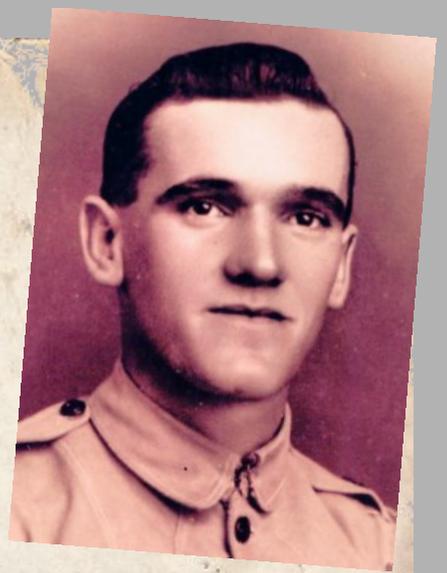


Archie Smith



Archie Smith was born into a military family at Plymouth on route to his father's next posting.

His father had been based in Aldershot and also India, a career soldier who served for 27 years until his premature death. His father became the range warden of Purfleet Rifle Range so it was here in Thurrock that Archie grew up.

Archie himself enlisted under age at 17, joining the Signal Corps as a bugler for the King's Royal Rifle Corp (KRRs), now amalgamated as the Green Jackets. He was sent to France, along the Somme battle line, his platoon under the command of future Prime Minister Anthony Eden.

He was captured by enemy forces in a big battle near Fluers. It was the first use of tanks by the British army, a trial project involving 9 such vehicles with the KRRs following behind them. The speed at which the tanks advanced compared to trench warfare meant they were able to advance farther faster. However, this also meant they were outflanked, exposed in rolling fields where Archie was caught.



Archie was amongst a small number of soldiers who surrendered and were taken to Germany, though they were unable to ascertain where, and billeted with Russian prisoners of war. Archie was put to work for the Germans as he was not an officer, repairing their railways.

There was never enough food and the Germans were starving by 1918, so the POWs had nothing. As a result in later life Archie never left his plate until it was empty.

After the war he stayed in as a regular and was sent to Karachi which was then in India. Archie left the army in 1925, he came out as a corporal having never made commission and carried on working as an electrician. Archie worked at various institutions around the borough, including Bata.



Archie married in 1928 and lived in Delafield Road off Rectory Road in Little Thurrock. He had six children, four boys and two girls.

When the Second World War broke out he was a bit too old for active service. He joined the Home Guards 'Dad's Army' in Grays and became a Sergeant Major responsible for drilling recruits in the playground of the junior school in Arthur Street.

In 1953 the family put money together to buy a television, but whenever TV programmes depicted POW camps he would get upset as he felt they were never that silly and the guards were not idiots. He said the Germans blamed him when things went wrong and put him in solitary with only bread and water.

Like so many people of his day Archie never had a driving licence and rode a bicycle everywhere. He was delighted when his second son bought him a power attachment for it, which meant he could cycle much more easily.

"Dad was very good with his hands and loved making things - I remember he made me a toy car when I was two or three years old. My mother would sit me in it when we went to meet the others from school and they would push me back".

Story provided by Archie's youngest son, Michael Smith.