



Ronald Whidborne Elverson is first mentioned as being at Ellesmere College in the 1914 Kalendar.

He arrived via Dover College, Jesus College, Cambridge and The Université de Paris. In the 1911 Census he is described as an Army Student at Cambridge. A career in the forces was a family tradition for his father, Hamilton James was a retired infantry Major of The Queen's West Surrey Regiment.

At Ellesmere, Ronald was 2nd Lieutenant in The Officer Training Corps. His Cambridge service saw him appointed as such in June 1911 in the Territorials.

In addition to serving with the O.T.C. Ronald taught French and German and helped with sports - he was a member of The Football Selection Committee in 1914. He also assisted with The Photographic Society. When he left Ellesmere in July 1914, having been on the staff for two years, he became a temporary 2nd Lieutenant (gazetted 25th September 1914) and temporary Lieutenant (gazetted 17th October 1914) in The 9th Battalion, The East Surrey Regiment.

The first eight months of 1915 were spent by 'The East Surreys' in training and preparing for trench warfare on such places as Clapham Common. On the last day of August, Ronald and his battalion moved to Boulogne, via Folkestone, and from there on to the Lambert area where the men spent more time digging and filling in trenches, shooting and bathing. The battalion's War Diaries note that a heavy draught horse died from over eating on the 15th September!

Further training was undertaken on the erection of barbed wire entanglements and practising attacks. There were discipline problems in this period for there are reports of fighting and drunkenness amongst the men. On the 22nd September, however, the troops moved up to the front line around Bethune.

The 9th Battalion were to attack Hullock, Loos at 11.00 am on 26th September. The Hill 70 quarry was captured but they could advance no further as the wire had not been cut and they were vulnerable to machine gun fire from both flanks. The battalion took cover in the captured German trenches but now they were at the mercy of artillery bombardment and constant rifle fire. Many of the wounded were hit again.

During this attack, fourteen Officers and 438 Other Ranks were killed, including Lieutenant Elverson. He was reported missing on 26th September 1915, but his body was never discovered. His military service records have survived and are available to view at The National Archives, Kew. Included in his file are copies of the correspondence between his mother and The War Office as the family clung to the hope that Ronald had not died but had been taken prisoner of war.

Lance Corporal Stanbury, No. 4313, East Surrey Regiment wrote to Ronald's mother on 22nd October to the effect:

"We made an advance about 12 noon on 26th (September). We all advanced like heroes and we got to the wires outside the German trenches. We were there firing for a while, then an order was passed along the line to retire and in the retirement I came into contact with Lieut. Elverson. It was hell on earth, what with our guns and the German guns, and machine guns that enfiladed us, also the snipers fire and the rifle fire from the German trenches and, as I aforesaid, Lieut. Elverson and I were retiring together. We then spotted our Major Welch of the East surreys lying down badly wounded, close to the German wire entanglements. We goes over, and attends, dresses his wounds. He had, I think, two wounds in the head, and one in the leg above the knee. Lieut. Elverson dresses his head and with my handkerchief we made a tourniquet which we ties very tight around his leg above the wound to stop the bleeding. We also asked if we could assist him away – to which he refused. To my opinion the Major would die very soon but before we went we shook hands with him and wished him the best of luck and hopes to see him some time again. After this period of time had elapsed we looked round. We could see our fellows retiring a very long way off, in fact we were the only two left in the vicinity unharmed and the Germans still firing. We then keep on walking back together and we came across a South Wales Borderer officer badly wounded. He had been hit in the right should and leg. Lieut. Elverson asked if we could do anything for him. He wished to be assisted away into safety. Lieut. Elverson and I then picked him up and helped him out of it. We had not gone very far when Lieut. Elverson got hit in the side or leg, which I am not sure, but I think it was in the leg, and fell. I were left by myself with the wounded officer. I asked Lieut. Elverson if I could do anything for him but he told me he would manage himself and for to go on the best I can with the wounded Welsh officer and that was the last I saw of Lieut. Elverson, but I will not fear the worst not yet awhile, if I were you. In all probabilities he may be taken as a prisoner of war...."

Another statement was made by Private Wooley, No. 6243 whilst at No. 10 General Hospital, Etaples:

"I and another fellow helped to bandage Lieut. Elverson up, close to the German wire. He was hit by a bullet right through the side of the chest and was also lamed by shrapnel in the leg. He was calling out for the Captain. We started carrying him back but he told us to put him down and soon after we got the order to retire. We left him and Major Welch together. He was breathing rather rough and could not bear to be moved. He was quite conscious and asked for a cigarette and gave me one myself. I never saw or heard of him after that".

An addendum to this statement adds:

"Lieut. Elverson was his (Wooley's) platoon commander so there could be no mistake about him. The bullet or piece of shrapnel entered the right side of the chest and came out under the left arm, where the wound was very large. There was a great deal of loss of blood. The wounds were bound up with three bandages which were available. Lieut, Elverson smoked a cigarette and took some tablets he had with him. He was quiet cheerful and said to Major Welch when the men had to retire "never mind our chaps will soon be back" but when Wooley and others of the regiment got back hours later in the morning all the wounded had disappeared. Lieut. Elverson had only one wound".

Private Morrisey, No. 6393 was also wounded in the battle and he made a statement from his hospital bed:

“After I was hit I saw Lieut. Elverson walking. He seemed to me to be delirious. He was retreating, there was heavy fire going on, he seemed to have his trousers off and was bleeding from wounds in both thighs, he ought not to have been standing under such fire. I think he must have been killed”.

Private Gilbert, No. 5810 added:

“On 25th September 1915 at about 11a.m.at Loos we charged on level ground, gained and lost, and gained and ultimately lost ground. Lt. Elverson was my own officer. When about 70 yards from him I saw him hit in (I think 'left') leg by bullet. He fell and turned over. I saw and heard no more of him”.

In the chaos of war, especially when in the heat of battle, it is hardly surprising that there was confusion and Ronald was only officially declared dead three years later on 26th September 1918.

Ronald's life is remembered on The Vis-en-Artois Memorial; The Dover War Memorial; the memorial in the parish church, St James the Apostle, Dover; at Jesus College, Cambridge and at Ellesmere College.

Ronald was born in Kensington, London on 23rd July 1890 and he was baptised on 3rd October when the family lived at Clanrichards Gardens. By 1901, however, his parents, Hamilton James and Anna Eliza and the family of two elder brothers and two elder sisters had settled permanently in Victoria Park, Dover.

He was posthumously awarded The British War Medal, The Victory Medal and The 1915 Star. They were sent to his brother, Arthur, to whom probate was granted in 1921.

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Family of Ronald Whidborne Elverson:

Father	Hamilton James	(1850 – 1904)	Major
Mother	Anna Eliza	(1851 - 1934)	née Whidborne
Siblings	James Hamilton	(1882 – 1948)	
	Edith Rosa	(1883 – 1966)	
	Charles Gordon Lee	(1885 – 1965)	
	Ada Marguerite (Daisy)	(1887 – 1978)	
	Arthur John Hawes	(1889 – 1953)	

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