

ERNEST ROLLINGS

THE POLICEMAN
"WHO ENDED THE WAR"

INTRODUCTION

At one stage during my time as Director of Corporate and Legal Services in South Wales Police I had responsibility for the Force’s Museum.

Whilst I had had an interest in the Museum since I joined the force in 1986, it was only then that I paid particular attention to it and its collections.

One day I was strolling through the Museum in the basement of the main building of Police Headquarters at Bridgend when my attention was drawn to some exhibits in one of the glass cases. There was an ornate casket with scenes of Neath on its sides and a set of First World War medals which included a Military Cross with a Bar to it which meant that the holder had been awarded it twice.

The card which described the exhibits referred to an Ernest James Rollings, a former Glamorgan and Neath policeman who, it was said, was “The Man Who Won the War”. I smiled at what I thought was a piece of enthusiastic exaggeration.

However, further along in the Museum was a notice advertising

the presentation to Ernest of the Freedom of the Borough of Neath on 20th January 1932 and a framed scroll extending congratulations to him from the Chief Constable and officers of the Neath Borough Police.

The next development came after the establishing in 2014 of South Wales Police’s First World War Project Group which I have chaired. There was some publicity as to our work and one day the Force Museum received an e mail from Anne Day, Ernest’s granddaughter.

A meeting with Anne was arranged and from there has developed a close connection aimed at ensuring that her grandfather’s bravery during the First World War is not forgotten.

In this booklet we have sought to tell Ernest’s story. Here was a man from a relatively humble background who became a policeman, joined the army at the start of the First World War and became in the 1930’s recognised as a national hero-“The Man Who Ended the War”.

Yet despite the attention of the press he remained, what he was

always to be, a quiet, unassuming man. His exploits were, however, anything but ordinary and his bravery deserves to be remembered. In doing so we must not forget that he was severely wounded in 1918 and yet returned to being a policeman after it. Typical of his generation, duty and sacrifice were ingrained in him.

We hope that these few pages will do justice to his memory.

Gareth Madge OBE

Chair, First World War Project Group
South Wales Police

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Anne Day who has provided us with a wealth of information including press cuttings, documents and photographs. The South Wales Police Heritage Centre (as its Museum is now known) is fortunate to have these items deposited with it. Other items relating to Ernest, notably his medals, Freedom of Neath casket and revolver had previously been deposited with the Museum by Ernest’s son, Geoffrey, Anne’s father.



Framerville, France, the place where Ernest’s exploits made him famous. This photograph, taken in June 2018, should be compared with that of the same scene taken on 11th August 1918 which appears on page 15

EARLY YEARS

Ernest was born on 15th September 1893 in Cotterell Street in Hereford. He was the son of Ernest Thomas Rollings, who was from Heyop near Knighton in Radnorshire, and Emma Rollings (nee Gittings) who was also from Radnorshire having been born in Womaston, near Presteigne.

At the time of the census of 1901 Ernest and his parents and his sister, Mabel Evelyn, then two years of age, were living at 7 Brecon Street in Canton in Cardiff, where Ernest’s father was a policeman with the Cardiff City Police.

Ernest later lived in Knighton and worked as a Post Office messenger and telegram boy there.



Ernest as a young messenger boy

At some stage Ernest left Knighton since, on 19th December 1910 he joined the Great Western

Railway Company as a porter at Abertillery. The following year’s census shows that he was living in lodgings at 10 Argyle Street in the town.

Ernest then achieved a promotion and an increase in his pay when he became a parcel porter with the Great Western in Cardiff in June 1911.

He was there for just over two years before he resigned in July 1913 in order to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a policeman.



Ernest the railway porter

POLICEMAN (PART I)

Ernest joined the Glamorgan Constabulary on 28th July 1913 when he was nineteen years of age and was serving at Caerau near Maesteg at the outbreak of war in August 1914.

Many policemen from the police forces of South Wales were reservists and were re-called for service. Ernest, however,

volunteered in response to the call by the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, for men to come forward to help the regular army fight what he foresaw as being a long war.

*Ernest as PC 597
Glamorgan Constabulary*



Ernest later wrote:

“I always feel a sense of deep satisfaction that I was one of the first 100,000 of Kitchener’s Volunteers when the appeal was made shortly after the outbreak of the war....I had made up my mind beforehand to join a cavalry regiment, in order to get riding experience should I return to the police force after the war.” (“Western Mail” 13th March 1958)

And so it was that Ernest, with the consent of his Chief Constable, resigned from the police on 30th October 1914 to join the army.



*Glamorgan policemen armed in readiness for wartime emergencies.
Ernest is pictured third from the right in the second row.*

SOLDIER

FROM THE CAVALRY TO THE INFANTRY

Ernest's attestation on enlisting in the army was taken at Bridgend on 11th November 1914 and he formally joined it the following day at Newport.

Ernest had his wish to join the cavalry since he was then posted as Trooper 5794 to the 2nd Reserve Cavalry Regiment for initial training before he was to join the 2nd Dragoon Guards (the Queen's Bays). In the event Ernest didn't go on active service with them since, in June 1915, he transferred to the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. Ernest said of this:

“About March 1915, after I had qualified as a mounted soldier, there came a call for men to volunteer for infantry regiments, who were desperately short of reinforcements. There were certain inducements offered such as a choice of regiment, and the continuation of our cavalry pay of 1s 2d per day against that of the infantryman's shilling. The other thing that persuaded many to volunteer was the fear at that time the war might end before we saw anything of it.....

Bearing all these things in mind, I volunteered and expressed very definitely my desire to be posted to The Welch Regiment. To my great disappointment I was sent to the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.” (Western Mail 13th March 1958)

He went to France on 27th July 1915 to serve with the 2nd Battalion of the regiment as Private 23336. He said of this time:

“...I found myself up at the front lines and doing relief in the trenches combined with the usual trench raids for prisoners.” (Western Mail 13th March 1958)

He was clearly a highly regarded soldier because, in September, he was promoted to Lance Corporal.

