

Olliff-Lee WN

Originally from Barrow-in-Furness, the Lee family settled in Bedford Park in 1905, living at 23 Blenheim Road. Walton Lee was a Land Agent. In 1887 he married Charlotte Olliff, a farmer's daughter, from Little Missenden. Walton Noel Olliff was their second son, born in Barrow-in-Furness on Christmas Day 1889. He had three sisters, Marjorie, Mary Elizabeth and Edith, an elder brother, Olliff, born in 1888 and a younger brother Edward. The photograph from about 1900 shows also an aunt and cousin.

Walton Noel went to Carlisle Grammar School and then studied from 1906 at City and Guilds Central Technical College, London where in 1909 he gained an 1st. class honours B.Sc. (London). He acted for a time as assistant to Mr. RW Vawdrey at the college , as detailed in his application for Associateship of the Institute of Engineers. He then joined the engineering staff of the Indented Bar and Concrete Engineering Company, assisting in the design of various reinforced concrete structures, including being Resident Engineer on the construction of a large warehouse in Manchester. He was admitted AIE in April 1914.

As did many similar professional men, Noel joined the Artists Rifles, which became the 28th (County of London) Battalion, London Regiment. The Artists became in effect an Officers Training Unit. He volunteered for active service on outbreak of war, as a Private, and saw service in the Expeditionary Force from October 1914 before being commissioned 2nd Lieutenant from 27 April 1915, and transferred to 1st Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment.

The Campaign map shows the Battalion's first line position in the Battle of Loos, near Cuinchy at the start of the attack. The whole 7th Division took part in the initial assault north of the Vermelles-Hulluch road, facing the Quarries and a

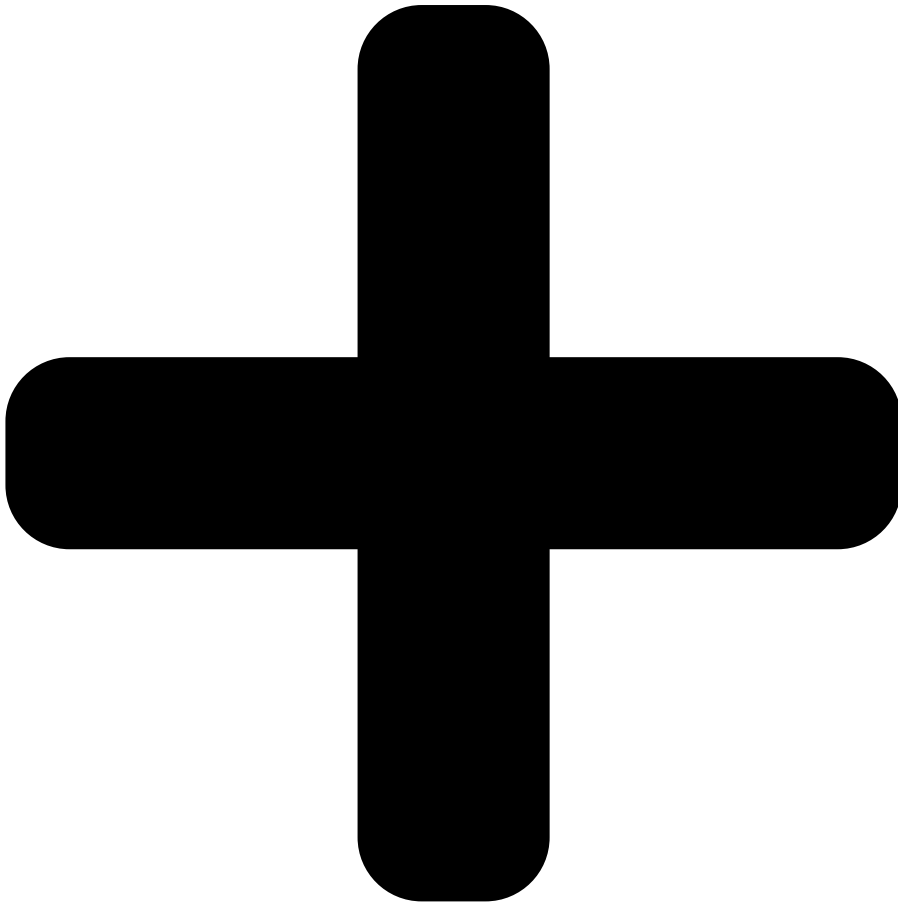
series of strongpoints. Suffering badly from British cloud gas – which was not moved sufficiently by the gentle breeze – and badly cut up by German machine gun fire and artillery, the Division nonetheless seized the Quarries and only failed to penetrate the third German line due to the relative weakness of the numbers of men that got through. Noel was killed in action on that first day, 25 September 1915. He was 26. His body was never formally identified, so he is commemorated at the Loos memorial, on Panel 73.

On the same day, [Lieutenant Cyril Francis Webb](#), who in peacetime had lived a few houses away at 27A Blenheim Road, of 2nd Battalion, Yorkshire Regiment was also killed.

