

The Man behind the Medal

Colour Sergeant Aubrey Thorpe – 1st Northumberland Fusiliers

Group of 5 – Queen’s Sudan Medal, Khedive’s Sudan Medal (bar Khartoum), Queen South Africa Medal (bars Belmont, Modder River, Orange Free State, Transvaal), King South Africa Medal (bars South Africa 1901, South Africa 1902), WW1 War Medal



Aubrey Thorpe was born on 23 August 1877 at Hastings in Sussex, U.K.. He enlisted with the Northumberland Fusiliers at Aldershot on 10 January 1895 and was appointed Lance Corporal on 13 November the same year, then promoted to Corporal on 29 February 1896. On 30 November 1898 he was promoted to Sergeant, and on 1 September 1900 to the rank of Colour Sergeant. Colour Sergeant was in effect what in today’s Infantry would be the Company Sergeant Major.

Late in 1896 he was posted to Gibraltar and on 17 January 1898 with the Regiment to Egypt. He was at the Battle of Khartoum which took place on 2 September 1898. He was posted to South Africa on 16 September 1899, serving with the regiment until the end of hostilities. On 23 June 1902 he was posted to the reserves and remained there until 9 January 1907.

During the South African War (1899-1902) he was involved with the Relief of Kimberley, and was present at the Battles of Belmont and Modder River. At the Battle of Modder River the Fusiliers lost 11 men killed and 34 wounded. The Regiment was not involved in the Battle of Magersfontein as they were ‘holding the camp’ and creating a diversion along the railway to the left of the real attack.

The Regiment saw little action in the first quarter of 1900, and after the fall of Bloemfontein the Regiment occupied Hoopstad, a town 150km north of Bloemfontein, before moving to the Kroonstad district to protect Roberts’ lines of communication. The Regiment saw action at Lindley (220km south of Johannesburg) in June 1900, before moving into the Western Transvaal in pursuit of Boer General de Wet.

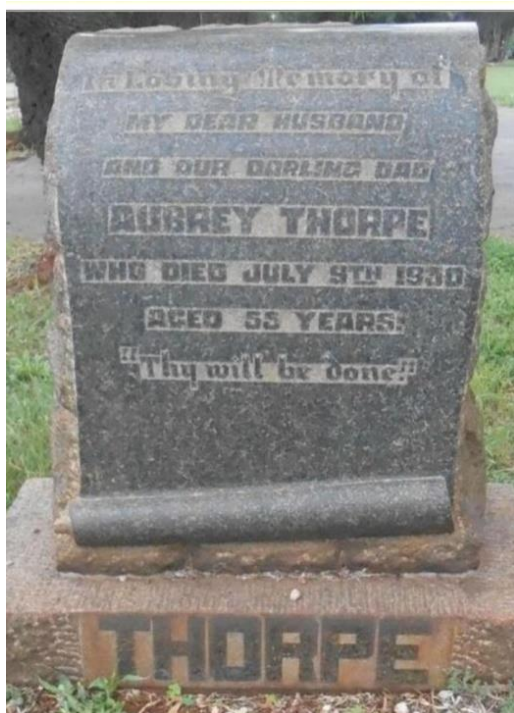
Early in 1901 the Regiment was involved in a battle at Lichtenburg with the Boers where 15 men were killed and 26 wounded. Late in 1901, on 24 October, as part of Methuen’s Brigade, the Regiment were attacked by de la Rey near Zeerust, at the Battle of Kleinfontein, where the regiment had 13 men killed and 14 wounded.



Early in 1902, on 24 February, the Regiment was again in action against de la Rey in the Klerksdorp district, at the Battle of Ysterspruit, where they had 12 men killed and 62 wounded. Towards the end of hostilities, at the Battle of Tweebosch, the following is recorded in John Stirling's book 'British Regiments in South Africa 1899-1902' (page 82) – "*Sections of the 4th and 38th Batteries showed great gallantry, and 330 men of the Northumberland Fusiliers and Loyal North Lancashire Regiment showed conspicuous courage in protecting the wagons and refused to surrender until resistance was useless. This was a sad close to two and a half years splendid work.*"

The Transvaal bar on Thorpe's Queen South Africa medal and his King South Africa medal give testament to him being involved in the actions described above. There is no mention of him having been injured or taken prisoner, so to accurately predict where Thorpe might have been is difficult. However, he was in South Africa until the peace treaty was signed.

Thorpe moved to South Africa after being put on the army reserves in January 1907 and married Margaret Ellen Boonzaier on 30 September 1907. He was employed as a Shift Boss on the gold mines, east of Johannesburg, and it was probably here that he started with Pulmonary Tuberculosis, the disease from which he died in 1930. A few months before the end of World War 1 he enlisted with the 1st South African Infantry. His attestation papers indicated that on 20 September 1918 he was married and had six children – aged 10, 9, 7, 6, 5 and 4 years of age. He was an active Free-Mason and was President of the Albert Edward Lodge in 1917-18.



Thorpe died on 9 July 1930, and at the time of his death gave his occupation as that of a farmer, at a place called Wattles near Germiston, a town east of Johannesburg.

His death certificate gives the cause of death as being Pulmonary Tuberculosis, and he is buried at the Primrose Cemetery in Germiston.

Picture: Thorpe's tombstone in the Primrose Cemetery in Germiston

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Allan Gordon