

The military career of Herbert W. Ramsey

born 1893



It is a very sad fact that the one thing we can say for certain about Cpl 1242 Herbert Ramsay is that he lies buried here at the cemetery in [Le Tréport, France](#). Having been wounded in battle he was brought to a Military Hospital in Le Tréport where he died on 31st August 1915 at the very young age of 21 years.

Herbert began his military career when he was Attested on 9th May 1911 and he became a "Snapper". "The Snappers" was the nickname gained by the 15th Regiment of Foot, who subsequently became the East Yorkshire Regiment, resulting from of an incident on 11th September 1777 at the battle of Brandywine during the American War of

Independence when they ran out of ammunition. Apparently they ran short of the balls or bullets for their flintlock rifles so the remaining ammunition they had was given to the best shots while the others were ordered to "snap your flints" thus firing small gunpowder charges that gave the appearance and sound of a shot being fired but were actually quite harmless. The bluff worked and the battle was won. The regimental magazine of the East Yorkshire Regiment also adopted this name and the fact that Herbert had attested was formally recorded in the June 1911 edition of "The Snapper".

The 4th Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment, with Headquarters at [Londesborough Barracks, Hull](#), was formed on 1st April 1908 as part of the fourteen infantry divisions and fourteen mounted yeomanry brigades that were the new Territorial Force created that day by a complete restructuring of the volunteer forces and yeomanry. When The 4th Battalion was formed it began a new numbering system commencing at 1 and Herbert's number on joining in 1911 was 1242. The use of the word territorial signified that the volunteers who served with the force were under no obligation to serve overseas as its primary purpose was home defence. The individual units were administered by County Associations headed by the county's Lord Lieutenant with other members variously chosen from units commanding officers, nominated by councils and boroughs or co-opted members who were often retired military officers. Each regiment or battalion however had a regular army officer attached as full time adjutant. Training was provided through regular localised sessions with summer camps at military training areas and while there was no obligation to serve overseas this opportunity sometimes arose, which might appeal to those leading an otherwise quite dull working life as the army was spread about the world in some very interesting places.

Herbert started his working life by following his father into the North Eastern Railway and in the 1911 Census, which was taken on Sunday 2nd April 1911, he is shown as an "Engine Cleaner on NER" and still living with his parents at [30, Skelton Lane](#) (now called Sandhall Road) not far from the [Skelton Railway Bridge](#) where his father worked as a Steersman. It was fairly normal for a young man to start on the railways

at this grade and, as Herbert appears to have done, gradually work their way to becoming a fireman which would hopefully lead on to becoming an engine driver, a slow process that would probably take ten to fifteen years. It is highly likely that Herbert's work place was in the area of the main station and depot in Hull which was only a short way from Londesborough Barracks. At some stage Herbert moved from Skelton to [591, Spring Bank West, Hull](#) both nearer to his work and the barracks.



591, Spring Bank West is the red house two doors to the left of the "Halfway House" and quite a convenient location one might think for a young man of Herbert's age. His elder sister Minnie Waudby also moved to Hull and close by at [11, Saltburn Street](#) but this is unlikely to have been until after her marriage in 1913. The houses in Saltburn Street were demolished between 2009 and 2011 for re-development.

The war that would end all wars began on Friday 28th July 1914. The 4th Battalion, as it still was then, had just departed for summer training camp and were re-called to Hull immediately. Over 75% of the men volunteered for service overseas at the first time of asking and by the

end of October those who had not were transferred to other units while others took their place and they moved to Newcastle to prepare. By this time a reserve battalion had been formed and so the 4th battalion became the 1/4th and the reserve became the 2/4th Battalion.

The 1/4th Battalion moved to France on 17th April 1915 and were quickly settled in, as the War Diary records:

1915

April 17th Folkestone

R.M.S. 'Invicta' 8.30 p.m. Folkestone for Boulogne. Arrived 10.15 p.m. 27 Officers & 492 O.R. marched up to the rest camp at St. Martin, arriving about 11.15 p.m.

April 18th Boulogne

11.20 a.m. Marched off for Pont Debriques Station, 3 1/2 miles. Entrained 2.30 p.m. on train from Le Havre carrying our transport and personnel which had left that place about 10 p.m. 17th.