After the War, Noel's sister Mary Elizabeth married Lieutenant John Edwin Hardy Duckworth, MC, Worcestershire Regiment. He became a Dentist in Bedford Park. Their daughter Jane Watson, Noel's niece, was formerly the Archivist at St Nicholas, Chiswick.

HOW AND WHERE 2/LIEUT. W N OLLIFF-LEE DIED





**Transcripts of enquiry and eye-witness reports concerning
2/Lt. W N O Lee**



Trench Map L00S 1915
From Lt. Col.
R Owen, OC 1st Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment to Mr
Walton Lee 20-10-1915

I have been both very busy and most of the time in action or I would have written to you before. I was also hoping against hope that your dear son might be alive, but the evidence of the bomber who was with him is, I regret to say, conclusive.

I ordered the Acting Adjutant to take the evidence of the men and send it to you, and I fear that is all we can do. You see the fight went on for five or six days after your son was killed and we were unable to look for anyone; eventually the official parties detailed for clearing the battlefield, buried officers and men.

I cannot tell you how we, his brother-officers deplore his death. He was beloved and respected by all ranks and I found him so keen and hard-working. I am only allowed to recommend officers who have been killed for "mention in dispatches" and this I have done for your dear boy.

I thought him a most charming fellow and we feel his death very much and truly we do sympathise with you and his family most deeply.

He showed the utmost bravery and by his courage and example largely contributed to the great victory shared in by this regiment. I hope to write to you again but now we are off to the trenches again tomorrow.

with deepest sympathy from the regiment and from myself...

From G B Schon to Mr Lee

We have made all possible enquiries about your son and as a result I am extremely sorry to have to inform you that there is little doubt but that he was killed instantaneously.

It appears that he was leading a small party of bomb throwers forward up a sap leading to a German first line trench, when he was struck by bullets from a German machine gun. The bomb throwers had already suffered heavily as we met with an awfully fierce resistance from the Germans before the trench was captured, and it was when leading a charge into the main German position that your son was hit.

May I say on behalf of those in the Battalion, both officers

and men, who knew 2nd. Lieut. Lee – they are not very many left now, – that we in a small way share your loss also. For we have to bear the loss of an extremely good officer whom the Colonel, Lt.Col. R Owen, had a very high opinion of, and one who was universally popular.

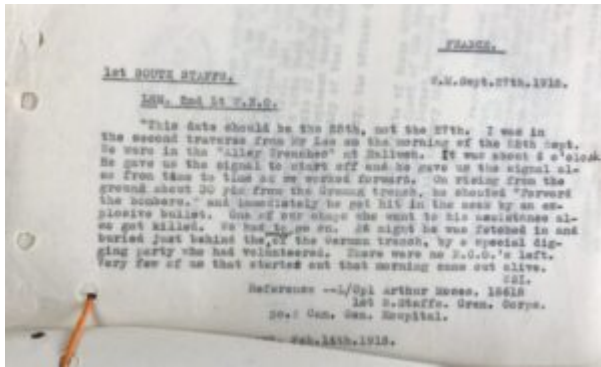
I enclose a signed statement by one of our bomb throwers which I am afraid leaves little doubt as to what actually happened.

PS Should anything further come to light, I will inform you as soon as possible. The loss of nearly all one's best friends in the Regiment hardly bears thinking of. His death without doubt took place early on the morning of 25th September in the trenches opposite Vermelles on our side, and Cite St. Elie on the Germans'.

No. 11799. Pte. Carrington F states (19 October 1915):-

"I was in the attack on the 25th September, 1915 and was with Lieut. Lee who took over a section of bombers with "A" Company. When we arrived at the German wire, all the section seemed to be "wounded or missing" except Lieut. Lee and myself. Lieut. Lee told me to follow him into the German sap. We got in the sap with a Pte. Jos. Johnson of another section. Lieut. Lee remarked that we should now have to try to put the machine gun out of action. We all three sent over some bombs and the gun ceased fire. Lieut. Lee said "Now is our chance" and led the way up the sap. The machine gun again opened fire and he was killed at once. I am quite certain that he was dead as he was shot in the head and also had three wounds in the body."

No. 16618 L/Cpl Moses A states (14 February 1916 from No.2 Canadian General Hospital):-



I was in the second traverse from Mr. Lee on the morning of the 25th September. We were in the "Alley Trenches" at Hulluch. It was about 6 o'clock. He gave us the signal to start off and he gave us the signal also from time to time as we worked forward. On rising from the ground about 30 yds from the German trench, he shouted "Forward the bombers" and immediately got hit in the neck by an explosive bullet. One of our chaps who went to his assistance also got killed. We had to go on. At night he was fetched in and buried just behind the parapet of the German trench, by a special digging party who had volunteered. There were no NCOs left. Very few of us that started out that morning came out alive."

