

Tom Treliving - Bayonet Fighter

As with most towns and cities in Britain, the Peterborough Advertiser (or 'Tiser' as the local soldiers called it), was filled with news from the front every week. News of movements of local troops, stories of bravery, wounds and death covered the pages along with photographs and maps when they were available. Often the newspaper would reproduce letters sent home from the front by local men telling stories of battle, but also of how well they were often faring, with good food and wine available in the French villages they had passed through. Sometimes men home on leave would be interviewed and this was a good way of slipping past the censor with the men willing to give more details.

The short excerpt in the letter below from Peterborough man Tom Treliving, 1st Bedfordshire Regiment, is a good example of the type of news which found its way home.

Peterborough Advertiser, Saturday 26th September 1914.

Letter from Tom Treliving

"We saved the French Army," wrote Private Tom Treliving of the Bedfordshire Regiment to Miss Penny of Peterborough, referring to the Battle of Mons. "As the shells burst around us we lay under cover smoking fags and eating tinned meat...Tell Bob the Germans can't shoot for nuts, but their artillery is a bit hot."

A short time after this was published Tom found himself in the middle of the **First Battle of Ypres**. (October 19–November 22, 1914), this was the first of three costly battles centred on the city of Ypres (now Ieper) in Western Flanders. Attempted flank attacks by both the Allies and the Germans failed to achieve significant breakthroughs, and both sides settled into the trench warfare that would characterise the remainder of the war on the Western Front.



Around three weeks after Tom's letter was published, the following story appeared in the Advertiser which gives an unusually detailed account of the action that took place.

Peterborough Advertiser, Saturday 19th December 1914.

Death of Tom Treliving

The death of Private Tom Treliving, 'D' company, 1st battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment, was now received in Peterborough. He was killed in action on 7th November, aged 27. The son of Frederick and Emma Treliving, of 16, Hubbard's Passage, Peterborough, he is commemorated on the Le Touret Memorial, Pas de Calais, France, on panels 10 and 11 along with other members of his regiment. Tom was one of the first to go out to the front and had been employed at the Peterborough G.P.O. He had a brother and many friends in Peterborough and he was engaged to be married. After becoming separated from his unit while advancing near Ypres, he had stumbled upon a farmhouse in a wood being held by a number of Germans. The Germans did not want to give away their position by firing on a solitary British soldier, so they left the farmhouse with the intention of bayoneting him to death. Tom finished all five of them off with his bayonet before succumbing to his fatal wounds. His body was later found surrounded by the dead Germans.

Around a month later on 16th January 1915, the Advertiser published a letter from Sergeant F.W. Golding of the 3rd Bedfordshire Regiment, sent to Mr. Fergusson of Princes Gardens, Peterborough. The letter told more about the death of Private Tom Treliving who lived at 64, Alma Road, Peterborough, and confirmed the action in which Tom met his death.

Peterborough Advertiser, Saturday 16th January 1915

Tom Treliving's Death

Sergeant Golding wrote: "I am sorry to have to tell you about poor Tom, but on 7th November 1914 we were in a wood holding a position, I had my platoon in some dugouts about 200 yards from the firing line, and all of a sudden we were surprised to see some of our troops retiring, but it was only for a time, as we all took up a line and drove them back [the Germans] a lot further than they came, as they don't like cold steel.

After we had driven them back and things had quietened down, we had a roll call, and I discovered Tom amongst about 12 more missing. As I had left a lot in the firing line I thought he would be there. About 2am on Sunday morning I and about 20 others formed a line and skirmished the wood in case of any snipers, and on going through a farm we came upon three Germans all dead, and a little further on we came across another German and one of our chaps. At first, (it was dark) I couldn't recognize who it was, but as I always try to find out by letters or disc who the poor chaps are, I was surprised to find it was poor Tom. How he got where he was is a mystery as he must have gone astray, but my idea is that he got separated from the regiment and was making his way back when he was set upon by the Germans who had concealed themselves in the house for the purpose of sniping, as he was killed by a bayonet, but we were all convinced he died a soldier's death, and had it been a case of man-to-man I believe Tom was a match for anyone with rifle or bayonet.

Well, as you say in your letter, there will be a good many sorrowful homes through the war, but I have a firm belief it will be over before very long."

It seems to me, on reading in Sgt. Golding's letter, that 'Tom was a match for anyone with rifle or bayonet', that bayonet fighting must have been something Tom excelled at. Whether he had been ambushed by four Germans or five, (the two stories differ here); the Germans certainly had the bad luck to pick on Tom Treliving for a quick bayonet kill. Tom clearly finished off at least four of the enemy before succumbing to his wounds. There may have been even more Germans in the ambush that made it impossible for him to win the day, but he made them pay dearly. What a fight that must have been.

