

## **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 87<sup>th</sup> 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 47<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 Soham 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 Chris Pratt for recent research he has carried out for Earl Soham to mark the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ending of WW1. This is his detailed write up on Marmaduke Abbay :-

**Captain MARMADUKE JOHN NORMAN ABBAY**  
**87<sup>th</sup> Punjabis (attached 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs)**  
**Who Died of Wounds, aged 29, on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1915**

**1914/15 Star    British War Medal    Victory Medal**

Captain Abbay was one of three brothers, sons of the Rector of Earl Soham, who all answered the call to serve their country a long while before the outbreak of war. The eldest, Bryan Norman Abbay [did not go to Framlingham College] was commissioned into the Essex Regiment on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1900 (London Gazette 20/2/1900). On 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1905 (L.G.30/5/05) Lieutenant Abbay transferred to the 27<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Indian Army. Having served with both the 27<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and The Royal Fusiliers he finished the First World War as acting Lt. Col. in command of his own regiment, the 27<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. Post war service saw him commended for distinguished service in the Afghan War 1919 (L.G.3/8/20) and in Waziristan in 1919 -20 (L.G.10/6/21). In 1926 he was appointed Colonel of 18<sup>th</sup> King Edward's Own Cavalry, Indian Army and in the New Year's Honours list (L.G.1/1/31) he was appointed to the Order of the Bath (CB). His military career came to an end on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1941 (L.G.11/7/41) when he ceased to be a member of the Reserve.

Captain Abbay's younger brother, Ambrose Thomas Norman [OF], joined the Royal Navy in 1902 and was commissioned as a Sub. Lt. on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1906 (L.G.23/4/07). He finished the First World War as a Lt. Cmdr. on board HMS Rob Roy. Post war service saw him appointed to the Distinguished Service Order (L.G.8/3/20) for distinguished service in the Baltic in 1919, whilst in command of HMS Walker. The white ensign from HMS Walker still hangs in St.Mary's Church, Earl Soham. His naval record is not entirely decipherable but does show 30/4/31.....for Ark Royal in command but on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1932 (L.G.15/11/32) he was placed on the retired list at his own request in the rank of Captain.

I have established from the India Office that Captain Abbay's service record has not survived. However the Indian Army List confirms that he was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1885. He was commissioned into the Dorsetshire Regiment on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1905 (L.G.15/8/05) before transferring to the 87<sup>th</sup> Punjabi Regiment on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1907 (L.G.26/11/07). On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1907 (L.G.28/1/08) he was promoted to Lieutenant and on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1914 (L.G.22/9/14) 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 Confidential Reports on Indian Army Regiments 1913-1914 contains a report by Lt-Col. Fitz Wintle CO 87<sup>th</sup> Punjabis - Lt. Abbay is *"Painstaking and keen in his work, Has plenty of application and commonsense. A good rider. Fond of sport and of active habits. Passed for promotion. At present assistant recruiting officer for Sikhs"*.

The war diaries of the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs for the 9<sup>th</sup> March 1915 show that *"Captain M.J.N Abbay 87<sup>th</sup> Punjabis joins regiment"*. At this time the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs (Commanded by Lt. Col. H.L. Richardson) were part of the 8<sup>th</sup> (Jullunder) Indian Infantry Brigade (Brig-Gen E.P. Strickland) which was part of 3<sup>rd</sup> (Lahore) Division (Maj-Gen H. D'U. Kearny). The 3<sup>rd</sup> (Lahore) Division was part of the Indian Corps (Lt.-Gen. Sir James Willcocks) in 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (Gen. Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien).

The day after Captain Abbay joined the battalion it moved via Neuve Chapelle to the La Basee Road. Captain Abbay was a former pupil of Framlingham College and the website for the Society of Old Framlinghamians states that on *"10<sup>th</sup> March at Neuve Chapelle, 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"*. I have not been able to establish the source of this report. From the war diaries of 11<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> March 1915 they were taken out of the

line and returned to billets at Windy Corner. Again, from the war diaries of 13<sup>th</sup> March 1915 "our wounded included..... and Captain Abbay who was slightly wounded but remained on duty". The Earl Soham Parish Magazine tells us that Captain Abbay's wound was slight and he came home for a week at the end of March. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1915 he returned to France. The battalion spent the rest of March and early April alternately in the line or in billets at Croix Marmeuse and apart from occasional shelling had a quiet time.