During the following month, however, he was admitted to hospital before being evacuated to England on 2nd November. Whilst his army records state that this was due to “lumbago” Ernest later stated:

“I spent most of my time in the Arras, La Bassee, Armentieres area until October 1915, when I got a “Blighty” wound while, as

a corporal, I was in charge of a wiring party repairing the barbed wire in front of our trenches.”
(*Western Mail 13th March 1958*)

As he then spent a number of months in England following his evacuation, it seems likely that his account of the wound as being the reason for it, is correct.

On 21st May 1916, whilst still in England, Ernest, then a Lance Corporal in 3rd (Reserve)

Battalion of the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, applied for a commission. He was accepted and joined the Number 5 Officer Cadet Battalion at Trinity College, Cambridge on 5th October 1916.

On 31st January 1917 Ernest was commissioned as an officer and became a Second Lieutenant in the Machine Gun Corps (Heavy Branch) which was to become the Tank Corps in July 1917.



Ernest the cavalryman in November 1914

“C” BATTALION OF THE TANK CORPS

Ernest returned to France on 25th April 1917 and joined “C” Battalion the following month. The *Glamorgan Gazette* for 18th May reported:

“P.C. E.J. Rollings was stationed at Maesteg when he joined the Army after the outbreak of war. He is now a second-lieutenant, and is serving with the “Tanks.” In a letter to P.S. Jacob Loveluck, Bridgend, he says, ‘I am in charge of a ‘bus. We have quite a good time compared with the infantry, and the pay is better. Please remember me to all I know.’”

Each of the Battalions of the Tank Corps were initially identified by alphabetical letter and each tank in a battalion would be identified with names beginning with the corresponding letter. Thus, on 31st July 1917, the first day of the Third Battle of Ypres, often referred to as Passchendaele, Ernest was in command of a supply tank called “Celerity”.

Later, on 21st/22nd August 1917, during the Ypres battle, Ernest again commanded

“Celerity” during an offensive operation in support of infantry. The Battalion’s Commanding Officer, in his report on the action, singled Ernest out for particular praise for the assistance he gave when the tanks had to cross the Steenbekke river:

“...it was only by the most superhuman efforts of the Section Commander, Lt Murray-Menzies, the assistance of the 184th Tunnelling Company, and the help rendered by specially prepared “Pioneer Tank”, under 2/Lt. E. J. Rollings, that these tanks were eventually moved across the River.”

“Pioneer” Tank Celerity. Commander, 2/Lt. E.J. Rollings. This tank was loaded with sleepers, fascines, sandbags etc., and performed invaluable work in helping the fighting tanks across the Steenbekke, and in towing several tanks out of difficulties. Without the assistance thus rendered, it is doubtful if any of these tanks would have arrived as far as our own front line.”

Ernest was awarded the Military Cross for his actions on 21st/22nd August. The citation reads:

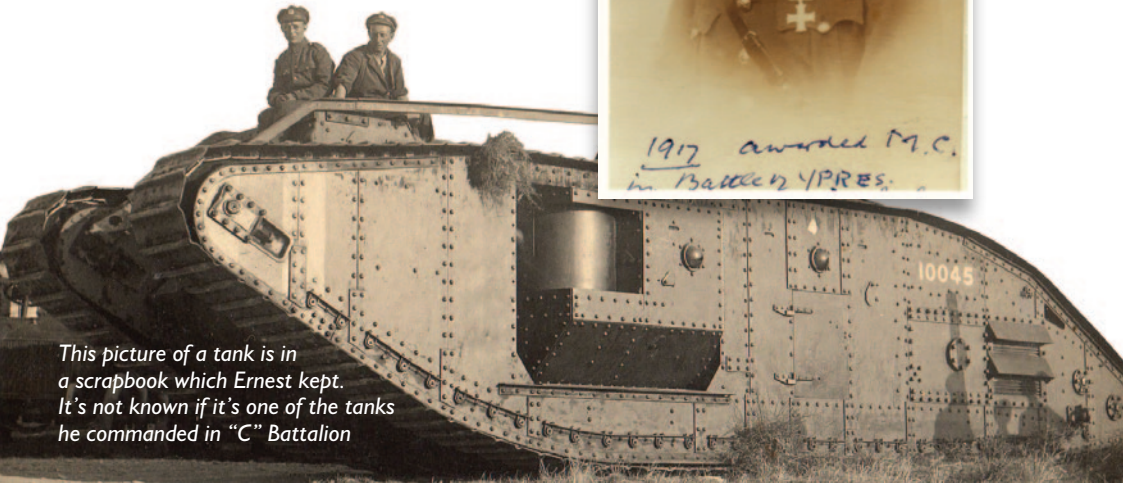
“For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He commanded his Tanks in difficult ground and under heavy shell fire with the greatest courage and perseverance, helping them out of many difficulties and keeping them in action by his splendid personal energy and fearlessness. After he had completed his duties, he went back to assist a seriously wounded officer and several men who were still under heavy shell fire.” (London Gazette 18th October 1917/Edinburgh Gazette 11th March 1918).

Later in 1917, between 20th and 27th November, Ernest took part in the massed tank action during the Battle of Cambrai. He was in Number 8 Section of Number 8 Company and

commanded tank “Cyclops”. It seems that all of the tanks in the company breached the enemy’s front line but Ernest’s tank and another appear to have ditched before reaching the next line.

On 19th January 1918 Ernest returned once more to England to become part of 17th Battalion of the Tank Corps.

Ernest wearing the Military Cross he was awarded for his actions during the Third Battle of Ypres



This picture of a tank is in a scrapbook which Ernest kept. It's not known if it's one of the tanks he commanded in “C” Battalion

17TH (ARMoured CAR) BATTALION OF THE TANK CORPS

The Battalion was formed at Bovington Camp in Dorset on 16th April 1918.

It was originally to be issued with Whippet tanks but in the event received Austin armoured cars. These were originally destined for Russia but were not sent due to the revolution there in October 1917. They were equipped with two Hotchkiss guns mounted in turrets and had a top speed of around 30mph.

The Battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel E.J. Carter.

He was a pre-war officer who had been commissioned into the Devonshire Regiment before transferring to the 13th Hussars. During the war he transferred to the

Machine Gun Corps (Heavy Branch) and then served with it and the Tank Corps until the end of the war. He continued to serve in the army after the war. He had been Ernest's Company commander in "C" Battalion.

