

Wilkins Fitzwilliam Chipp

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THE MAN BEHIND THE MEDAL(S) LT COL W F CHIPP, THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT

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One name features prominently in the history of the Regiment during The First World War; it is that of Lt Col Wilkins Fitzwilliam Chipp DSO and Bar, OBE, MC, ED, Croix De Guerre France and Belgium; this is his 'story'.

In September 1899, on a wave of militarism and patriotism caused by the impending war in South Africa, young Chipp, aged 17, enlisted at his home town of Kington, Herefordshire in the local company of the Herefordshire Rifle Volunteer Corps. Chipp was the son of the Deputy Chief Constable and attended Lady Hawking's Grammar School in Kington and this was to be the start of a 50 year acquaintance with a military uniform.

Chipp's military career progressed, he was promoted Corporal in 1900, Sergeant in 1902 and Colour Sergeant in 1907. He was the Sergeant in charge of the Colour Party when Edward VII opened the Rhayader Dam and water works. On the formation of the Territorial Force in 1908 Chipp enlisted into the 1st Battalion of the newly formed Herefordshire Regiment. He received the Kings Colour on behalf of the Regiment at Windsor from King Edward VII in June 1909. He was also noted as a fine rifle shot.

At the outbreak of war in August 1914, he was Colour Sergeant (effectively Sergeant Major) of the Kington Company. He was well respected and remembered by one veteran I spoke to some years ago, as a very fair man, who always had the interests of the men, especially the new young recruits at heart.

Chipp remained as Sergeant Major during late 1914 and early 1915 when the Battalion was billeted mainly in the Newmarket area, undergoing training and working on the East of England defences. In August 1915, Chipp landed with the Battalion on C Beach Suvla Bay Gallipoli. The trials of the campaign are well documented and The Herefordshire Regiment's experiences were no different. Chipp wrote home of his comrades who were killed or wounded, of the cunning of 'John Turk', the shortages of water and the heat, flies and general misery. He took command of A Company when all the officers became casualties, over a period which included it being cut off for 5 days. He was not to be spared, and an Army Form (AF) B 104-80A dated 19 September 1915 {1}, addressed to Chipp's father - Capt T F Chipp, Denmark Road, Gloucester, reports that '277 CSgt W F Chipp is in hospital in Malta suffering from a bullet wound to the arm and bruising to the side'.

He recovered and rejoined the Battalion at Suvla, and was on the peninsula when he was informed that he had been Commissioned into The Herefordshire Regiment on 9 October 1915. He was later evacuated to England suffering from dysentery, and joined the 3rd Battalion (raised for the war period only) in March 1916. He soon rejoined the 1st Battalion in the Middle East, and a letter signed by Second Lieutenant Chipp at Park Hall Camp Oswestry on 7 April 1916 says ' Sir, I have filled out the form as requested, I am at present under orders to take a draft of Lancashire Fusiliers to the MEF next week. I enclose a photograph for your use - if you should ever need one' {1}. There is no indication of the addressee, so the nature of the 'form' and potential use of the photograph remain unknown.

Chipp then served with the Battalion throughout its time in the Middle East; garrisoning outposts in Western Egypt and the Suez Canal, the battles of Romani, Gaza and Khuweilfeh, and the eventual relief of Jerusalem. He at various times was the Adjutant, company commander and for a time a staff officer on the staff of 158 Brigade. He was promoted captain and major, attended various staff courses, had a hill named after him in the high area of Tel Asur in Judea during the actions of Spring 1918. He was awarded the Military Cross for 'conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty he carried out a valuable recce and cleared up an obscure situation. He readjusted parts of the line with great skill and showed complete disregard of danger' at Khuweilfeh in November 1917.

On reorganisation of the Army in 1918, the Herefordshire Regiment was the 'fourth battalion' which was lost from 158 Bde and gained by 102 Bde, 34 Div in France. The Battalion sailed for France on 17 June 1918, ironically (as will be seen later) the convoy was escorted by Japanese destroyers. The great German offensive of the Spring was still not beaten. 34 Div moved to the Chateau Thierry area in support of the French, and had their first experience of the gas and slaughter of the Western Front. By September the Battalion was in the Kemmel area and joined the great advance via Menin and Moen, being in

reserve in the Wevelghem area on 11 Nov. During this period Chipp found himself as Company commander, Regimental Second in Command and for several periods Commanding Officer of the Battalion.