April 19th Barinchove

Arrived Barinchove (Station for Cassell) about 8.0 p.m. and billeted for night there. Proceeded by march route to billets 4000X east of Steenvoorde on road to L'Abeele, arriving 2.45 p.m. Men all settled in billets in farms with Battalion Headquarters at corner of cross roads in the Callicanni Inn, 3 miles East of Steenvoorde.

April 20th Steenvoorde

Settled up interior economy regiment and transport. Battalion Headquarters connected up by telephone with Brigade Headquarters at Chateau De La Beau, Steenvoorde.

The battalion had arrived just in time to be rushed into the second battle of Ypres, which itself can be divided into several battles beginning on 22nd April with the Battle of Gravenstafel when the Germans attacked the French lines to the north of Ypres and for the first time effectively used poison gas. At about 5pm that day they released approximately 170 tons of chlorine gas along a 4-mile front relying on the wind to carry the gas over the lines occupied by French, Moroccan and Algerian troops. German troops had carried the gas forward by hand in canisters weighing about 90lb each and released it by hand simply relying on the wind to carry it over. The wind obliged but nevertheless many of the German troops involved were killed or injured in the process.

The gas was heavy and settled into trenches forcing those who were not too damaged by it to scramble out into the heavy enemy fire that awaited them. The troops in the path of the gas cloud suffered 6,000 casualties many of whom died within a few minutes and most of those that survived only did so with lung damage and blindness.

Thus a four-mile gap in the allied trenches had been created but the Germans, due to a lack of foresight were unable to take full advantage of it and their efforts to breakthrough were thwarted by Canadian troops on the flank of the gap who at about a quarter to midnight mounted a successful counter attack despite sustaining heavy casualties. This just the first day of battle's that raged until 25th May and beyond.

April 22nd Steenvoorde

10 p.m. Received orders to concentrate at Battalion Headquarters and be prepared to move in motor buses bivouacked on Battalion alarm post all night.

April 23rd Steenvoorde

12 noon. Motor buses arrived and Battalion (less transport) was taken to Poperingje and marched from there to 'A' Camp, between Vlamertinghe and Ypres, arrived 4 p.m. Transport arrived by march route later.

April 24th Vlamertinghe

1.30 am. Turned out and marched to hold east bank of Ypres canal. Map Belgium Sheet 25, C.25.a. In position 3.15 p.m. being attached to 13th Brigade. Four men wounded by shell fire.

April 24th Trenches

10 a.m. Orders received to march to Weiltje. Arrived there 1 p.m. and dug ourselves in at a point a few hundred yards N.E. of the Headquarters 27th Division; at Potizgi Chateau. 3 p.m. Received orders to support an attack being made by the Canadians on Fortuin. Moved out about 3.45 p.m. in support to the 4th Yorkshire Regiment towards Fortuin and soon came under heavy artillery fire from our left flank from the direction of St. Julien. Artillery formations were adopted — The Battalion moving in lines of Platoons — two platoons "D" Company leading. The attack on reaching point C.24 a (Map Ypres 28) swung to the north towards St. Julien, and then came under somewhat heavy rifle and machine gun fire. Rifle fire was opened at 950 yards and eventually at 500. These two Battalions joining up with the 18th Royal Irish Regiment who had apparently been sent on a similar mission. No fire from the direction of Fortuin had during this time been heard, and no Canadians seen.

7.30 p.m. The O.C. Royal Irish having received orders from his General that we were to retire when it became dark, we did so. The retirement was carried out in good order, viz platoons and our Platoons and our Potizgi trenches were reached about 11 p.m.

Casualties: -

Lieut Col Shaw, Major Thielman and Captain B. Farrell and 12 Other Ranks killed. 66 Other Ranks wounded. 10 Other Ranks wounded and missing, and 7 Other Ranks missing.

Only two days in the field and the Battle of St. Julien and already there are 15 dead and nearly a hundred wounded or missing with almost a full month to go before these battles would be over. To say that the battles were over makes it sound very peaceful but reality was a little different:

May 25th Trenches

9pm. Withdrew C Coy into communicating trench running from Sanctuary Wood to Hooge to be in support of the Cavalry. Remaining Companies all withdrawn into dugouts round Battalion HQ to form a reserve under orders of Colonel Kirby (Carabineers). Captain Lawrence wounded in thigh.

Casualties: - 2 Other Ranks wounded. 2 Other Ranks missing.