The Battalion was equipped with 16 armoured cars plus

assorted support vehicles. It had a complement of over 200 officers and men.

Carter and his men were given very little time to get the Battalion together and they went to France on 26th April 1918.

They spent May in training, especially in gunnery and map reading, and during June and July operated in support of French forces.

In due course the Battalion became part of the British 4th Army commanded by General Sir Henry Rawlinson which was preparing for the major Allied offensive which became known as the Battle of Amiens.



*Lieutenant
Colonel
Carter*



Austin armoured cars of the 17th Battalion on reconnaissance, 25th August 1918 © IWM (Q7036)

THE BATTLE OF AMIENS AND THE RAID ON FRAMERVILLE

Ernest was in charge of two armoured cars comprising Number 8 Section of “B”

Company of the 17th Battalion which was attached to the 5th Australian Division as part of the Australian Corps under General Monash.

On 8th August 1918 Ernest led his section in raids in support of Australian forces as part of the Battle of Amiens.

Ernest’s section was made up of:

Number 1 car: This consisted of Ernest (commander), Corporal MacNicholl (front driver), Private Huntbatch (left gunner), Private Johnson (right gunner) and Private W.H. Wells (rear driver).

Number 2 car: in this were Lance Corporal C.F. Rhodes (commander), Private Haynes (front driver), Private Sayer (left gunner), Private H. Mottram (right gunner) and Private Redpath (rear driver).

It had been widely predicted that the war would continue into

the summer of 1919 at the earliest. However, all that was to change as a result of the “Final Hundred Days” that began with the start of the Battle of Amiens on 8th August when the Allied forces achieved great success . The German General, Ludendorff, later said that:

“8th August was the black day of the German Army-the Emperor told me later on, after the failure of the July offensive, and after August 8th, he knew the war could be no longer won.”

Just after dawn on the 8th British, Australian and Canadian Divisions along with French forces attacked the Germans. The Australian forces in particular were very successful and soon breached the German defences.

The 16 armoured cars of 17th Battalion were to carry out operations in support of the Australian 5th Division. Twelve were to undertake offensive operations, six of which were to operate north of the old Roman road between Amiens in the west and St. Quentin in the east, and six, including those commanded by Ernest, were to go south of the road. The remaining four cars

were to carry out a long distance reconnaissance role on behalf of the Corps HQ.

In order to get the armoured cars into action it was necessary for them to negotiate ground which had been broken up by artillery fire and so tanks were used to tow them in the initial stages so that they could get through to passable roads.

However, some of those were blocked by fallen trees and branches which had been hit by artillery fire. The larger ones were removed by the tanks. The armoured cars had axes and gun cotton to assist with the removal of the smaller trees and branches.

Ernest had received specific orders to head for Framerville, a village some ten miles behind the German lines. It was known to contain a German Corps Headquarters.

By noon Ernest and his cars had fought their way through to the village. Ernest entered the German Headquarters alone. He found that the German staff had fled leaving behind considerable quantities of maps, plans and other documents which he put into sandbags.

Ernest, in an article which appeared in the *Western Mail* on 14th March 1958 gave a vivid description of what occurred that day:

“Amiens, August 8, 1918. The attack was on a one mile front with the object of freeing Amiens and the Amiens-Paris railway. If it was successful, our advance could be exploited in a second thrust towards the St. Quentin-Cambrai line. As at the Battle of Cambrai, there was to be no long preliminary bombardment, so that no warning would be given to the Germans.

Zero hour was 4.45am. A mass of 415 tanks had been moved up close behind our lines without the enemy scenting danger.

Suddenly, shortly before zero hour, the German front lines were drenched by our massed artillery fire along the eleven mile front. Before they had time to recover their wits, waves of our tanks were upon them.

Great havoc was wrought upon their front line positions by the tanks crushing the machine gun emplacements and strong points.....

After the attack had been in progress for some time, my battalion of armoured cars began moving forward. We were towed by the tanks for a considerable distance, until we reached reasonably crater free roads on which we could proceed under our own power...

I was ordered to make for a village named Framerville, where it was known that there was a German Corps headquarters...

My orders were quite specific: if I could reach the German headquarters I was to obtain any possible information and bring it back.

Major Boucher also handed to me an Australian flag, laughingly suggesting I should fix it on the headquarters to show the British Army had arrived.

That evening I got my section together and explained the part we were expected to carry out in the battle. After this, and explanations on any doubtful points, I asked for volunteers to man the two cars.

I required nine with myself-five in each car. The response was beyond expectations, and I had much difficulty in deciding who

was to be left behind: they were all most anxious to go.

Good fortune was ours at dawn on zero morning. We got on to the main road behind the Germans' front, passing streams of traffic heading for their line. There was a continuous stream, and never have I seen so many limbers etc. drawn by bullocks...

Upon arrival we immediately located the headquarters with little difficulty because of the staff cars and general activity there.

It was situated in a farmhouse. After circling the village for some time firing at the many easy targets, and killing large numbers of Germans, I sprayed the doors and windows of the headquarters with machine gun fire and pulled my car up alongside the door.

With the gunners of both my cars keeping a sharp lookout for any likely interruption from outside, I entered the building, revolver in hand, wondering what sort of greeting I would receive.

To my relief there was no sign of life. The enemy had evidently taken fright hearing and seeing

armoured cars upon them so suddenly.

On entering the room I saw lots of papers, maps and office equipment. I collected all I could in the way of documents and maps and handed them to the men in the car outside, who packed them in sandbags.

I recall making three journeys back to the car at the door with material I thought might be useful, including the telephone. I did not go upstairs, but made a thorough search downstairs, being quite satisfied to leave it at that...

Before leaving I did fix the Australian flag over the headquarters to the satisfaction of my major. When our own troops arrived in the village 48 hours later the flag was still flying.

After nearly three hours in hostile territory we did a final shoot up of enemy in the area and made our way back towards our own lines-still passing German transport going up to the battlefield.

Once we had got our side of it my gunners really got to work. They created enormous havoc,

which must have had an effect on the battle then raging. Many hundreds of rounds were fired, and terrific carnage caused, really beyond description, both on roads and on each side of them.