He was always in the thick of the action and he was awarded:

The DSO for action in the Menin area in Oct 1918 when he ... 'commanded his Battalion with great skill and gallantry, with only part of his command he was ordered to take over the whole front and push on, an extremely difficult operation which he carried out at once under heavy shelling and machine gun and minenwerfer fire. It was entirely due to his own personal recce under fire and perfect control that enabled his men to overcome every obstacle'.

A bar to the DSO gazetted on 1 January 1919.

Mention in Despatches gazetted on 30 December 1918 and 10 July 1919.

The French and Belgium Croix de Guerre both gazetted 19 June 1919.

He was one of only two who received 'triple honours' (DSO and bar and MC) from King George V at Buckingham Palace in 1919.

Although the war in Europe was over, Chipp according to a confidential report form {1} dated 21 May 1919 had 'an above average line record and was anxious to continue soldiering as a regular, strongly recommended; a fine rifle shot, an excellent trainer. Posted to 2nd Cameronians'.

The details of his inter war activities are not known in full, but his military service continued while he worked in the forestry service in India and Malaysia where he served in the Malay States Volunteer Regiment. He was made OBE in 1940.

Various papers {1} show him as a Wing Commander in the Admin and Special Duties Branch of the RAFVR at the time of the fall of Singapore in 1942. He was captured and endured over 3 years as a prisoner in Changi prison where he was appointed chief librarian. He was released and returned to England in 1946 aged 64. The papers include a detailed handwritten report on 'The Observer Corps, events leading up to the surrender of Singapore' and concludes 'despite the Jap searches the Observer Corps nominal roll was kept hidden and is still in the possession of the writer' signed W F Chipp Commanding.

Chipp obviously had a penchant for hiding things. As illustrated by an account which he wrote and which was published in the KSLI and Herefordshire Regimental Journal, in brief:

'Having had some slight experience of the Japanese, and hearing first hand accounts of their behaviour since the invasion began, it was evident that any valuables in possession of prisoners, or abandoned would be quickly annexed I had in my possession my decorations and medals (twelve) and was determined if possible to hide them from our captors.....

For a secure hiding place I consulted ... the director of museums who himself had a valuable camera and some films he did not want to lose. He suggested a safe hiding place could probably be found in the Raffles Museum On the evening of the capitulation, 15 February 1942, we went to the museum.....

The problem of finding a hiding place for my small case was solved by my friend who took me to the reptile room on the first floor. The larger models were mounted on hollow plaster casts, and in one of these I concealed my case. The camera would not fit and was hidden behind a corner cupboard

Then 3 years and 7 months after the British surrender, came the capitulation of the Japanese on 3 September 1945 the Japanese guards were replaced by Ghurkas and no one was allowed to leave except by special permission On 6 September my old friend Colonel JP Read CBE (RA) came to the camp to enquire of his old acquaintances. I told him of the hidden case and a few days later received special permission to accompany him into Singapore, the Director of Museums was unfortunately too ill to the museum was locked, but we found an assistant, the same one that had admitted us 4 years previously, and entered the museum the reptile room was found to be locked and all exhibits covered by sheeting. The assistant explained that the Japanese disliked reptiles and had kept the room locked during their occupation ... lifting up the hamadryad I quickly found my case with contents intact.....

The search for the camera was not successful. On return to the camp I told my friend of my good fortune and his misfortune. He was very ill and said he would probably not need them in any case; he died a few days later shortly after his evacuation to India.

A fascinating account, and perhaps one would think that Chipp had had enough of military service, but on return to UK he joined the reformed Home Guard as Lieutenant Colonel, commanding the 11 County Of London Battalion. His probable last appearance in uniform was on Armistice day 1956 when he commanded the Home Guard, Guard of Honour at the Grave on the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey.

Chipp died in 1970 and there were many fond words in various obituaries that were published 'a truly great man who served others consistently throughout his life', 'as good a soldier that could be found', 'a truly great man has passed on'.

But what of his medals? These were sold by Spinks in 1994 and consisted of:

Distinguished Service Order and second award bar.

Officer of the Order of The British Empire

Military Cross

1914/15 Star

British War Medal

Victory Medal with MID

1939/45 Star

Pacific Star

Defence Medal

War Medal

Efficiency Decoration (MALAYA)

TFEM (AO 288 of October 1912)

Croix De Guerre (France)

Croix De Guerre (Belgium)

This raises one question - Chipp in his account of hiding his medals describes them as '... medals (twelve) ...', my assumption is that this meant a total of 12 medals, if this is the case then what were the 12?

