

# SIDNEY EDWARD EXCELL

1891 – 1916

6th Battalion, The Buffs (East Kent Regiment)



**Surname/Christian name:** Excell, Sidney Edward.

**Rank/Service No:** Pte G/8921.

**Regiment/Unit:** 6th Battalion, The Buffs (East Kent Regiment).



**Date of Death:** 04/08/1916 \* (see footnote 2)

**Age:** 25

**Type of Casualty:** Killed in action

**Theatre of War:** Ovillers – Battle of the Somme

**Born/Year/Location:** 3rd quarter of 1891 – registered Collier Street, Kent.

**Enlisted/Attestation:** Gore Court, Goudhurst, Kent

**Son of/Address:** Son of Henry & Mary Jane Excell (nee Cashford), Cacketts Farm, Horsmonden, Kent.

**Buried/Commemorated/Memorial:** Thiepval Memorial

### **Relevant Military Record/Diary of Events:**

Sidney (and his brother George) enlisted and took the oath on the same day, 27th November 1915 at the recruitment centre in Gore Court, Goudhurst, where they also had their medical examination, the paperwork being forwarded to Ashford. They were then placed in the Buffs Reserves.

They joined their unit at Canterbury, Sidney on the 9th Feb 1916, George had joined his unit on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2016, both appointed to the 6th Battalion, The Buffs, East Kent Regiment and both were posted to France on 19th May 1916 and joined their Battalion at Erny-saint-Julien.

### **Movements between 19<sup>th</sup> May and 27<sup>th</sup> July:**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> May they went to Burbure from Erny-saint-Julien until 16<sup>th</sup> June. This was a period of intense training.

From Burbure to Lillers station where they entrained to Amiens. From Amiens they marched to Naours, arriving on the 18<sup>th</sup> June. From Naours to Frehencourt 28<sup>th</sup> June and Millencourt 1<sup>st</sup> July, entering the trenches on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July, the Battalion suffering many casualties.

Then to Warloy 10<sup>th</sup> July, Louvencourt 11<sup>th</sup> July, Bertrancourt 22<sup>nd</sup> July, back to Louvencourt 25<sup>th</sup> July, Bouzincourt 26<sup>th</sup> July and on the 27<sup>th</sup> July, they were in the trenches.

The Excell brothers died in the trenches north-east of Ovillers, towards Mouquet Farm, a strategic German stronghold during the fighting in the Poziere, Albert and Thiepval areas during the Battle of the Somme. It was here they faced some of the heaviest shelling of the Somme campaign.

Sidney died when they went over the parapet to attack a section of German-held RATION TRENCH, shortly after 11pm on the evening of the 3rd Aug, killed instantly by machine gun fire.

George made it to the German trench and engaged in hand-to-hand combat before being fatally wounded.

### **The 6<sup>th</sup> Battalions movements are shown in the War Diary entries from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> August following the transcription below:**

#### **1ST AUGUST 1916:**

TRENCHES - "Orders received that the Battalion would attack a German strong point on the following Thursday. (3<sup>rd</sup> Aug. 1916). Captain A. S. SMELTZER took over command of 'D' Company again. Two jump-out trenches were dug, one by the 5<sup>th</sup> Northamptonshire's, and the other by 'C' Company.

A patrol under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. MOON went out during the night to reconnoitre an old German trench. This was found to be wired up. Some Germans were encountered and an exchange of bombs (*hand grenades*) took place."

#### **2ND AUGUST 1916:**

"Company Commander went up to the hill on the far side of MASH VALLEY where a good view of the strong point to be attacked could be got. The 9.2's (*field guns*) were supposed to fire on this redoubt during the afternoon, but owing to faulty observation no shells fell in the right spot."

#### **3RD - 4TH AUGUST 1916:**

TRENCHES - "Orders from Brigade re attack received. The day was quiet on the whole.

In the afternoon the Battalion was moved into position for the attack. 'B' Company on the left, 'D' Company on the right, 'A' and 'C' Companies in reserve.

About 9pm the enemy shelled our trenches heavily, but the French 75's were turned on to the German batteries with gas shells, which completely stopped the shelling. The guns then opened an intensive bombardment of the enemy's trenches.

At 11pm, 2ND LT. HANMER and a party of bombers, crept up under the barrage to be ready to bomb an enemy MG (*machine gun*) should it open on our men or on the 8<sup>th</sup> Fusiliers on the right.

At 11.15pm, 'B' Company went over the parapet, followed by 'D' Company, the barrage lifting at the same time.

'D' Company then went through 'B' to take the trench on the left of the strong point. 'D' Company went rather to the right.

'A' Company were brought up from the reserve and then 'C' Company, who consolidated the strong point taken, together with a Company of Royal Engineers.

