

## Douglas Gordon Kemp



Douglas was born in his grandparents home at 27, Princes Street, Ryde, Isle of Wight on 10th August 1892, the second of four surviving children to Sydney Thomas Kemp and his wife Emily (nee Hayden). He spent his early years on the island, and from the age of 11 to 16 was educated at the Isle of Wight County Secondary School in Sandown. When he left school he became an articled apprentice for three years to a Mr C Mathews - a civil engineer, the Borough Surveyor of Ryde. During that time he was involved in estimating, and construction, and worked on sundry drainage, building and water supply schemes. (The 1911 Census shows him as living at home with his parents in Temple House, George Street, Ryde, where his occupation is given as being an architect's assistant). Having completed his apprenticeship, for twelve months or so, Douglas was paid 25 shillings a week by a Mr Barton, and worked on some sanitary engineering, and a small town planning scheme in Ryde. In 1913 (probably around May) he moved to London, where up to July 1914 he was employed under the Borough Surveyor of Paddington, mostly reinforcing concrete on bridges. When war was declared in August 1914, he was working under Mr Wilson (civil engineer) on the pier harbour at Thames Haven.

Aged 17, Douglas first became a soldier in the Royal Engineers in October 1909 when he enlisted (at Ryde) in the Territorial Force, as a Sapper in the Hampshire (Fortress) RE. In June 1913 he transferred to the London Electrical Engineers RE (T) as a Sapper (qualifying as a "skilled electrician" in July 1914, and a "superior electrician" in August 1916).

When the war broke out Douglas was embodied into the 3rd Company L.E.E, and was detailed to searchlight work at Dover. In December 1914 he was promoted to Acting 2nd Corporal, then in August 1915 to Acting Corporal. On 19th September 1915 he joined the British Expeditionary Force in France, where he spent some time attached to the 1/2nd Home Counties Field Company RE; and to the 1/3rd London Field Company RE in the searchlight detachment, where he was employed in general duties in the field. His rank as Corporal was made substantive on 2nd December 1915.

On 12th May 1916, Douglas returned to England, for searchlight work with the L.E.E. In June 1916 he moved to SE Section L.A.D. He returned in January 1917, shortly before being attached to the RE Cadet School in Deganwy, Wales. On receiving a temporary commission as a 2nd Lieutenant, he was discharged from the L.E.E on 31st March 1917. As that rank he served with the 470th Field Company (renamed from 3/1st North Midland) RE (T) in France.

On 9th February 1918 Douglas was decorated with the Military Cross. The award of the medal related to the associated actions of the battle of Cambrai (20th November to 30th December 1917), and in particular the events at Gouzeaucourt on 30th November 1917.

On that day the Germans launched an attack, in the area which was largely defended by troops of the 29th Division. Eye witness accounts recalled that the Germans were liberally supplied with automatic rifles or light machine guns strapped on and fired from the hip. The infantry attack was initiated at the same time as an artillery barrage being directed in successive steps on reserve trenches and strong points. Long-range fire was started at the same time on back areas and railheads, particularly on Fins and Velu. The infantry was accompanied by about 20 low-flying aeroplanes employing machine-gun fire. The greater part of 29th Division "were apparently completely surprised and submerged with little resistance".

Having been , forced out of his headquarters at Quentin Mill, on the western slope of Quentin Ridge, due to artillery and machine gun fire Major-General de Lisle, (Officer Commanding 29th Division) came across the 470th Field Company on the Fins Road. The company was marching from Equancourt to join their Division, the 59th, on the Bourlon front at Flesquieres. Major-General de Lisle ordered the field company to advance at once and to hold certain positions. The Germans had advanced and occupied the villages of Gonnelleu, La Vacquerie, and Gouzeaucourt, and had progressed to about 1,000 yards beyond Gouzeaucourt on the Fins Road. It was there that the company (along with a few other soldiers) occupied an old British trench, and held off any further advance for several hours. When a counter attack was made, they joined it, and helped push the Germans back out of Gouzeaucourt.

The citation to Douglas' Military Cross published in the London Gazette reads:

""For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. During an enemy attack he took charge of a party and held his position with great courage and coolness until reinforcements arrived. He then took part in a counter-attack and assisted in capturing an important trench which he held until relieved. He showed splendid initiative and determination at a critical time".

A short time after receiving his decoration, on 21st March 1918, the Germans launched their Spring Offensive. Three sections of the 470th Field Company RE were in the field near Noreuil, with one section being in reserve at Mory. At about 5 a. m intense shelling began which consisted of both gas and high explosive, the effect of which lasted until 9 a.m. By 9.30 the Germans were in the British front line, and the position was acute. Consequently the field company took up its' battle position in a trench east of Noreuil (Douglas and 2nd Lieutenant English were in the centre). Almost at once the Germans advanced against the trench, but were forced to turn direction. As the company was in danger of being taken in reverse, an order was given to withdraw to the sunken road by the Advance Dressing Station at Igarree Corner. However, when they arrived they found the Germans advancing on them, along the road from both directions. Only one officer and six other ranks returned to rear headquarters at Mory. Douglas was taken a Prisoner of War. He died from a leg wound on 23rd March 1918 whilst in the German field hospital at Quéant. He is buried in a mass grave in the German Cemetery there, and is commemorated in the H. A. C. Cemetery in Ecoust-St. Mein.

He was unmarried, and had no children.



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