On the last few hundred yards we collected over 200 prisoners, who came with their hands up and actually formed themselves into a body, marching towards our lines, covered by our armoured cars. The infantry then took them over and we proceeded to our headquarters.

My report and our captured material were sent to the headquarters of General Monash, of the Australian Corps, for examination.....

What were my feelings when I walked into that farmhouse?

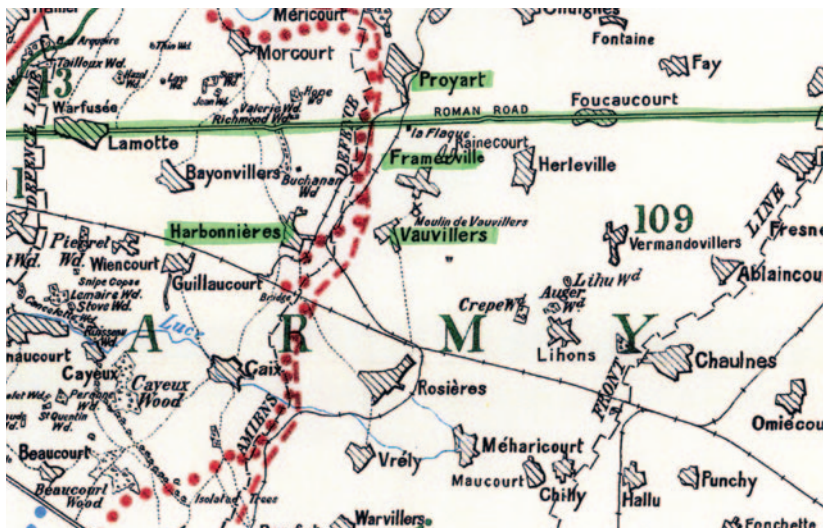
I would be a very foolish man to say that I didn't have butterflies in my stomach. But my control over such occasions stood me in good stead-apart from the fact that, however frightened I may have been, I daren't show it in front of my men. Besides, having got so close to my objective, I had to take the remaining few steps-and damn the consequences”.



Armoured car on the main Amiens to St. Quentin road, 8th August 1918

Ernest was awarded a second Military Cross for his actions on 8th August. The citation for it read:

“For conspicuous gallantry in command of a section of armoured cars during an attack. He took his section across the shelled area with skill and courage, and penetrated a village strongly held by the enemy, killing many of them and stampeding a quantity of transport. He sent back reports of great value, and finally extricated and brought back his cars without a casualty.”
(London Gazette 2nd December 1918)



Map showing Ernest's area of operations on 8th August 1918



The scene in Framerville on 11th August 1918 after the raid



**PRIVATE 309267
WILLIAM
HENRY WELLS
(NUMBER 1 CAR)**

He was living at Walton Heath near Epsom in Surrey when he joined the army at Guildford in October 1915. He was a motor mechanic at that time. Served as Private 10167 in the Royal Flying Corps. Spent his service in England before he was transferred to the Tank Corps in March 1918 and then went to France with the 17th Battalion in April 1918. Discharged from the army after the end of the war.



**LANCE
CORPORAL 304356
CECIL RHODES
(NUMBER 2 CAR)**

He was from Manchester and joined the army in September 1914. He was a chauffeur in civilian life. He served as Private 12395 in the 10th Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment and went to France in July 1915. He was later transferred to the Tank Corps. He was awarded the Military Medal for his action on 8th August 1918. He was discharged from the army after the end of the war.



**PRIVATE 304396
HENRY MOTTRAM
(NUMBER 2 CAR)**

He was originally from Manchester and joined the army in September 1915. He originally served in the Royal Army Medical Corps as Private 760 in the 2/3rd East Lancashire Field Ambulance. In January 1917 he transferred to the Machine Gun Corps as Private 92691. In September 1917 he transferred to the Royal Berkshire Regiment as Private 38209 before transferring to the Tank Corps in December 1917. He was discharged from the army after the end of the war.

ACHIET-LE-PETIT AND AFTERWARDS

Ernest was not to remain in France for much longer after the events of 8th August.

On 21st August 1918 Ernest's section was in action near the Arras to Bapaume road. It was at 9.30am that morning, in the small village of Achiet-le-Petit, that the armoured cars of the 17th Battalion came under attack from German artillery. Ernest's car was one of two that received direct hits.

Ernest was severely wounded with shell splinters in his head and back. He was initially treated in a Field Ambulance and Casualty Clearing Station and then taken to the Number 8 Red Cross Hospital at Boulogne prior to being evacuated to England on 26th August.

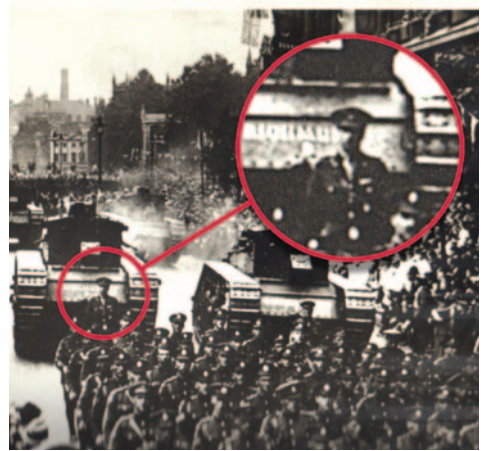
He was subsequently treated at the 2nd Western General Hospital in Manchester and convalesced at the St. John's Auxiliary Hospital in Llandaff in Cardiff.



Cavalry resting in the churchyard at Achiet-le-Petit on 21st August 1918, the day Ernest was wounded. © IWM (Q11220)

He spent several months recovering from his injuries and then, in 1919, he returned to the 17th Battalion which was in Ireland during the time of the unrest there. It was whilst he was there that he married Mary Margaret French in Cork.

Another notable event for Ernest in 1919 was that he took part in the Victory Parade held in London on 19th July to mark the signing of the Peace Treaty and the end of the war. Ernest proudly led a column of tanks in the parade.



Ernest, indicated, at the Victory Parade, 19th July 1919



Achiet-le-Petit, June 2018



Taken in December 1918 when
recovering from wounds at
Manchester Hospital.