May 26th Trenches

9.30pm. All available men commenced construction of a new line of trenches, to be occupied if driven in from front line, and running from S.E. corner of Zouavre Wood, through Sanctuary Wood, and joining the fire trench in Square J.19.a. S.W. corner.

1am. Knocked off work in trenches.

9.30pm. Continued work in trenches.

Casualties: - 2 killed and 2 wounded.

May 27th Trenches

Casualties: - 3 wounded.

May 28th Trenches

Casualties: - 1 wounded.

May 29th Trenches

10.30pm. Machine Gun Section under 2/Lieut. Redfern arrived, with 2 Light Vickers Guns, from the Transport Lines in Vlamertinghe.

11.30pm. 2nd Cavalry Division relieved by 3rd Cavalry Division (6th and 8th Brigades). Battalion put under orders of G.O.C. 8th Cavalry Brigade.

Casualties: - 2 wounded.

May 30th Trenches

9pm. Continued work on new trenches. C Coy relieved by A Coy and brought into dugouts at Bn. HQ. Trenches held by 3rd Dragoon Guards near Hooge heavily shelled.

Casualties: - Nil.

May 31st Trenches

Entrenching work continued.

Casualties: - Nil.

Strength of Battalion at 31.1.15: - Available for duty – 19 Officers and 490 Other Ranks.

In Hospital (Not Evacuated 149 OR).

June 1st Trenches

5pm. Orders that we are to be relieved by the Lincoln regiment about midnight.

June 2nd Trenches

2.20am. Lincoln Regiment arrives but it was now too late to march off as dawn had broken. Orders received to remain until tomorrow night.

June 3rd Vlamertinghe

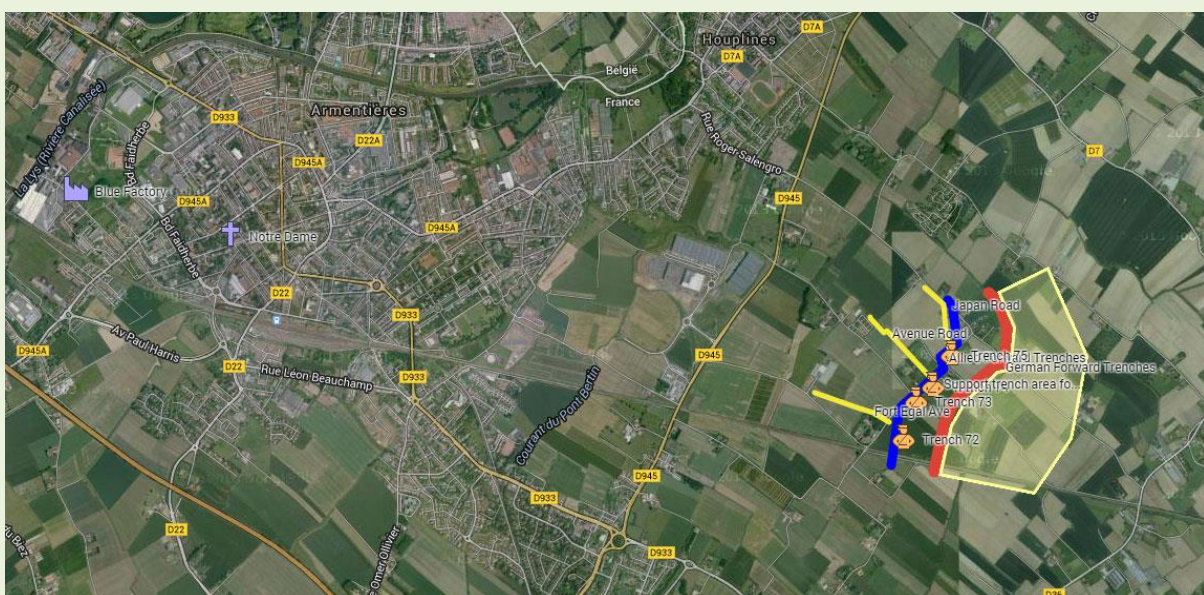
1.30am. March off and arrive in Bivouac near Vlamertinghe (Map 28, Square B.27.e) about 3.45am.

Casualties 2.6.15 – 1 wounded, 3.6.15 – 1 wounded.

Captain Sharp (wounded) returns to duty from Le Havre with 14 ORs.