I found Tom's card in the pension records (via the WFA website), and the section reproduced below is interesting in that it contains the details of two men on it. This is Tom's brother Albert, who is alluded to briefly in the letter of the 19th December. They have spelled Treliving wrongly, with a 'W' instead of a 'V', then crossed out the 'W' but didn't add the 'V'. Tom's brother's details are in red ink, A. Treliving, 7810, 2nd Shropshire Light Infantry, killed in action 25.6.15, with an address at Maida Hill, Holborn, London. The men's details are marked (1) and (2).

S.B.36.-D. (41081) Wt 11699/2562 459 Bks 7/19 H & J, Ld (42067) Wt 17685/2797 178 Bks 9/19		Regional No. 7/D/1771
Particulars of Man (1)		Particulars of Claimant
Name TRELIVING Tom No. 7810		Name TRELIVING Mrs Emma
Regiment 3rd Bedfordshire Regtl. No. 8030		Address 64 Alma Rd
Rank Private Marital Status S		Malden, Kent
Date and cause of death 7-11-14		New Address Maida Hill, Holborn
While serving W.S. Case No.		and date of 1-1-15
		Relationship Wife Date of Birth
		Particulars of any man in respect of whom the said Claimant has made a previous claim.
		Name
		Regiment
		Rank
		Date and cause of death
		While serving
		After discharge

Being new to these documents, I can't help but think that this Form, S.B.36.-D, was quite useless for the recording of details in this manner. Having been killed first, Tom's details should be entered in the empty section on the right for 'Particulars of any man in respect of whom the said claimant has

made a previous claim'. But of course his name was entered in the first column, as how could anyone know at the time that there would be a second casualty later on? Details of the second man cannot be entered into the last, empty column, because he wasn't killed first, so no previous claim could have been made concerning him, so Albert's details now have to be crammed into the same section as Tom's in a different colour and with crossings out. The whole thing looks to be a disaster!

Even if Form S.B.36.-D was used correctly, it was only capable of recording the details of two men. Even a relatively small town such as Peterborough at that time had four sets of three brothers killed in action, for example the **Rhodes** brothers below:

Albert, Private, 14436, 6th Northamptonshire Rgt. Missing, 26.9.16.

George, Corporal, 12952, 7th Lincolnshire Rgt. Killed in Action, 3.11.16.

Percy, Private, 61652, 23rd Royal Fusiliers. Died of Wounds, 17.2.17.

Form S.B. 36.-D, 1915 M.G. A.H. Regional No. 2/D/ 4349

Particulars of Man: Name **RHODES Percy** (1), **Albert** (2), **George** (3). Regt. No. 61652 (1), 14436 (2), 12952 (3). Rank **Private** (1), **Cpl** (2), **Cpl** (3). Date and cause of death: 22-2-17 **Died Wounds** (1), 3-11-16 **Killed in Action** (2), 17-2-17 **Died of Wounds** (3). Relationship: **W.S.** (1), **W.S.** (2), **W.S.** (3).

Particulars of Claimant: Name **RHODES Mr. John**. Address **Canada House, Dogsthorpe, Peterborough**. Relationship: **Father**.

Particulars of Awards: 15/- weekly from Oct 21/16 to Oct 21/17. Confirmed & Combined award. 10/- 21/16 + 5/- 21/16 = 15/- weekly + 3/- Bonus from 15.2.17.

The Rhodes brothers are recorded in the same unsatisfactory manner, all in one section. As another observation, it is a shame that in the section 'Particulars of Awards', they call a grant of an extra two shillings payment to their parents from 15.3.21, a 'bonus'.

Tom Treliving's Medal Index Card below shows he qualified for the 1914 Clasp.

Campaign: **1914**

Name: **TRELIVING**, Corps: **1st Bedfordshire Rgt**, Rank: **PR**, Reg. No.: **8030**

Medals: **MEDAL ROLL PAGE**, **VICTORY 1/9/1914/32 185**, **BRITISH 1914**, **14 STAR 1/2/13 143**

Action taken: **R.M.A.**

Qualifying Date: **16/8/14**

TOM TRELIVING, 8030, Private, 1st Bedfordshire Regiment. Killed in action, aged 27, on the 7.11.14 at Ypres, Belgium. The son of Frederick and Emma Treliving of 16 Hubbard's Passage, Peterborough. No known grave, he is commemorated on the Le Touret Memorial, Panels 10/11.

In 1901 Tom was an errand boy in London. In 1911 he was living with his elder brother Frederick and his family at 64 Alma Road, Peterborough. He was still at this address for probate in 1915. From 1909 his occupation was a postman in Yaxley.

In 2014 when I wrote my book about Peterborough in WWI, there were not the records available online to carry out the sort of checks we can do today. I didn't know anything about Tom's brother, not even his name. It was just the simple case that one brother was living in Peterborough, so qualified for the book, and the other, even if I had known about him, was living in London, so didn't qualify. In 1911 Albert Treliving was living with his parents and another brother, Richard, at 259a Killman Lane, London. His occupation was a Grocer's Porter. There were five other siblings.