Dec.
1918.

A photo from Ernest's scrapbook with an endorsement by him

POLICEMAN (PART 2)

FROM THE GLAMORGAN POLICE TO NEATH POLICE

After the end of the war Ernest re-joined the Glamorgan Constabulary and served in the Swansea Valley for a time.

Ernest's daughter, Dorothy, was born in 1920 but sadly his wife died the following year.

Ernest was stationed at Briton Ferry when, in November 1922, it

became part of the Borough of Neath as a result of changes to local government boundaries. Consequently, Ernest transferred to the Borough police force on 8th November.

For over a year after his transfer, in addition to his police duties, Ernest undertook responsibilities in relation to the fire brigade in Neath. Until the formation of the National Fire Service in 1941 borough chief constables were often chief fire officers as well, with responsibility for fire brigades in their areas.

In April 1925 Ernest married Jennie North Smith in Neath. She was 23 years of age and had been born in Chatham in Kent. She and Ernest were to have a son, Geoffrey, who was born in 1928.

During this period Ernest's police career was also progressing as he was promoted Sergeant in 1926 and made Chief Clerk to the Chief Constable which was, no doubt, an important position in a small borough force and a reflection of the regard in which he was held.

Soon, however, there was to be a development which would have an even greater impact on Ernest's life.



Ernest as Sergeant 3 in the Neath Borough Police

THE SUNDAY EXPRESS 8TH NOVEMBER 1931

On 8th November 1931, the *Sunday Express* revealed what had happened during Ernest’s raid on Framerville in 1918 which, it was said, had hastened the end of the war. An appeal was made for information regarding “The Man Who Ended The War”.

The story had unfolded at this time since a man who had served with the Royal Air Force as a mechanic during the war, had gone to the *Sunday Express* with a shorthand note which he had taken of a briefing which a Major

D. P. Stevenson of 35 Squadron had given to his officers and men at 9.30pm on 28th September 1918. This was on the night before the great Allied assault which broke the German defences of the Hindenburg Line. This is what he was recorded as having said:

“You see those flashes? They are the guns which for forty eight hours have been drenching the Hindenburg Line with gas and high explosives.

It was the original intention of GHQ to cross the Hindenburg Line and winter on the other side in a position favourable to ourselves and unfavourable to



Ernest (second row, far left) at a civic ceremony in Neath

the Bosch. These plans have been changed.

A subaltern took some papers from a German staff officer. They were found to contain a complete plan of the defences of the Hindenburg Line.

Every machine gun, trench mortar, and battery position was marked; the places where the troops were to be billeted and the places where they were to draw rations were marked. Naturally it remained to be proved that these plans were authentic.

It was the work of this squadron, together with the squadrons on the right and on the left, to test that document.

We found that the positions tallied with the positions on the plan. So that we have a complete key to the strongest fortress Germany ever had.

Foch has decided to push on through the Hindenburg Line. We now have drawn up the largest army we ever had on our side on the Western Front.

Tomorrow morning, at zero, the whole Allied line, from the sea to Champagne, will go forward. We are, as it were, the hub of the

whole operation. Nobody must spare himself, either body or brain, from tomorrow, in order that things may work as smoothly as oil.

You may have to go on for six weeks, but I think that at the end of that time you will have reason to be satisfied with your work.

Highly placed officers have said to me that they consider it possible that this battle, which will be the biggest fight from the beginning of history, will end the war.

Be that as it may, you need have no doubt but that you are on the winning side. The German is beaten stiff. We shall cross the Hindenburg Line tomorrow, and it is hoped that we shall advance from eight to ten miles. And it will be God help the Germans.

Goodnight, gentlemen.”

The *Sunday Express* concluded its report by saying:

“..where is the subaltern who ended the war? The ‘Sunday Express’ invites him to come forward and take his place in history.”

THE MAN WHO ENDED THE WAR.

Subaltern's Capture Of Hindenburg Line Defence Plans.

GREAT WAR SECRET

OUT AFTER 13 YEARS.

GERMAN PLANS FOUND BY YOUNG OFFICER.

WHERE IS HE?

FORGOTTEN HERO OF RAID ON ENEMY H.Q.



A map showing the Hindenburg line in September 1918.

AT 9.30 p.m. on September 28, 1918—eve of the great attack which was to tear the Hindenburg Line to shreds—Major D. P. Stevenson, D.S.O., M.C., commanding No. 35 Squadron of the R.A.F., marched his officers and men into a hangar just north-west of St. Quentin and made the following speech:—

“You see those flashes? They are the guns which for forty-eight hours have been drenching the Hindenburg Line with gas and high explosives.

“It was the original intention of G.H.Q. to cross the Hindenburg Line and to winter on the other side in a position favourable to ourselves and unfavourable to the Bosch. These plans have been changed.

“A SUBALTERN TOOK SOME PAPERS FROM A GERMAN STAFF OFFICER. THEY WERE FOUND TO CONTAIN A COMPLETE PLAN OF THE DEFENCES OF THE HINDENBURG LINE.

“Every machine-gun, trench-mortar, and battery position was marked; the places where the troops were to be

Sunday Express
8th November 1931

THE SUNDAY EXPRESS 15TH NOVEMBER 1931

The following Sunday, 15th November, the paper was able to reveal that the man concerned was Ernest.

The paper said that scores of young officers had sent in their details claiming to be the officer but, after what the paper described as “...a careful and

exhaustive investigation”, it was satisfied that it was Ernest who had been responsible for the capture of the secret documents. It was emphasised that it wasn't Ernest himself who had put his own name forward but that he had been identified by a Lieutenant J.T. Yeoman who had served with Ernest in “C” Battalion of the Tank Corps and later in the 17th (Armoured Car) Battalion. Further verification of Ernest's identity came from Lieutenant Colonel Carter, Ernest's Company Commander in “C” Battalion and Commanding

Officer of the 17th Battalion at the time of the raid.

The newspaper had also made contact with Ernest. Many years later former Constable Charles Thomas Little of the Neath Police recalled taking a telephone call from a reporter who wanted to speak to Ernest who was initially reluctant to do so but eventually did.

Sunday Express 15th November 1931

THE MAN WHO ENDED THE WAR FOUND.

