved in the assault. Nevertheless, the Battle provoked increased activity across the front and the Battalion was subjected to shelling throughout the month and an assault by Bulgarian troops on the 22 August, which was repelled. Total casualties for the month were 4 killed and 29 wounded. However, the effects of malaria and dysentery were to claim more casualties during the campaign.

The 7th Battalion remained on the front line near Lake Doiran over the winter of 1916/17. Both sides were subjected to intermittent shelling and the occasional skirmish but there was no offensive by either side until February 1917.

In April 1917 a new offensive was planned by the allies with the intention of breaking through the Bulgarian lines around Lake Doiran. On this occasion the 7th Battalion, Wiltshire Regiment was to be at the forefront of the assault, with orders to capture enemy trenches on heights between Lake Doiran on the right and Petit Couronne on the left (the latter being one of the major heights occupied by the Bulgarians).

The assault was planned as a night attack to take place on the night of the 24th and 25th April 1917. By attacking at night it was hoped that there would be an element of surprise. However, from their dominating positions on Pip Ridge and Grand Couronne the Bulgarian troops had far reaching views behind the allies' front lines and beyond towards Salonika, giving them advance warning of any supply or troop movements.

Alarm bells should have been ringing when, on the morning of 24th April, a Bulgarian deserter told Allied Commanders that his regiment had been warned to expect an attack at 2000 hrs. that night and that reinforcements had been moved up in anticipation of the assault.

In the event, Frederick Doggett (who was part of A Company) and his comrades left their own trenches, as planned, at 2105 hours on Tuesday, 24 April and proceeded down into the Patty Ravine that separated the front line between the 7th Battalion and the enemy. Each Company moved in sections in file, before forming up in line in the ravine on the North West slope. Operational orders had stressed the extreme importance of concealment from the enemy's view during the movement to forming up positions. However, having anticipated the attack, the Bulgarians had brought up searchlights which played along the Battalion's front line and heavy trench mortar fire commenced as soon as they had left their own trenches causing many casualties.

The Battalion War diaries record that three Companies (A, C and D), despite being under fire and in the searchlights, crawled up the slope in line and advanced to the wire at the top of the slope in front of the Bulgarian trenches. Although the wire had been well cut in a number of places (by a mix of shelling and wire cutting parties), it was impossible for the main force to get into the enemy trenches due to machine gun fire from the Battalion's left and heavy rifle fire all along the line, which had been reinforced with additional men. The main part of Battalion was effectively forced to lie down in shell holes in front of the wire (D Company had encountered uncut wire). However, small groups of men from A and C Companies did manage to infiltrate the Bulgarian trenches but, ultimately, they almost certainly ran out of ammunition and were not seen again. By this stage all the officers in A Company had become casualties and Sergeant Townsend returned to the Battalion's own lines to report the situation. Sergeant Townsend was given orders to withdraw A Company, bringing back as many of the wounded as possible. This became a general order and all three Companies returned to their lines, A Company being the last to do so.

An eyewitness visiting the 7th Battalion's line reported a desperate scene; "*Our trenches were by this time full of dead, dying and wounded, all the companies were mixed up; the shelling of our trenches continued and the confusion was such that it was quite impossible to reorganize or make any estimate of losses before daylight*".

It was decided that a fresh attack using the reserve company (B Company) and those elements of the three other companies that had returned would serve no useful purpose. Thereafter, stretcher bearers worked throughout the remainder of the night to bring back as many of the wounded as possible (this continued sporadically through the following day).

The casualty return for the night of 24th and 25th April 1917 lists Frederick Doggett as missing, but with the additional note "believed killed". The fact that Frederick was initially listed as missing indicates that he was most likely killed in the attack at the top of the slope (rather during the bombardment while forming up).

On the day prior to the attack the Battalion's front line strength was recorded as 29 Officers and 893 Other Ranks. Two days later the figure was 16 Officers and 575 Other Ranks, a loss of 331 men. 80 of these men had been listed as missing of which 42 belonged to A Company.

The First Battle of Doiran was to continue until 9th May 1917 but the British troops were unable to dislodge the Bulgarians from their positions on the dominating heights.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records a grave for Frederick at Doiran Military Cemetery, which is located on the South East shore of Lake Doiran close to the modern day border between Greece and Macedonia.



James Doggett, Frederick's father who lost both his sons in the War, remained the innkeeper at the Barge Inn, Honey Street until his death on 12 March 1920 (aged 56 years).

ⁱ Under The Devils Eye, by Alan Wakefield and Simon Moody, contains a detailed account of British Military action in Greece and Macedonia in World War 1.