



CAPTAIN JOHN RAMSAY COX

6TH (SPECIAL RESERVE) BATTALION ATTACHED TO
1ST BATTALION, WORCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT

John Ramsay Cox was born on 29 June 1873 in Yatton, Somerset to Catharine Margaret (née Ramsay) and William Charles Cox. The census of 1881 shows the family living at Ashley Lawn, Yatton with John's three elder sisters Mary, Kathleen and Edith. William's occupation at that time was a Leather Merchant.

John was educated at King's School, Bruton from April 1885 to December 1887 and privately. By 1891 he was employed as an Architect's Clerk and the family had moved to Weston-super-Mare. John's father is recorded as 'living on own means', and the family employed four servants. John's elder brother William was now living with them and another son had been born, Erskine.

On 2 November 1898 John married Florence Julia Mary Comber at Christ Church in the parish of Walcot St Swithin, Bath. The wedding was reported in the Bristol Mercury on 3 November 1898: *At Christ Church, Bath, yesterday afternoon, Mr*

John Ramsay Cox of Brockley, St James's Park, son of the late Mr Charles W Cox [sic] of Worlebury, Weston-super-Mare and of Mrs Cox of Brockley, was married to Miss Florence (Daisy) Comber, elder daughter of Commander G Mervyn Comber RN, of 14 Portland Place, Bath. The service was conducted by the Rev B Norton Thompson, vicar of Christ Church, assisted by the Rev C W Tyler and the Rev E A Purvis, and was fully choral, Mr H J Davis being at the organ. The bride, who was given away by her father, was dressed in a very handsome oyster white satin Duchesse gown with long train scaled with very beautiful old Limerick lace, her mother's gift. The bodice was also trimmed with the same old lace and real orange blossoms. The sleeves and yoke were of ruched mousseline de soie, and she wore a long plain tulle veil with coronet of orange blossoms. The bridesmaids were Miss M Comber (sister of the bride), Miss K Cox and Miss E Cox (sisters of the bridegroom), and Miss E Castellain, and their dresses were made of handsome ivory

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brocaded satin with long sashes of cerise velvet, with bodices of ruched chiffon, trimmed with ivory guipure insertions. The bride's long train was borne by Masters Raymond O'Neill and Neill O'Neill, while the office of best man was filled by Mr William Stanley Ramsay Cox, brother of the bridegroom. Besides the large wedding party, there was a large congregation. The bride's mother wore a handsome violet silk and velvet dress and bonnet of Parma violets, and she carried a bouquet of lilies of the valley and violets. Subsequent to the ceremony there was a reception at the Assembly rooms, where Commander and Mrs Comber entertained upwards of 200 guests. The wedded pair left later for London on the way to the Continent, Mrs Cox's dress being a grey tailor-made coat and skirt with revers and cuffs of white satin, and white felt hat trimmed with clusters of violets. The presents were many and costly.

By 1901 they were living at Wilton Court, Ross, Herefordshire and John was a Fruit Grower.

John was gazetted as a Lieutenant on 1 December 1907 and his first commission in the army is recorded in his service record as 7 December in that year. The record shows he was 5 feet 11 inches tall and the address he gave was Park House, Cheltenham. From 7 December 1907 until August 1908 he was serving with the 4th Battalion, King's Shropshire Light Infantry in Northern Bengal. From August 1908 until June 1912 he was serving with the 6th Battalion (Special Reserve) Worcester Regiment in the Mounted Rifles.

The 1911 Census shows John and Florence living at Edstone Hall, Wootton Wawen, Warwickshire and records John's occupation as 'Lt Special Reserve of Officers'. He was a member of the East India United Service Club, and was good at all games, but preferred tennis and golf. He was also keen on hunting.

John rejoined the army early in September 1914 when he was gazetted to his old regiment on the 4th. Having been attached to the 11th Worcestershire, and temporarily employed as a Staff Captain at the 78th Infantry Brigade Headquarters at Prestbury House, Prestbury (the HQ later relocated to John's house in Thirlestaine Road). He proceeded to France in early January 1915 as part of a draft for the 1st Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment; the battalion's War Diary noted that he joined them on 24 February 1915. By this time John had been promoted to Captain from 2 February 1915 but was not gazetted until May 1915.

In March of that year the battalion was alternating between trenches and the Brigade Reserve billets at Red Barn on the Estaires - La Bassée road. On 9 March the battalion was in these billets and preparations made for the operation the next day.

