

CAPTAIN MARMADUKE JOHN NORMAN ABBAY (1899-1902)

He was born on 3 November 1885 and after leaving the College he went to the Royal Military College at Sandhurst.

By WW1 he was a Captain in 87th Punjabi Regiment of the Indian Army. At Neuve Chapelle, on 10 March 1915, he went out alone to an isolated house, which he realised to be the key local position. There he set up a machine gun, which he had carried up to the house, and used it to silence the enemy trenches opposing the 47th Sikhs, to which he was attached. This enabled them to go forward and recover ground that had previously been lost.

He was wounded in a subsequent engagement at Ypres on 26 April 1915 and died from his wounds on 10 May 1915.

Although he does not appear to have been awarded any medals, we do know that he was the 4th OF to be recommended for a VC, but it was sadly not awarded.

There is memorial in the College Chapel to him. It was designed by Sir Thomas Jackson and is cast in bronze set in a moulded frame of Portland Stone. The memorial is identical to one in Earl Sham church where he is buried. The Union Jack in which his coffin was wrapped is also in Earl Soham church, along with his sword.



I am indebted to Christopher Pratt for recent research he has carried out for Earl Soham to mark the 90th anniversary of the ending of WW1. This is his detailed write up on Marmaduke Abbey :-

I have established from the India Office that Captain Abbey's service record has not survived. However the Indian Army List confirms that he was born on 3rd.November 1885. He was first commissioned into the Dorset Regiment on 16th.August 1905 before transferring to the 87th.Punjabis Regiment on 9th.August 1907. On 16th.August 1914 he was promoted to Captain. The record shows that he gained qualifications in Musketry, handling a machine gun and Punjabi, the latter to the higher standard. The war diaries of the 47th.Sikhs for the 9th.March 1915 show that "Captain M.J.N Abbey 87th.Punjabis joins regiment".

At this time the 47th.Sikhs (Lt.Col.H.L.Richardson) were part of the 8th.(Jullunder) Indian Infantry Brigade (Brig-Gen E.P. Strickland) which was part of 3rd.(Lahore) Division (Maj-Gen H.D'U.Kearny). The 3rd.(Lahore) Division was part of the Indian Corps (Lt.-Gen. Sir James Willcocks) in 2nd.Army (Gen.Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien).

The day after Captain Abbey joined the Battalion it moved via Neuve Chapelle to the La Basee Road. From the war diaries of 11th.March 1915 "at 0715 the regiment fell in to support an attack near Neuve Chapelle where the regiment remained". Over the next couple of days the Battalion attacked Bois De Biez firstly falling back "as they were heavily shelled by shrapnel and high explosive for about an hour and a half" and then counter attacking under "very heavy rifle and machine gun fire". However they managed to hold the first line of trenches they had attacked. On the 13th.March 1915 they were taken out of the line and returned to billets at Windy Corner. Again, from the war diaries of 13th.March 1915 "our wounded included..... and Captain Abbey who was slightly wounded but remained on duty". For the rest of March and early April the Battalion was alternately in the line or in billets at Croix Marmeuse and apart from occasional shelling had a quiet time.

The history of the 3rd.(Lahore) Division shows that "On 25th.April 1915 the 3rd.(Lahore) Division pitched tents near Ouderdom. The following morning the Division attacked across open fields near the village of Wieltje. The open ground was between several hundred yards and a mile wide and they attacked in the face of machine guns, gas and artillery". Of the 444 men of the 47th.Sikhs that set off 384 (78%) met their death. Captain Abbey was seriously wounded and died on 10th.May 1915. None of the attacking troops reached the first of the German lines.

Christopher Pratt has also sent the following picture of his gravestone in Earl Soham churchyard :-