Two days in the Bivouac and then back to the trenches and so it went on, and on until July 14th when they received orders to move southwards to the neighbourhood of Armentieres, although no date was given. They marched the 8-10 miles to Armentieres through a wet night on 17th July arriving in the early hours and were billeted in Blue Factory. Since the middle ages Armentieres had been famous as home of the linen industry resulting in a factory complex growing up on the western edge of the town by the favourable waters of the River Lys. Now it was called upon to provide temporary accommodation for the thousands of troops being brought to the area. The following day arrangements were made for three companies to be billeted in a convent a few hundred yards away, close to the Notre Dame church and they moved in on 19th. The following day they had a bath and were issued clean underclothing, could the "[Mademoiselle from Armentieres](#)" have prompted this course of behaviour.

Herbert saw out his remaining service in Armentieres and its trenches. The trenches remained substantially in the same location throughout the entire war although the support trenches expanded over the years. Meanwhile the towns, villages and land alongside them suffered serious damage from the constant bombardment. The full nature of this trench network, allied and German can be compared to the present landscape in side by side maps of the area at the [National Library of Scotland](#).



View [Armentieres and trenches](#) in a larger map.

Above is a much simpler map which sets out to the far left the site of the Blue Factory and Notre Dame Church and then to the right hand side just those trenches that Herbert would have known. The forward allied trenches are shown in blue with their yellow support trenches reaching to the rear while only a few hundred feet away are the red forward German trenches and their support area masked out behind.



**For some a rest and meal back in the support area while
for others a bath.**

**Photographs with permission of the IWM from the
"Miss Stella MacDonald Collection.**



It is not at all certain how, when or what wounds Herbert sustained. He was clearly in the forward trenches at the time but no particular attack or battle was underway although of course there were no "peaceful times", bombardment in some form or other was constant only the intensity was variable. The War Diary entries for that couple of days set the scene:

August 5th Trenches

The weather, which has been wet for the last few days, cleared up and less difficulty was experienced in approaching the trenches along Plank Avenue, the boards of which had become wet, greasy and very slippery. At 09.30 am the enemy started to shell Battn HQ and the farm close by from which men got their drinking water. One man, Private Grayson, was wounded. As usual, the enemy at intervals throughout the day enfiladed our trenches Nos 75 & 74 with whiz-bangs and light howitzer shells, but very little damage was done.

General Lord Cavan visited Battn HQ before going to England previous to taking command of the Guards Division. General Wilkinson, his successor came with him.

*Casualties: - No. 1526 Corpl Tovey W of "D" Coy- wounded
No. 924 Pte Grayson F of "B" Coy - wounded (died of wounds 7.8.1915)*

August 6th Trenches

*Casualties: - No. 2538 Pte Ellyard C S of "D" Coy - killed
No. 1880 Pte Vokes G of "A" Coy – wounded*

August 7th Trenches

11.00 am. Captain W T Wilkinson DSO & Captain Harland MO proceeded on leave to England.

02.00 pm. Orders issued for relief of this unit, trench 74, 74S and 74SS to be relieved by 8th DLI. Trench 75 & 75S to be relieved by 5th Loyal North Lancs.

10.55 pm. Relief completed by relieving Battns as above.

*Casualties: - No. 1352 Pte Harrison A of "A" Coy - wounded
No. 1438 Pte Butler H of "D" Coy - wounded
No. 1242 Pte Ramsey W H of "A" Coy – wounded*

Herbert had been wounded. While he is described here as a Private an error like this under these circumstances can be understood. No details of his wounds are given. There would have been various well practised arrangements for dealing with casualties depending upon the seriousness of injury starting with dressing stations in the immediate support area. Herbert's injuries were quite serious as we know that he was taken to the Military Hospital in Le Tréport. Just the day before Herbert was injured Henry Laurence Benson was injured in a near by trench and Henry Benson managed to maintain a diary. In a short extract from that diary he relates how he was taken to the Le Treport Hospital at what could well have been the very same time, route and method as Herbert.

"Friday 6th Anniversary of my signing on. They started to shell us after tea and just as I came out of my dug out I was hit on the head with a piece of shrapnel, also on the finger. Lost a lot of blood and was taken on a stretcher to our dressing station and later in a motor ambulance to Armentieres.

Saturday 7th Went on in morning in motor ambulance to Bailleul where I was stuck in a school and spent the day there feeling pretty rotten.

Sunday 8th Still in the school all day; most uninteresting.

