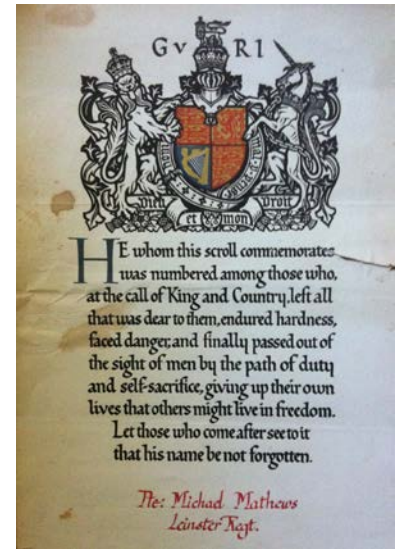




A long way from Bunkershill

By

Martin Matthews



Michael John Matthews was born in Roscrea on 7th November, 1889. His parents, Timothy and Eliza lived in Limerick Street, and in 1900 moved to the Bunkershill area of the town. Michael joined the British army prior to the outbreak of World War I. He enlisted in the Leinster Regiment, First Battalion, in Birr, Kings County. His service number was 8421. He was stationed with his battalion at Fyzabad, India in 1911.

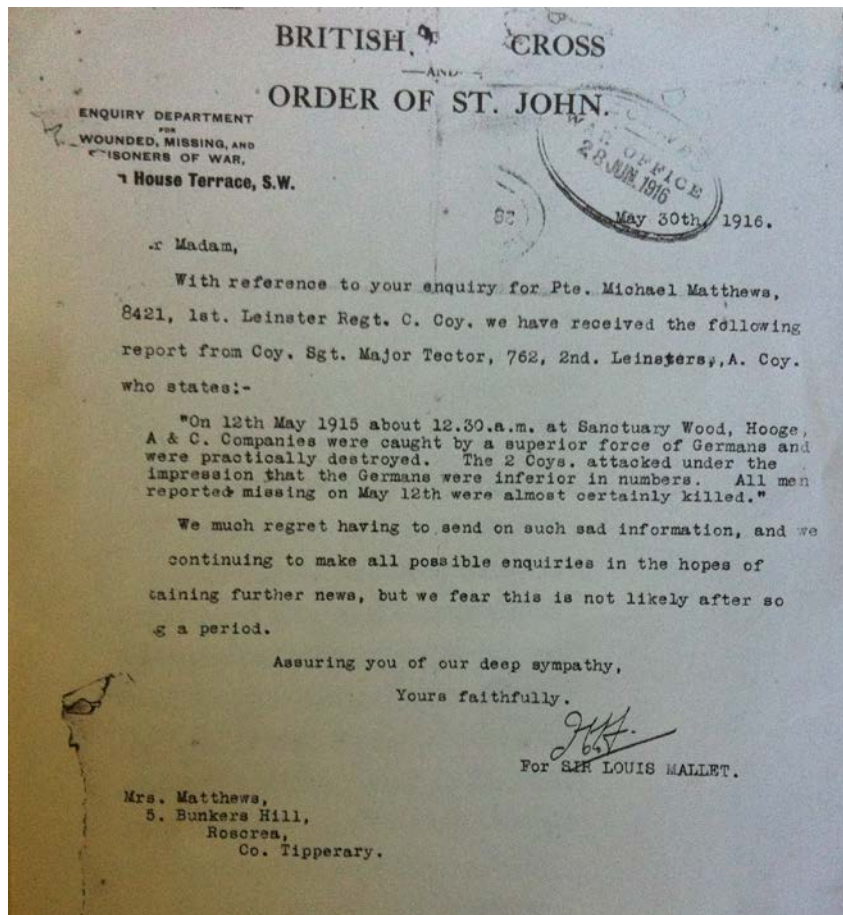
After the outbreak of war in Europe, the battalion returned to England arriving on 16 November, 1914. The battalion was then subject to a month of rigorous training in preparation for the battlefield. The battalion was then posted to France, disembarking at Le Harve on 21st December 1914. The Western front beckoned and the First Battalion relieved the Cameron Highlanders at Saint Eloi, Flanders, on 12th January 1915. The Leinster Regiment's first Battalion were first drawn into action 14th March, 1915.

Michael Matthew's battalion were combatants in the first use of poison gas by their German counterparts in the Second Battle of Ypres in April, 1915. His life was lost in this same year when they incurred heavy losses in May at Sanctuary Wood' Hooge. A letter sent to Michael's mother from the Enquiry Department for wounded, missing, and prisoners of war on 30th May 1916, detailed the heavy losses endured by the regiment against the German forces. The letter stated *"the 2nd coys. attacked under the impression that the Germans were inferior in numbers. All men reported missing on May 12th were almost certainly killed."*

While definitive proof of the death of Michael Matthews has not been ascertained, the last lines of the letter indicated what the fate of thousands in this battle was. It stated:

We much regret having to send on such sad information, and we (are) continuing to make all possible enquiries in the hopes of gaining further news, but we fear this is not likely after so long a period.

Assuring you of our deep sympathy.



The Actual Transcript of the letter is as follows:

BRITISH RED CROSS AND ORDER OF ST. JOHN

Enquiry Department
for
Wounded, Missing and Prisoners of War
.... House Terrace S.W.

May 30th 1916
(Received War Office 28th June 1916)

Dear Madam,

With reference to your enquiry for Pte. Michael Matthews, 8421, 1st Leinster Regt. C. Coy, we have received the following report from Coy, Sgt. Major Tector, 762, 2nd Leinsters, A, Coy. who states:

"On 12th May 1915 about 12.30 a.m. at Sanctuary Wood, Hooge, A & C. Companies were caught by a superior force of Germans and were practically destroyed. The 2 Coys, attacked under the impression that the Germans were inferior in numbers. All men reported missing on May 12th were almost certainly killed."

We much regret having to send on such sad information, and we (are) continuing to make all possible enquiries in the hopes of obtaining further news, but we fear this is not likely after so long a period.

Assuring you of our deep sympathy,

Yours faithfully,

...for Sir Louis Mallet

Mrs. Matthews,
5, Bunker's Hill,
Roscrea,
Co. Tipperary.

Michael John Matthews is remembered on the Menin Gate, Ypres, panel 44, West-Vlaanderen,
Belgium.



Top: Leinster Regiment Cap Badge)

(L to R: 1914/1915 Star; 1914/1919 Victory Medal; 1914/1918 British War Medal)