The Companies then pushed on, and when dawn broke it was found that 'B' Company was in RATION TRENCH where two blocks had been made; 2ND LT. ROUTLEY and a SUSSEX officer made a reconnaissance as far as MOUQUET FARM.

The Germans attempted a counter-attack from MOUQUET FARM, upon whom our Lewis guns were turned with good effect. All the dug-outs, trenches were cleared of Germans, the total bag of prisoners amounting to 2 officers (one of whom wore an Iron Cross) and 87 O.R (*other ranks*) chiefly PRUSSIAN Infantry.

#### 4TH AUGUST 1916:

About 4am the enemy started to shell the captured trenches. About 11am the Battalion was relieved by the 6TH Royal West Kent Regt. going back to huts in MARTINSART WOOD.

The total casualties were 4 officers wounded, 114 Other Ranks killed, wounded, missing."

#### 5TH AUGUST 1916:

MARTINSART WOOD

"Quiet day in MARTINSART WOOD.

MOUQUET FARM was heavily shelled by our heavies."

#### 6TH AUGUST 1916:

"Church parade in the morning. 2 working parties found for OVILLERS POST"

#### 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 1916:

The 6<sup>th</sup> Bn. went back in the trenches on the and after being relieved, they withdrew to Bouzincourt, west of Albert, to billets and to rest up for a few days.

### WAR DIARY/INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1916

3rd August 1916

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY. (Extra heading not required.)				Army Form C. 2118.
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks (reference to Appendix)
TRENCHES	1	8.16	Orders received that the B <sup>ty</sup> would attack a German strong point on following Thursday. Capt. A.S. Smalger took over command of 'D' Coy. again. 2 jump-out trenches were dug, one by S <sup>ts</sup> NORTHAMPTONSHIRES & the other by 'C' Coy. A patrol under 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. MOORE went out during the night to reconnoitre an AD German trench. Fuses were found to be wired up. Some Germans were encountered & an exchange of bombs took place.	
	3	8.16	Coy. commander went up to the hill on the far side of MASH VALLEY where a good view of the strong point to be attacked could be got. The G.I.s were supposed to fire on their retreat during the afternoon, but owing to faulty observation no shells fell in the right spot.	

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY. (Extra heading not required.)				Army Form C. 2118.
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks (reference to Appendix)
TRENCHES	3	8.16	Orders from 1 <sup>st</sup> Div re attack received. The day was quiet on the whole. In the afternoon the B <sup>ty</sup> was moved into position for the attack. 'B' Coy. on the <del>right</del> left, 'D' Coy. on the right. A <del>coy.</del> Coy. in reserve. About 9 p.m. the enemy shelled our trenches heavily, but the French 75s. were turned on to the German batteries with gas shells, which caused by stopping the shelling. The gas then opened an intense bombardment of the enemy's trenches. At 11 p.m. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. HANMER and a party of bombers crept up under the <del>barrage</del> <sup>barrage</sup> to be ready to bomb an enemy M.G. should it open on our men or on the 8 <sup>th</sup> Fusiliers on the right. At 11.5 p.m. 'B' Coy. went over the parapet, followed by 'D' Coy., the barrage lifting at the same time.	





### Additional personal and family information:

**Family History:** Both brothers Sidney and George, joined 6th Battalion, The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) Sons of Henry & Mary Jane Excell (nee Cashford), Cacketts Farm, Horsmonden, they were both Farm Labourers, their father was a Farm Carter/Waggoner.

Their parents, Henry and Mary Jane married on 7th June 1880 in Headcorn, Kent and lived at Medway Cottages, Pattenden Lane, Marden in 1881 moving to Porters Cottage, Collier Street, Yalding in 1891.

The family came to Horsmonden in about 1896 when they moved to August Pitts, Churn Lane and from there to Cacketts Farm off Maidstone Road.

**Siblings Birth year/Name:** 1880 Henry, 1881 Elizabeth Jane, 1883 Ernest, 1885 John, 1886 Kate, 1888 Gilbert, 1890 Frank, 1895 George, 1897 Esther Mary, 1900 Nellie.

Brother Frank served in the Middlesex Regiment lived on until he was 91.

### Other Articles of Interest:

**This image with horses was taken at August Pitts circa 1905.**



Rear left to right - Frank(b:1891), **Sidney (b:1891)**, Henry(b:1860)  
front left to right - **George (b:1895)**, Esther(b:1897), Mary Jane (b:1861) Nellie (b:1900)  
Baby on Mary's lap is possibly Maud Cashford (married Edgar Wood)



## Transcription of the letter sent to Mrs Excell

6<sup>th</sup> Buffs  
15<sup>th</sup> August 1916

My Dear Mrs Excell

It is my sad duty to write and inform you of the death of your two sons in action on Aug 3<sup>rd</sup> last.