Monday 9th Entrained after breakfast in a hospital train and travelled all day reaching Le Treport? about 11pm when we were taken up to No 3 Brit Gen Hospital the Trianon Hotel standing right on the top of the cliffs.

Tuesday 10th Had the X-rays on me, but there was no shrapnel in my head. Felt practically alright again, but had to stay in bed.

Wednesday 11th Still in bed."

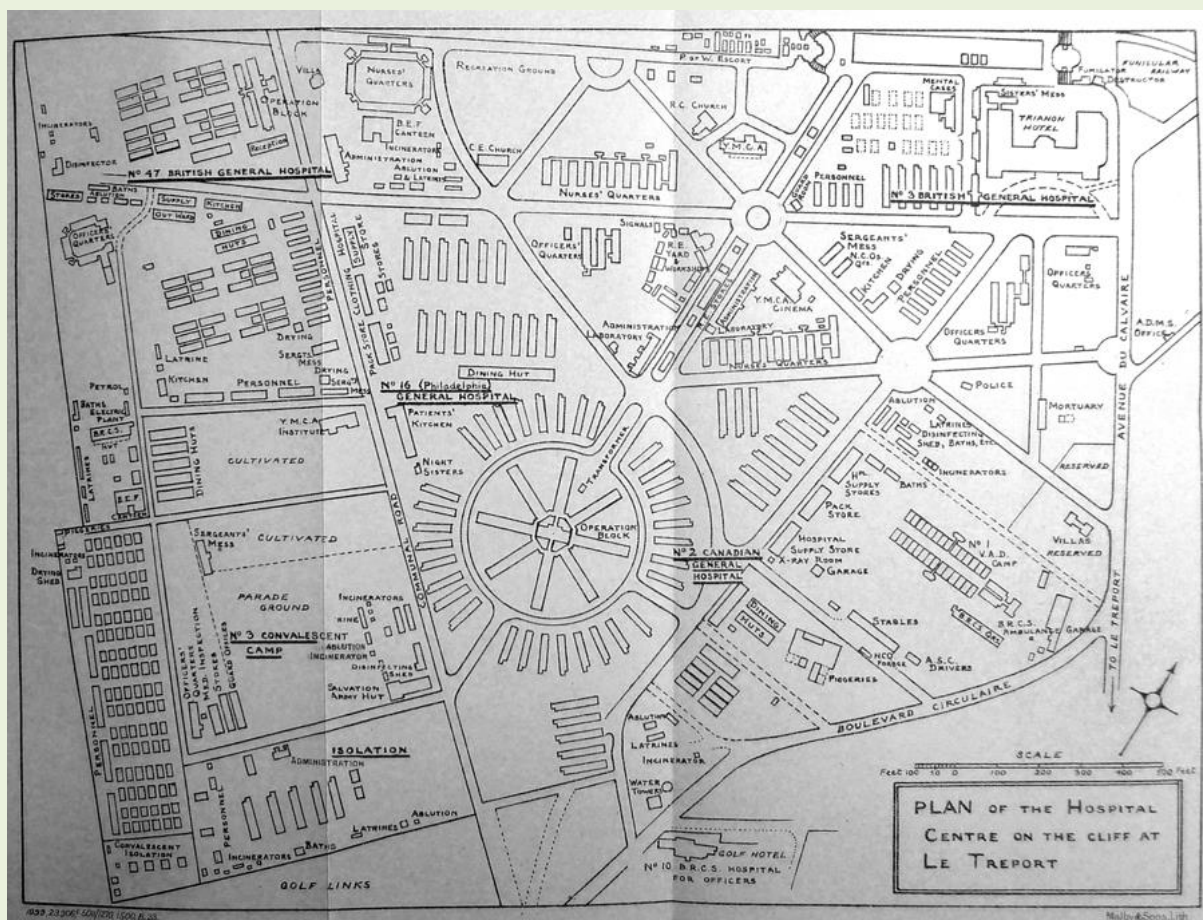
**From The War Diary Of
Henry Laurence Benson
1890 – 1916**

As I am sure you can imagine the Military Hospital at Le Treport was a very busy and very important place set about 100 miles from Bailleul which was itself set back from the front line area of Armentieres. By road today the

journey would take a couple of hours but as we can see from the diary above it was at that time a very long day by rail. You can gain some idea of the importance of Le Treport from the description below taken from the War Graves Commission.