NOW A POLICEMAN IN SOUTH WALES.

HIS OWN STORY OF THE RAID.

THE Man Who Ended The War—the forgotten subaltern who captured the Hindenburg. Lino defence plans and so enabled the allied armies to crash through and force an Armistice—has been found.

He is Lieutenant E. J. Rollings, M.C., of the 17th (Armoured Car) Tank Battalion, and now Sergt. E. J. Rollings, of the Neath police, South Wales.

For thirteen years he has patrolled the streets of Neath unaware of the great part he played in the world's history.

Yet had he not, on August 8, 1918, dashed in his generous car into enemy territory nine miles in advance of our own front line and seized a German Corps headquarters the war might have lasted another two years.

The dramatic revelations in last week's "Sunday Express" state that it was an unknown and unobscured subaltern, by capturing these German plans, had brought the war to an abrupt end at all British talking.

SCORES OF LETTERS. Scores of young officers sent in letters in the belief that they were the man concerned, but a careful and exhaustive investigation has left little doubt that Sergeant Rollings made the vital raid and found the plans that gave almost year-long details of the Hindenburg line.

He was the only man who did not make the claim personally. The information was sent by one of his colleagues, Lieut. J. T. Yeoman, who was wounded in the raid.

Five days after the raid Lieut. E. J. Carter, who was in command of the battalion, was personally congratulated by the King on the achievement of his men in the raid.

An account of this raid of the battalion's history is contained in a book, "The King's Own," written by the author, and published by the publishers, sent for an officer's duty. . . . and was able to give details of the raid.

"The King congratulated the section on the Hindenburg. . . . LATER he saw Colonel Carter and had a long talk with him. . . . A "Sunday Express" representative yesterday took Sergeant Rollings to

see his old colonel, who is still in the service. They shook hands on it. "There is no doubt about it," said the colonel, "he is your man."

The story of the raid is almost as dramatic as its consequences. The plans were actually captured at Fromeville, six miles east of Amiens, in the battle of August 8, 1918. Listen to Sergeant Rollings' own version—

"The 17th (Armoured Car) Tank Battalion, in which I was a lieutenant, was a motorised unit, and on August 7, 1918, we received sudden orders in abrupt succession at once to the Auxonne Corps at Villers-Bretonneux, a hundred miles away.

"**"RACE THROUGH" ORDER.** "We hurried there the same night, and our orders were short and to the point.

"We were to wait behind the line until the Australians had made a break in it, then race through, search for all German headquarters, search them for documents, and shoot every German on sight.

"I received personal orders to concentrate on a German headquarters at Fromeville, which was also mine in advance of our front line.

"Before dawn the next morning we were all at our posts, waiting. I was in charge of two armoured cars.

"**"Dawn—and hell broke loose.** The Australians went over the line unopposed, and fifteen minutes later they brought the signal—they were through!

"Off we went, leaving the Australians waiting at the beach in the German front line, eager for more successes.

"The tanks towed us for two and a half miles, and here we found the roads free from snailshells, and left them behind.

GERMANS IN SIGHT. "Fromeville was now about seven miles ahead unless away. In the distance we could see the German rear-echelon, still retreating. We halted temporarily to make a stand.

"As we went on the tank in the lead was fitted that would be the end of the German line. It was a long way, and we raced at top speed along the German front line.

"After a while, however, we found we had to fight our way through the retreating Germans, but they were completely demoralised and we killed them in scores. My chief driver was our own ally, which were dropping dangerously near, but I fought my way through to Fromeville, with the help of a British soldier with his dog, sent by the Australians.



Neath, South Wales, is the man that is told in full on Page Eleven.

"I never knew the part these papers played in ending the war until now."

"**"THIS IS A SURPRISE."** "In 1909 I went back to the Glamorgan Garrison Police as a constable. Two years later I was transferred to Neath, where I am now." "But goodness this is a surprise!" said Sergeant Rollings, with a daughter aged eleven and a son aged four.

The "Sunday Express" is glad to have made good this thirteen-year-old record. Even now there is an official commission to examine the facts, and the name of Lieutenant Rollings remains outside the official history of the war.

LADY HOUSTON

On Monday, 16th November, 1931, the *Daily Express* announced that a Lady Houston had come forward and was going to make a payment of £5000 to Ernest as a mark of her appreciation of his bravery. The same day her secretary wrote to the News Editor of the *Sunday Express* with a cheque and said:

“Lady Houston sends her hearty and most appreciative congratulations to ‘The Man who ended the War’ and begs his acceptance of a little nest egg to put aside for a rainy day.”

Lady Houston was a remarkable woman. She was born Fanny Lucy Radmall in South London in 1857, the daughter of a warehouseman and draper.

As a 16 year old chorus girl known as Poppy she eloped to Paris with Frederick Gretton, the wealthy and married son of a partner in the Bass brewing company. They never married but he left her £6000 a year for life in his will when he died in 1882.

In 1883 she married a Theodore Brinkman who she divorced in 1895. Then in 1901, she married her second husband,



Lady Houston

George Frederick William Byron, 9th Baron Byron of Rochdale.

She was a supporter of the women’s suffrage movement and their campaign for votes for women.

During the First World War she opened a rest home for nurses returning from the front line. This led to her being made one of the first five Dames of the British Empire when the Order was established in 1917, the year in which Lord Byron died.

She married for a third time in 1924 when Sir Robert Houston, a Liverpool ship owner and MP described as “hard and ruthless,” became her husband.

It was said that he once showed her his will leaving her £1 million but that she tore it in half saying “If I’m only worth a million, then I’m worth nothing at all!”

However, when Sir Robert died in 1926 he left her £5.5 million out of his fortune of £7 million making her, it was said at the time, the nation’s richest woman.

In 1931 she donated £100,000 to Supermarine so that they could continue research and development into the seaplane which won the Schneider Trophy

for the fastest such aircraft after the Government had initially withdrawn backing for it.

This work which went into the seaplane eventually enabled Supermarine to develop the Spitfire in time for the Battle of Britain in 1940. She is, therefore, often referred to as “the saviour of the Spitfire.”

In 1932 she offered to give the

A FORTUNE FOR “THE MAN WHO ENDED THE WAR.”



