

Pte. J.Ede – The Queen’s (Royal West Surrey Regiment)

We believe this soldier to have been Pte Walter Ede of The Queen’s (Royal West Surrey Regiment) who died of wounds on 10th October 1915 aged 33. In civilian life he was a farm labourer and the son of James Ede, a house painter, and his wife, Rebecca, who lived in St John’s Road, Westcott. Although a J.Ede is also shown in the list of as one of those who were remembered at the ‘*We Thank You*’ lunch held in Westcott for servicemen who returned from the war, his name is not on the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and it appears Walter’s father’s initial may have been used on the memorial in error.

Walter Ede enlisted at Guildford, although he was at the time living in Romford, Essex. He served in the 1st/6th Battalion of The Queen’s which arrived in France on 2nd June 1915. After disembarking at Boulogne the battalion marched to a front line area east of Armentieres. Here life settled to the routine of 3 or 4 day periods in the trenches followed by similar periods of relief in billets in the villages of Le Bizet and Le Touquet. It was a trying existence; heavy rain fell to make the trenches muddy and slippery; the troops had to work continuously to maintain them and this often had to be carried out under sniper fire which caused occasional losses.

In late September 1915 the battalion was billeted at Vermelles and on 5th October was ordered to occupy old trenches along the Hulloch Road. The Regimental Diary records that the move started at 2.30 pm with companies marching at 5 minute intervals along communication trenches and the relief was not completed until 10.15 pm: ‘*The trenches were in a very muddy state and very narrow which made passing in them impossible and this delayed matters. The men were very done up by the time they arrived*’. The following two days were spent digging new trenches, sometimes under fire, and the battalion took some casualties.

The following day, 8th October, the battalion took heavier losses. The Regimental Diary contains the following entry: ‘*The enemy heavily bombarded our trenches throughout the afternoon and did considerable damage to parapets etc. During the evening the 6th RW Kent Regt attacked enemy’s trench and during the attack the Battalion stood to in case required. The attack which was at first successful was subsequently bombed out of the*

trench and the W.Kents retired to the original line – casualties killed Other Ranks 4, wounded Other Ranks 241.’

We do not know what happened to Walter Ede, but it appears that he died of wounds received either during the action of 8th October or possibly earlier. He died on 10th October 1915 and is buried in Choques Military Cemetery near Bethune, about 25 km west of Armentieres. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records that the village of Choques was from January 1915 to April 1918 the site of No.1 Casualty Clearing Station and that most of the burials there are of soldiers who died at the clearing station of wounds received at the Bethune front. After the war some graves were brought in from other cemeteries nearby and Choques now holds 1,801 Commonwealth Burials.