Various documents of his have found their way to the Liddle Collection {1} and the Herefordshire Regimental Museum {2}, and included amongst these is a letter from Chipp's nephew who deposited the items in the Liddle collection which says, 'my uncle headed the Observer Corps in Malaya and spent 4 years in Changi prison after surrender' and that the documents were deposited on the death of Mrs Chipp (presumably Chipp's wife) after her death aged 102, it goes on 'lots of other papers and his medals went to pay for my Aunt's upkeep'.

Thus concludes the story of a great son of Herefordshire, a great man and a great soldier, who enjoyed a truly remarkable military association which lasted for more than 50 years.

References

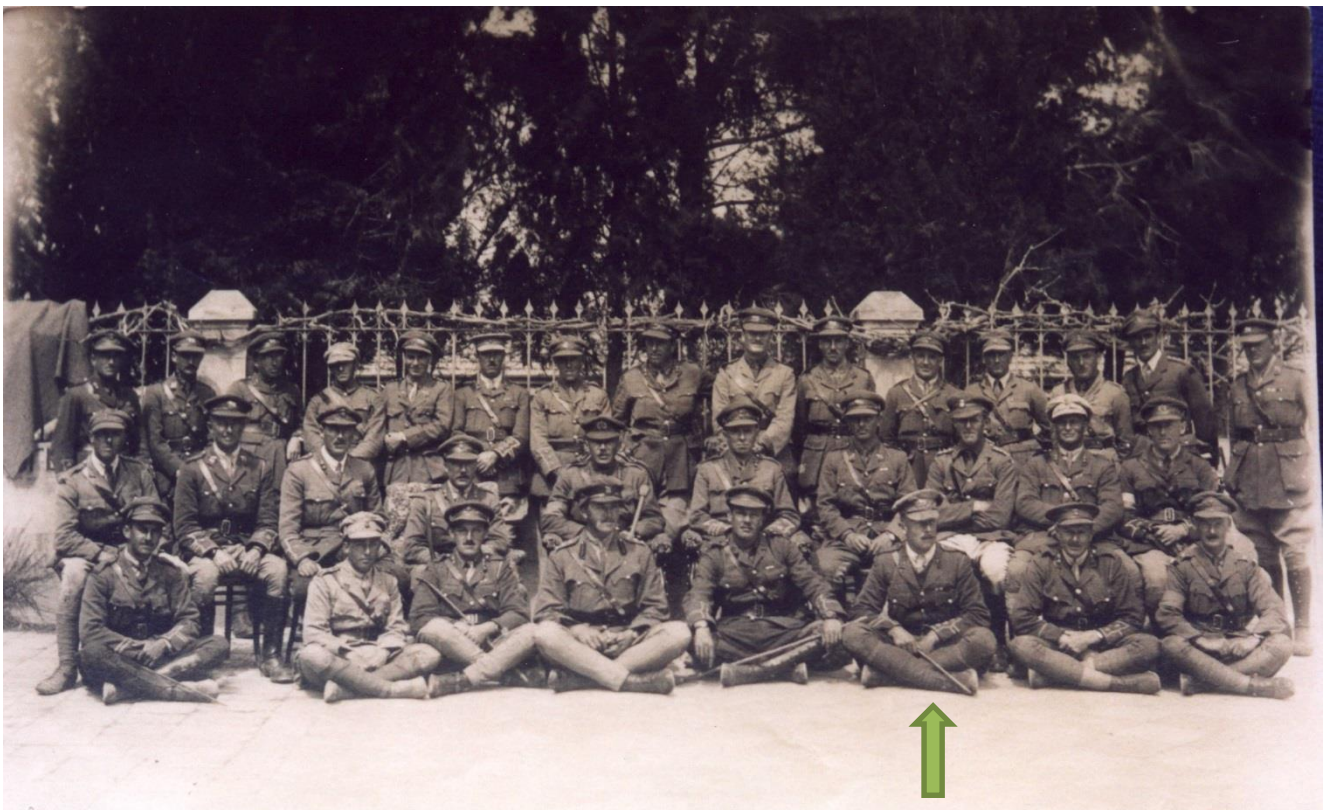
1. The Liddle Collection, The Bretherton Library, Leed University.
2. The Herefordshire Regimental Museum, The Drill Hall, Harold St, Hereford.

Photographs

1. The 1908 Colour Party.



2. Capt W F Chipp, 'A group of officers from 158 Bde attending a study day, Jerusalem Apr 1918'.



3. Lt Col W F Chipp, 11 County of London Home Guard 1952.