GHQ, 3rd Echelon, BEF 7.3.16 to War Office Reference ...the letter from Mr Walton Lee concerning the recovery of the identity disc of the late 2nd. Lieutenant W N O Lee, 1st South Staffordshire Regiment. I have the honour to state that in obscure cases the information required by you has been furnished by the Standing Committee of Adjustment (where such information has been obtainable) either in their covering letter to Messrs. Cox and Co's Shipping Agency or in the report itself. In the case in point the facts are as follows. The Report of the SCofA was passed on 7-2-16 and forwarded through Command Paymaster, Base, on 8-2-16. On 13-2-16 the identity discs of Lt. RJ Richardson, 2nd. Lt. WNO Lee and a notebook of Lt. HT Burke, all of the South Staffordshire Regiment were received from the 12th Lancers with a covering note to say that they had been "collected" by their dismounting Company. As these particulars seemed somewhat misleading, the identity disc was forwarded, without comment, pending further enquiry, which has been, and is being, made by

the Casualty Branch with a view to ascertaining whether the body of the Officer in question was buried. Such information, if available, will be communicated in due course.

GHQ, 3rd Echelon, BEF 30.6.1916

The Officer Commanding, 12th Lancers forwarded the identity disc of the late 2nd.Lieut. WNO Lee, also that of Lt. RJ Richardson, and a notebook of Lt. HT Burke, together with other effects of NCOs and men of the 1st. S Staffordshire Regiment which had been collected by the Dismounted Company of that Regiment.

The Officer Commanding 12th lancers reported:-

"The effects of these officers and men were taken from bodies lying in front of the Trenches in Square G 11 b Map Bethune "B" series Combined Sheet 1/40,000. It was impossible to bury them. They were killed in the Battle of LOOS "

The next report received was from the Officer i/c Machine Gun Section, 6th Dragoon Guards who buried two full lieutenants and 12 men of the 1st S.Staffordshire Regiment. One Officer was identified as Lt. Richardson, and from other enquiries the other Officer was traced to be Lt. Burke. Neither had Identity Discs. They were buried under the wire between O.G.1 and O.B.1, Sheet 36c.N.W.3, Square G.11.a.2.8

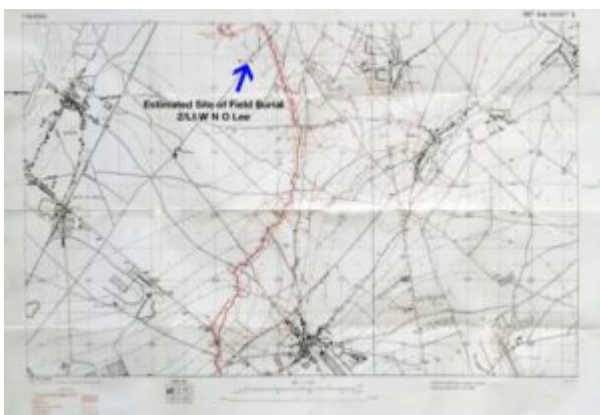
Later a report was received from the Officer Commanding, 7th. Royal Sussex Regiment stating that they had buried an unknown Officer of the North Staffordshire Regiment. He was wearing a private's tunic. The body was recognised as that of an Officer from the fact of buttons with the regimental crest being worn on the private's tunic and Officers puttees were also on the corpse. There was no identity disc and the pockets had clearly been cut open. He was buried at a point G.10.b.8.8, Sheet 36c.NW.3

From enquiries which have since been made in this office, it is very probable that the Officer belonged to a North

Staffordshire Battalion, and from the following deductions there is a strong presumption that the body found and buried was that of 2/Lt. Lee.

A party of the 12th Lancers originally found the bodies (which were lying in the same vicinity) and removed effects but were unable to bury them. Then a party of the 6th. Dragoon Guards while searching the same area were able to recover the bodies of Lts. Richardson and Burke, but could not get to the third body. Later the 7th. Royal Sussex Regiment at the same place were able to recover the body of an Officer, who (from the foregoing) had been searched and and all means of identification removed. It is very probable that this Officer was the one whose identity disc was removed by 12th. Lancers, and whose body could not be recovered by 6th Dragoon Guards, namely 2nd. Lieutenant Lee, especially as the burial place of the latter, as described by the Officer Commanding, 7th Royal Sussex Regiment, viz. :- G10.b.8.8 is almost identical with that given by the Officer Commanding, 6th Dragoon Guards, viz :- G.11.a.2.8

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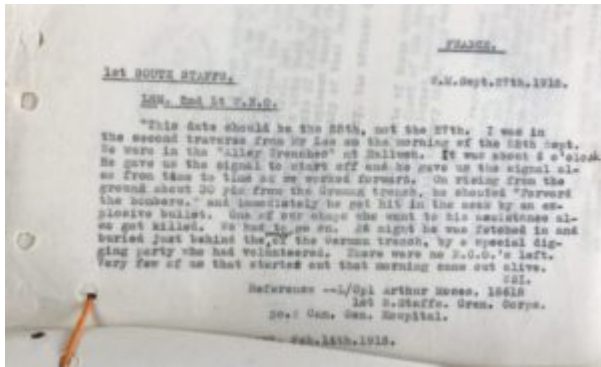
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