On 10 March The Battle of Neuve Chappell commenced. The battalion's War Diary states that: *The day opened with big gun fire from about 450 guns; this bombardment lasted half an hour and was directed on and behind the German trenches in front of Neuve Chapelle. At the end of this period the guns lifted and three attacks were delivered by our troops ...*

The fighting continued until 13 March when the battalion returned to billets. It was at about 9am on 12 March that Captain Cox was killed in action, when, to quote the words of his Commanding Officer: "*... he behaved with the greatest gallantry during the whole operation.*" He was 41 years of age.

The battalion's War Diary reads:

11 March

... Orders were received about 10pm that the Battalion with the Northamptons & Sherwood Foresters were to attack the line (86) (85) at 7.30am on the morning of the 12th.

12 March

At 5.30am a counter-attack along the whole line but mainly directed against the right flank took place - the following occurred. The Sherwood Foresters retired right back to their support trenches. A Company, 1st Worcestershire Regiment immediately formed at right angles to their own trenches & brought a withering fire on the German attack; this they repulsed with heavy losses & charging with fixed bayonets retook the Sherwood Foresters' trenches. By 7am the position was as follows:- A Company some distance in front of the Sherwood Foresters' trenches & much scattered among houses & orchards. The Germans now brought heavy fire to bear on us with machine guns and at 11am A Company was forced to retire. The Sherwood Foresters had meanwhile re-occupied their trenches but had made no attempt to support us.

In the meantime on the left the remainder of the Battalion had repulsed the attack with heavy loss to the enemy & at 7am advanced under a very heavy fire reaching a line on road (85) (94) which they held for 1½ hours. At 10am, the Battalion being unsupported either in rear or on either flank, retired and regained their original trenches, in which they

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remained until 11pm. The retirement took place under a very heavy fire & we lost heavily.

About 1pm O C Sherwood Foresters ordered 'A' Company 1st Worcesters to try & gain a position nearer the German lines. It was only possible for Capt Arden, who was commanding the Company, to collect about 20 of his own men. With these & about the same number of the Sherwood Foresters he advanced another 150 yards & held on to his new position until late in the afternoon. Then, as no support arrived & casualties were very heavy, he returned to his original trench.

About 9pm orders came that the 2nd Devons were to occupy our trenches & in conjunction with ourselves & the Sherwood Foresters to make a night attack on the same position. Arrangements for this attack were concluded about 11pm & until 3am of the 13th we remained lying on the ground awaiting the order to advance. At this hour we received orders that the attack would not take place & that the Battalion was to march back into Brigade Reserve behind B lines on RUE TILLELOY. Lt F C Roberts took over the duties of Adjutant.

The losses had been terrible. The 1st Worcesters had lost over 370 of all ranks, including 19 officers; their Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel E C F Wodehouse DSO, was among the dead. The battalion had gone into action on 10 March with a strength of 26 officers and 870 rank and file. On the morning of 13 March the whole battalion could muster no more than 7 officers and 450 men.

The following obituary appeared in *The Echo* on 19 March 1915 and the *Cheltenham Chronicle* on 20 March 1915: *News has reached Cheltenham of*

the death of Capt John Ramsay Cox of Park House, Thirlestaine Road. Capt Cox who has seen service in the 6th (Militia) Batt, Worcester Regiment, rejoined the army early in September, and was given a lieutenant's commission in his old battalion. After a time he was attached to the 11th Battalion of the same regiment, now billeted in Worcester, and worked with them for a considerable period. He was then temporarily employed as staff captain at the 78th Infantry Brigade headquarters at Prestbury House (Captain Capel's place), and which were afterwards removed to his own residence at Park House, where it is still installed. Early in January he proceeded to the front with a draft of the 6th Worcesters, and was attached to the 1st Worcesters. Where or how he met with his death we are unable to state, as nothing but a brief intimation of the fact that he has been killed has yet reached Cheltenham. The death of the gallant officer, who was a well known and very popular figure in the social life of the town, a golfer of great ability, and a tennis player of no mean order, will be greatly regretted. He leaves a widow but no family.

Captain Cox's body was never found and he is remembered on the Le Touret Memorial, Panel 17 & 18. He is also remembered on the Christ Church Roll of Honour; Cheltenham War Memorial; St Luke's Church, Cheltenham; King's Bruton Roll of Honour; St Brigid, Bridstow, Herefordshire (North Side Window) and Worcester Regiment Roll of Honour.

Sources:

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