During the First World War, Le Treport was an important hospital centre. No.3 General Hospital was established there in November 1914, No.16 General Hospital in February 1915, No.2 Canadian General Hospital in March 1915, No.3 Convalescent Depot in June 1915 and Lady Murray's B.R.C.S. Hospital in July 1916. These hospitals contained nearly 10,000 beds. No.47 General Hospital arrived in March 1917 and later that year, a divisional rest camp and a tank training depot were established in the neighbourhood. By March 1919, the hospitals had been closed and Le Treport became the headquarters of the 68th Division, which re-formed there before going to the Rhine. The divisional supply depot was closed in June 1919.

The full extent of this Hospital Centre can be seen in the plan below.



While the picture below shows the very impressive Trianon Hotel built on the cliff top in 1912, the building in the top right hand corner of the above plan, before it was commandeered to form a Hospital. This war destroyed many things including the Trianon Hotel as while the building survived the war it failed to attract business in the austere period that followed and was then demolished during the second world war, in 1942 by the occupying German army as they believed its dominant presence on the skyline could act as a landmark and assist the forces allied against them.



Despite the size and scale of the Le Treport Hospital Centre it was in many ways still but a staging post. Those that could be treated and returned to their units were dealt with in that way but considerable numbers who required and would benefit from further or more complex treatment were convoyed home. Others, who's hope of recovery was more limited often remained.

Dorothea Crewdson was a nurse working at Le Treport and the following two days' entries from her diary, at the time of Herbert's injury, provide a first-hand view.

SUNDAY, 8TH AUGUST What a nice place bed seems tonight. Have had such a day of work. A convoy came in at 9, or soon after, and it has been a great rush since. Every bed is filled except in the little ward. Had to get all b-bathing done as quickly as possible and was all finished soon after tea. We have seventeen new patients altogether. One poor boy is very bad indeed. Looks like he will follow Huntley and Moore. Left Malet looking after him. Other wounds are less serious at present. C had nine new people in. Three of the old patients should have gone today but railway officials would not allow it with one convoy coming in and another going out, so departure was postponed till tomorrow. Poor old Morgan still kept waiting. Does not seem able to get off.

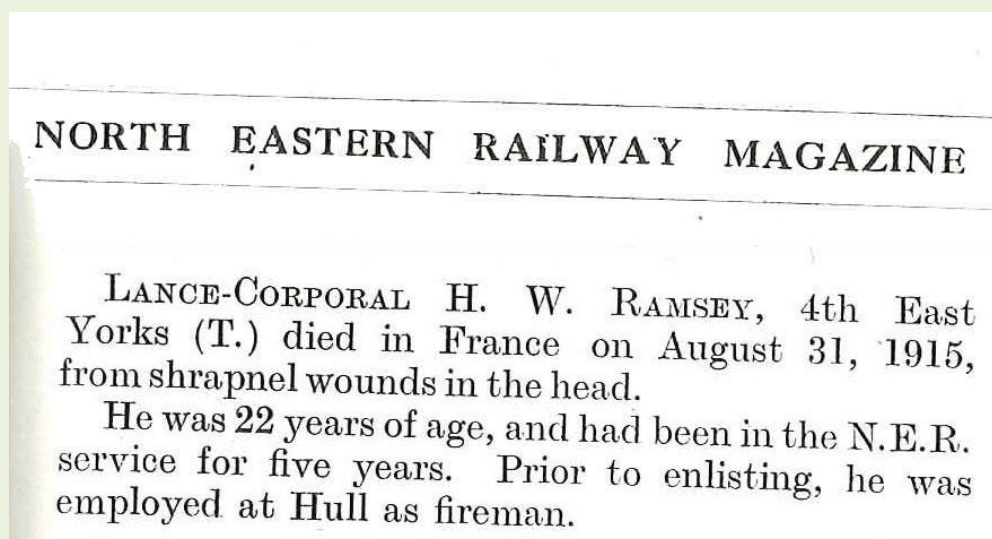
*TUESDAY, 10TH AUGUST Very hot day – but not quite so much as yesterday. It was so sultry and trying and the poor men felt it terribly. Had another death last night. Poor little Watson, the Durham Light Infantry man and a miner who had had his arm amputated. He got much worse yesterday, was operated on but died in the night. Very sad. He was such a nice man. We also had a death the night before – Private Guy who came in with the last convoy – so we have had rather tragic times in our hut, one man dying after another. No more on DI list at present, but another convoy is expected in tomorrow and there may well be bad cases in that. The great advance on our part has started. Bombardment has begun and rumours that we have won eight miles of trenches have spread abroad. * Have been very busy all today up to now and yesterday we kept hard at it till 6.15 p.m. I went back voluntarily after tea to help Sister Cavan with the beds, as work was so much behindhand owing to Watson having his operation and coming back so collapsed. I helped Sister Cowie with him. We put him into a side ward, a sort of chamber of doom now for these poor men to breathe their last. Great excitement yesterday about teatime. An aeroplane came down on the golf course just at back of our tents. The skipper was a young Belgian calling at Tréport to see his parents before going to the front. Everyone rushed to see the machine and when it*