“THE MAN WHO ENDED THE WAR” RECEIVES HIS £5,000—Lady Houston’s cheque being presented to Lieutenant (now Police Sergeant) Rollings, M.C., of Neath, in the Empire Cinema, Neath. In the photograph, reading from left to right, are Lieutenant J. T. Yermans, of the “Sunday Express,” who took part in the historic raid, the Editor of the “Sunday Express,” the Rev. G. Francis, M.A., Rural Dean, the Mayor of Neath, Alderman R. E. Bowen, J.P., Lieutenant Rollings, Councillor C. R. Hodge, Colonel G. D. Llewellyn, M.C., O.B.E., Chief Constable P. D. Kemp, Police Inspector Jones.



Lieutenant Rollings, in his peace-time uniform as a police sergeant, with his wife and children.

Daily Express
22nd November 1931



EVERYONE IN NEATH who could find space in the Empire Cinema crowded the building to congratulate Lieutenant Rollings.

British government £200,000 to strengthen the army and navy.

She was so upset by the abdication of King Edward VIII in 1936 that she stopped eating. She died of a heart attack in December that year aged 79.

On Friday 20th November Ernest was presented with Lady Houston's gift of £5000 before a packed audience at the Empire Cinema in Neath and in the presence of the Borough's Mayor, the Chief Constable P.D. Keep, the Editor of the *Sunday Express* and Lieutenant Yeoman. Lady Houston couldn't be there as was she was ill.

The *Sunday Express* of 22 November carried an account of the event written the previous day:

“All Neath turned out last night to honour Lieutenant E.J. Rollings MC, ‘The Man who Ended the War’, and to see him receive from the Mayor of Neath the cheque for £5000 sent by Lady Houston to the Sunday Express as ‘a tribute to his courage and a little nest egg for his future....”

The hall was packed to the doors. Thousands of people who

could not gain admittance thronged the streets outside, and Lieutenant Rollings, in the old uniform he wore in his now famous raid, was brought through the cheering crowds amid a procession of fellow members of the Neath Borough Police force and local ex-servicemen, headed by a band...

When Lieutenant Rollings stepped on the platform there was a hurricane of cheers, and the audience rose and sang with enthusiasm ‘For he’s a Jolly Good Fellow.’....”

Lieutenant Rollings, who was received with tremendous enthusiasm, said:

‘It requires far more courage to stand here than it did to raid those German headquarters nine miles behind the German lines....”

As a police officer I would like to impress upon you all that this is the first house I have ever burgled, and I never til now knew the value of the swag’...

...an enormous crowd waited in the street until nearly midnight to cheer Lieutenant Rollings on his journey home.”

FURTHER RECOGNITION

Following the publicity in the *Sunday Express* and the *Daily Express* the story was picked up by newspapers all over the country. Ernest became famous.

The people of his home town of Neath also wanted to recognise Ernest's wartime bravery. A special meeting of the Borough's council was held on 30th November 1931 when it was resolved to grant Ernest the Honorary Freedom of the Borough.

On 8th December 1931 the Neath Police made their own contribution to his recognition by holding a dinner in his honour at which he was presented with an illuminated address on behalf of the Chief Constable and other officers.

The necessary ceremony to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on Ernest took place at the Gwyn Hall in Neath on 20th January 1932. Again there was a packed audience and local dignitaries were present, including the Chief Constable and Lieutenant Colonel Carter.

The *Neath Guardian* in its edition of 22nd January 1932 reported on the ceremony:

“The Mayor said they were bestowing on Sergeant Rollings the highest honour the town could give him as a recognition of an act of his which, according to the opinion of experts, terminated the war at least 18 months to two years earlier than would have been the case. He felt they were doing the right thing in recognising with the Freedom of the Borough an act which saved, at the very least the loss of half a million lives. He himself had been the mover of the resolution conferring the Freedom on Sergeant Rollings.”

Ernest was presented with the Script of Admission and a silver casket. In responding he said that:

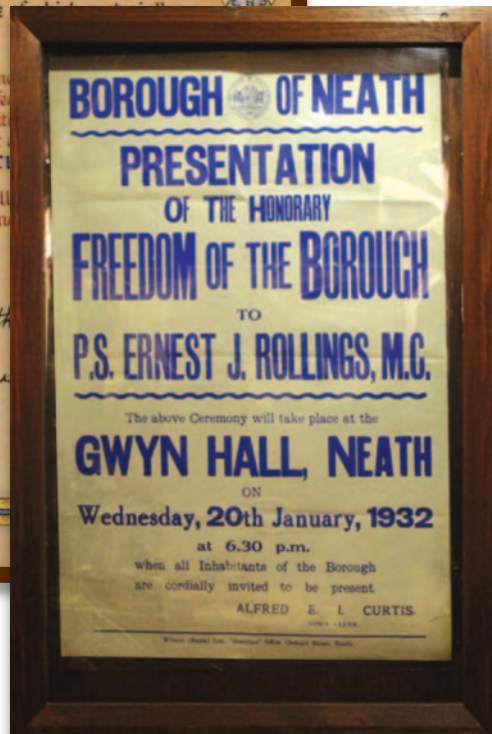
“...words failed him in trying to express to them his appreciation of the great honour they had bestowed on him in counting him among the small band of distinguished citizens of the ancient borough.”



The Freedom casket



The illuminated address presented to Ernest by members of the Neath Borough Police



Poster advertising the Freedom ceremony

ERNEST CONTINUES HIS POLICE DUTIES

Despite his fame and fortune Ernest continued to serve the people of Neath as a policeman.

In addition he maintained contact with old comrades. He was one of several former members of the Tank Corps who came together in Swansea in 1934 to form a South Wales Branch of its Old Comrades Club.

In November 1935 Ernest attended the sixth annual dinner of the Royal Tank Corps Old Comrades Club in London. Also present was Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh Elles who had been the first commanding officer of the Tank Corps and had personally led its tanks, including Ernest's, into action at the Battle of Cambrai in 1917, and General Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd who was the Chief of Staff to Sir Henry Rawlinson at the time of the Battle



The gathering of old comrades in Swansea in 1934. Ernest is sitting middle row third from the left.

of Amiens and who was, by 1935, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Ernest's police career continued on its successful path. He was promoted to Inspector in 1937 and when he retired from the Neath Borough Police in 1943, he was its Acting Chief Constable.