The history of the 3<sup>rd</sup> (Lahore) Division shows that "On 25<sup>th</sup> April 1915 the 3<sup>rd</sup> (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". In the entry for Captain Abbay, "de Ruvigny's Roll of Honour" states ".....and in the attack at Ypres on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April, when the machine gun bearer – a Sikh – was struck down, Captain Abbay took the gun and carried it, drawing the fire of the enemy on himself, until he fell badly wounded. Being very hot with his exertions and faint from loss of blood, he told his men to pour cold water over him, and they being Indians did so". Of the 444 men of the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs that set off 384 (78%) met their death and none of the attacking troops reached the first of the German lines. "de Ruvigny" goes on to state that Captain Abbay was "very seriously wounded, he was very ill when he reached the hospital at Boulogne, the wound would not heal, and he was unable to survive the third serious operation, and died under an anaesthetic on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1915".

The Framlingham Weekly News of 1<sup>st</sup> May 1915 quotes "Canon and Mrs. Abbay of Earl Soham received a message on Wednesday that their son Captain M.J.N. Abbay with the 87<sup>th</sup> Punjabis at the front, had been seriously wounded in the thigh. They at once left for France....." Sadly it also reports on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1915 "The Rev. Canon Abbay writes from the Hotel du Louvre, Boulogne that Captain M.J.N. Abbay, 87<sup>th</sup> Punjabis, who was dangerously wounded at Ypres on 25<sup>th</sup> April is going on favourably.....Canon and Mrs. Abbay returned home....." The Earl Soham Magazine reports that having returned home on the 6<sup>th</sup> May Canon and Mrs. Abbay were recalled the following day and stayed with Captain Abbay through the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. At about 0400 on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1915 Captain Abbay died of his wounds. He was brought home and buried with military honours at Earl Soham.

On 10<sup>th</sup> May 1915 the Framlingham Weekly News carried a report from the Earl Soham Parish Magazine "In Memoriam for Captain Marmaduke Abbay – Captain Marmaduke Abbay was on leave from his regiment at Jheklum, North West Province of India when war broke out". "Owing to the casualties in the Indian Force, more officers were wanted at the front, and after several months, Captain Abbay was allowed, on December 24<sup>th</sup> (1914) to join another regiment, the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs, then in France, and to bring 100 of his own men with him". ".....in the four day battle at Neuve Chapelle he fought with the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs.....". "Only one of the ten British officers came out untouched and half the men of the regiment were killed or wounded".

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



His full entry in the "de Ruvigny's Roll of Honour" is as follows :-

**ABBAY, MARMADUKE JOHN NORMAN**, Capt., 87th Punjabis, Indian Army, 2nd s. of the Rev. Richard Abbay, Rector of Earl Soham, Framlingham, Hon. Canon of Norwich, and Alderman of East Suffolk, by his wife, Janet,



**Marmaduke J. N. Abbay.**

dau. of the Rev. Canon C. F. Norman, and grandson of Thomas Abbay, of Great Ouseburn; *b.* Earl Soham Rectory, co. Suffolk, 3 Nov. 1885; educ. at The College, Framlingham; Mr. T. Eastman's, Winchester, and at Sandhurst; gazetted 2nd Lieut. Dorsetshire Regt. 16 Aug. 1905; promoted Lieut. and transferred to the 87th Punjabis, 16 Nov. 1907, and Capt. 16 Aug. 1914. On the outbreak of war he was attached to the 47th Sikhs, Lahore Division, served with the Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders, and was slightly wounded at Neuve Chapelle, 10-14 March, 1915, where only one British officer out of ten was untouched; and in the attack at Ypres on Sunday, 25 April, when the machine gun bearer—a Sikh—was struck down, Capt. Abbay took the gun and carried it, drawing the fire of the enemy on himself, until he fell badly wounded. Being very hot with his exertions and faint from loss of blood, he told his men to pour cold water over him, and they, being Indians,

did so. The result was that, besides being very seriously wounded, he was very ill when he reached the hospital at Boulogne, the wound would not heal, and he was unable to survive the third serious operation, and died under an anaesthetic on 10 May. He was brought home and buried with military honours at Earl Soham. Bronze memorial tablets by Sir Thomas Graham Jackson, Bt., R.A., have been placed in the churches of Earl Soham, Suffolk, and Great Ouseburn, Yorkshire. His two brothers are (1916) on Active Service—Major Bryan Abbay as second in command of the 20th Royal Fusiliers (3rd Public Schools Battn.,) and Lieut. Ambrose Abbay, in command of the Destroyer Garry.