went up again crowds were watching. Tozer and I went out to see the fun and it really was very thrilling to see the great bird go up and away into the sky. The Belgian's parents came up in their car to see him go and it must have been a rather sad parting for them. Arnold and I have been to the new canteen. The most wonderful array of stores and necessities greeted us, all kinds of goods piled up, from boot blacking to tinned fruit and other delectable eatables. It will be a great godsend to get things there instead of having to trudge after them down into the town. The storekeeper is a Mansfield man. Must talk to him.

** Unfortunately the rumours were without foundation.*

Dorothea's War: The Diaries of a First World War Nurse. – Dorothea Crewdson

Just 24 days after his injury and almost three weeks' treatment in Le Treport Hospital Herbert died. The only indication that we have of his injury comes from the announcement of his death in the North Eastern Railway Magazine published shortly afterwards.

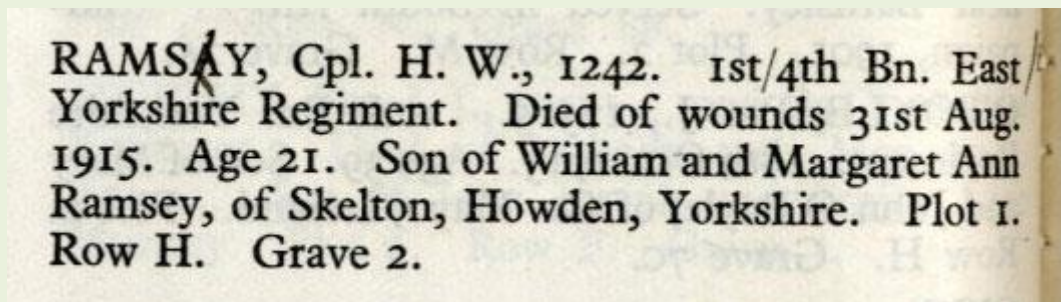


The Image above and the original of the photograph below were taken from the 1915 edition of the North Eastern Railway (NER) staff magazine, and very kindly provided by the [National Railway Museum](http://www.nrailwaymuseum.org).



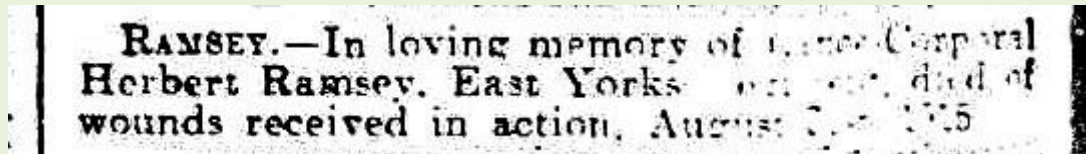
H. W. Ramsey
4th East Yorks (T.).

Initially casualties that died in the Hospital Centre were buried in the Military Cemetery at Le Treport and Herbert was one of 445 Commonwealth casualties buried there. Finally, he was laid to rest in Plot 1, Row H, Grave No. 2 as shown in the formal Le Treport Register.



As Le Treport filled it became necessary to open the Mount Huon cemetery nearby which contains 2,128 commonwealth graves as well as 200 German. Even then further cemeteries were required in the area.

On the 31st August 1917 the following short entry appeared in the "IN MEMORIAM" column of the Hull Daily Mail.



RAMSEY.—In loving memory of Lance Corporal
Herbert Ramsey, East Yorks. died of
wounds received in action, August 31, 1915

Let not the memory of Herbert William Ramsey and the sacrifice he made fade further.