The menu card for the re-union in London in 1935 in the shape of a First World War tank. The reverse has the autographs of Sir Hugh Elles and Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd



LATER YEARS

Following his retirement from the police in 1943 Ernest became an investigator with the Board of Trade where he worked for the next 6 years before finally retiring in 1949.

After the Home Guard was re-constituted in the early 1950's, in response to the Cold War, he served with its 8th Glamorgan Battalion and held the rank of Major before the organisation was finally stood down in 1957.

From time to time there were articles in newspapers that remembered his exploits during the First World War. On 12th

March 1958 the *Western Mail* published an article entitled “*You may owe your life to this man*” which introduced articles by Ernest himself which were to appear over the next two days and in which he gave detailed descriptions of his joining the army and the raid on Framerville, which were quoted earlier in this booklet.

Ernest enjoyed fishing and spent his retirement in the company of his family. His daughter Dorothy died in 1961 and then, on Thursday 3rd February 1966, Ernest died aged 72.

His funeral was, as was to be expected, well attended, and a full account of it appeared in the *Neath Guardian* of 11th February:

“Police officers, including members of the former Neath Borough force, acted as bearers at the funeral on Monday when cremation took place at Morryston.

The Mayor of Neath, Cllr. I.G. Tallamy was present with the Town Clerk, Mr. F.A. Rennison, with Superintendent Richard Richings, G.M., representing Glamorgan Constabulary.

Services at the house and Morryston were conducted by



Ernest and his wife, Jennie, enjoying a holiday together

the Rev. A.J. Way, curate of Neath.

Family mourners were: Geoffrey Rollings, son; Mr. Albert Swaithe and Mr. Jack Swaithe, cousins; Mr E.J. Webb and Mr. I. Rees.

Police bearers were: Sgts. J. Cornwell and Thomas, and constables Reg Edwards, D.H. McLeod, Reg. Fudge and John Knight.

Among the many present were members of the Cambrian Lodge of Freemasons, to which Mr. Rollings belonged, also members

of the former Home Guard unit, to which he had rendered much service.

Among police and former police officers present were:-Ex-Supt. Glyn Evans, Inspt. Kenneth Loyns, ex-Inspt. Douglas Harris, ex-Inspt. Tal Davies, ex-Det. Sgt. Edgar Davies, ex-Sergeants Jack James, William Perry, Jenkin Hopkins and Len Harry, ex-Constables Harold Selby, Harold Barron and P.C. Harold Fraley.”

Ernest’s father survived him and died two years later aged 94 whilst Jennie died in 1976 aged 74.

Friday, February 4, 1966 9

FIRST WORLD WAR HERO DIES AGED 73

Mr. Ernest Rollings

A MAN who captured plans of the Hindenburg line in August 1918 and so saved thousands of lives, died yesterday at his Dyfed-road, Neath, home—as reported in later editions of the Evening Post.

He was Mr. Ernest Rollings, who was 73.

Mr. Rollings, a tank officer in the first world war, was not aware of the real significance of his successful mission until much later.

AWARDED M.C.

joined the Army in November, 1914.

Demobilised in 1920 he continued to serve in the county force at Gwaun-cae-Gurwen and Ystalyfera before joining Neath borough police force. In 1926 he became a sergeant and



MR. ERNEST ROLLINGS

YOUTH ACCUSED

The headline in the South Wales Evening Post reporting Ernest’s death in 1966

ERNEST REMEMBERED

Before he died in 2012 Ernest's son, Geoffrey, did much to keep alive the memory of his father. This included donating to the South Wales Police Museum a number of items relating to him such as his medal set, his revolver from the First World War and, importantly, the casket containing the scroll as to his admission as a Freeman of the Borough of Neath.

South Wales Police, in turn, has sought to play its part by displaying these items and others

in the Museum, now re-named the Heritage Centre.

In addition, between October 2017 and August 2018, an exhibition telling Ernest's story, accompanied by items relating to him, was held at the Firing Line Museum in Cardiff Castle. It was entirely appropriate, since it is the museum of the Queen's Dragoon Guards, the successor to the 2nd Dragoon Guards which Ernest joined in 1914. It proved to be of great interest to visitors and was very successful.



Ernest's son Geoffrey, on the right, presents items belonging to his father to Assistant Chief Constable Colin Evans of South Wales Police in 1983



South Wales Police also produced a leaflet to accompany the exhibition and

articles prompted by it appeared in the *Sunday Express* of 11th November 2017, the *Western Mail Magazine* and the *South Wales Evening Post*, both of 9th December 2017.

Ernest James Rollings medals



Ernest's granddaughter Anne and his great grandson, Andrew, holding Ernest's medals



Members of Ernest's family outside Cardiff Castle, November 2017



The Rollings Exhibition in the Firing Line Museum, Cardiff Castle



ERNEST ROLLINGS • 1893-1966

THE POLICEMAN “WHO ENDED THE WAR”

“I chose him to help me form the 17th (Armoured Car) Battalion because he was so absolutely reliable. If I gave an order to do a certain thing in a certain way, I knew that as long as Rollings was there it would be done. That was the reason why he was chosen for the particular job of dealing with the German Corps Headquarters at Framerville.

**Lieutenant Colonel
E.J. Carter, 1931**

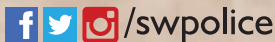
“.....a man not only of very high abilities, but one whose character is irreproachable, and whilst thoroughly accustomed to command men, he is at the same time most courteous and tactful in his dealings with everyone”

**B.R. Bowen
Chairman
Neath Borough
Watch Committee
1932**

“I remember my grandfather as great fun to be with. Every Sunday morning he'd plan a range of activities, which as a young child I looked forward to with great anticipation.....One of my fondest memories is snuggling up on his lap, sipping a warm drink in front of an open fire.

Most significantly he encouraged me to have a sense of adventure and show kindness to everyone.”

**Ernest's granddaughter
Anne, 2017**



www.south-wales.police.uk
www.southwalespolicemuseum.org.uk



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