We were attacking the German trenches and your boys were with me at the head of the charge. S.E. Excell (Sidney) was killed immediately by machine gun fire but G.H. Excell (George) with others escaped this and arrived in the German trenches and was doing terrible executions with bayonet and bomb when he was hit by a German bomb.

I had him taken away to a shell hole where he was safe and his wounds were dressed. I gave him something to drink and left him for a time he seemed quite cheerful and was in no pain in fact when I told him I would see about getting him down to a dressing station he replied "It's alright don't worry about me. I'm alright here you go back to the boys in the trench."

When we had captured and consolidated our position, I immediately got the stretcher bearers to him and he was carried down and to my great regret I heard that he had died of wounds.

I can't speak too highly of their conduct in the attack neither of them showed any fear when under fire and they both went over the parapet singing and shouting "Come on boys", in fact it was their excellent example that led the rest of the men and that won the attack for us.

Strangely enough it was only a few minutes before we went over, I was speaking to them and asked them how they liked the prospect and they assured me laughingly that they regarded the whole thing as a great piece of fun and sport.

They were the two best workers I ever had they never grumbled and were always cheerful under all circumstances. They worked together and lived together and never did I hear the least sign of quarrel between them which is very rare with brothers.

I know this must be terrible news for you but be consoled that they were as happy as kings out here and were heroes in every sense of the word and the few men left in the platoon all send their deepest sympathies to you in your bereavement.

In conclusion let me assure you that if there is anything further that I can do for you I shall be only too pleased if you will let me know.

I will do anything in my power for the memory of your two brave boys.

Yours very sincerely

G Routley 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt.

2nd Lt. 16 Platoon, 6 Buffs



# United Kingdom War Memorials

## Horsmonden Memorial Building



1922



Present Day



### Oak War Memorial Plaque in Memorial Building

(Pt Sidney Excell shown left block, row 4 no. 5)



### St Margaret's Church Memorial Scroll

# Commonwealth War Graves Commission Entry

## CWGC CERTIFICATE

In Memory Of

Private

**SIDNEY EDWARD EXCELL**

Service Number: G/8921

8th Bn., The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) who died on 04 August 1916

Remembered with Honour

THIEPVAL MEMORIAL

Pier and Face 5 D.



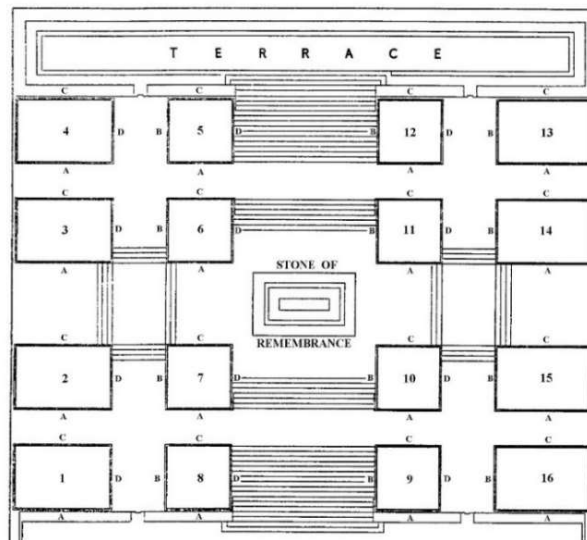
COMMONWEALTH  
WAR GRAVES

COMMEMORATED IN PERPETUITY BY THE COMMONWEALTH  
WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

## THIEPVAL MEMORIAL MILITARY CEMETERY



## CEMETRY PLAN



### THIEPVAL MEMORIAL

Pte Sidney Excell's name is shown on Pier and Face 5D

#### Pte. Sidney Edward Excell.



Our thanks to Mrs Julie Jones for sharing family documents and photograph with transcription of the letter sent from the Commanding Officer to Mrs Excell.

**Footnote 1:** There are a number of relatives of the Excell brothers; Mrs Julie Jones, Mrs Vera (Turk) Fallon and Mrs Audrey (Turk) Guntrip, great nieces, who are living in Horsmonden today. Vera and Audrey's uncle, Private Arthur Turk was also killed during WW1.

**Footnote 2:** \* Whilst the CWGC date of death for Pte Sidney Excell states 4th August, the War Diary entry for 3rd August suggests the attack that led to many deaths including Pte Sidney Excell was shortly after 11.00pm on the 3<sup>rd</sup> when the soldiers were instantly mown down by machine gun fire as they left the trench parapet. The letter from the commanding Officer concurred with this detail.

**Footnote 3:** Further research confirms the Officer who wrote the letter to Mrs Excell was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. ROUTLEY (Ernest George). Routley was awarded the Military Cross for the action on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1916 (He lived in Croydon and Trinity School, Croydon, carried out a history project on him). He was killed in action 7<sup>th</sup> October 1916 at the age of 24 and is also commemorated at the Thiepval Memorial.