

William Falcon's military service in The Great War

William Falcon was born on 1st April 1890, at Horsted House, Norwich in Norfolk, to Michael and Isobel Falcon. He was educated at Harrow School and by 1st August 1909, he was a 2nd Lieutenant in The Harrow contingent of The Officer Training Corps (with five years military training). On 11th March 1910, he was granted a commission (in the same rank), with The Welsh Field Company of The Royal Engineers. This was a Territorial Army unit and this would have allowed him to continue his studies as a mining student in South Wales. Just after the commencement of The First World War, he was promoted to Lieutenant on 5th September 1914 and joined 53rd (Welsh) Divisional Engineers.



William Falcon (back left) taken at Llanstadwell, South Wales in 1914

On 2 July 1915 William Falcon, along with the Division was ordered to refit for service in the Mediterranean. Leaving the artillery and train behind, the rest of the Division left 14-19 July, sailing via Alexandria (25-30 July), the ships reached Lemnos 29 July - 7 August. On 9 August, William Falcon in company with his Royal Engineers, landed at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli, with his Division as part of the invasion force expected to break the deadlock on the peninsula.

The effects of fighting, few reinforcements and the dreadful blizzard of November reduced the Division to just 162 officers and 2428 men (about 15% of full strength). William Falcon was amongst the many officers and men who succumbed to frostbite. On 11-12 December the Division was evacuated to Mudros, and then went on to Alexandria, where it began to arrive on 20 December 1915. By then he had been promoted to the rank of temporary Captain in The Welsh Divisional Engineers.



Royal Engineers in Salonika

From November 1916, he was engaged in operations in Salonika, where he commanded 9th Field squadron, Royal Engineers in the rank of Captain. He remained in Salonika until April 1917. Thereafter he moved with his squadron to Palestine

In the spring of 1918 in Palestine, engineers were aligned to mounted divisions. Captain Falcon was still with 4th Field Squadron Royal Engineers and attached to The 4th Cavalry Division (previously 1st Indian Cavalry Division).



4th Cavalry Division in Palestine

The Battle of Nablus took place, together with the Battle of Sharon during the set piece Battle of Megiddo between 19 and 25 September 1918, in the last months of the Sinai and Palestine Campaign of the First World War. Fighting took place in the Judean Hills where the British Empire's XX Corps attacked the Ottoman Empire's Yildirim Army Group's Seventh Army defending their line in front of Nablus. This battle was also fought on the right flank in the Jordan Valley, where Chaytor's Force attacked and captured the Jordan River crossings, before attacking the Fourth Army at Es Salt and Amman capturing many thousands of prisoners and extensive territory. The Battle of Nablus began half a day after the main Battle of Sharon, which was fought on the Mediterranean section of the front line where the XXI Corps attacked the Eighth Army defending the line in front of Tulkarm and Tabsor and the Desert Mounted Corps which rode north to capture the Esdraelon Plain. Together these two battles, known as the Battle of Megiddo, began the Final Offensive of the war in the Sinai and Palestine campaign.



Imperial Camel Corps crossing a Pontoon Bridge in Palestine

William Falcon was with The Desert Mounted Corps at Jisr-el-Majarmi on 21st September 1918, holding the rank of temporary major, where road and rail bridges were prepared for demolition (to trap the retreating Turkish forces). Major Falcon and his demolition party got to their objective at 05:00 hrs, on the River Jordan crossing, after a strenuous night march (for which he was mentioned in despatches).



Major Falcon in Palestine

Unfortunately a detonator went off at 16:00 hrs on 21st September 1918, severely injuring Major Falcon's hands. The type of detonators used were known to be unreliable, especially in the heat and had to be handled with a great deal of care. This would have been clearly understood by a man of his experience and expertise. Major Falcon was evacuated to a military base hospital in Alexandria in Egypt, where he received treatment for his injuries. He made a full recovery minus part of one of his fingers

The final battles of the campaign in Palestine resulted in many tens of thousands of prisoners (William Falcon was to state in a letter to my sister some years later, how he personally 'saw 30.000 Turkish prisoners') and many miles of territory being captured by the Allies. Following the battles, Daraa was captured on 27 September, Damascus on 1 October and operations at Haritan, north of Aleppo, were still in progress when the Armistice of Mudros was signed ending hostilities between the Allies and Ottomans.



Members of 9th Field Squadron RE on Mules

The operations of General Edmund Allenby, the British commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, achieved decisive results at comparatively little cost, in contrast to many offensives during the First World War. Allenby achieved this through the use of creeping barrages to cover set-piece infantry attacks to break a state of trench warfare and then use his mobile forces (cavalry, armoured cars and aircraft) to encircle the Ottoman armies' positions in the Judean Hills, cutting off their lines of retreat. The irregular forces of the Arab Revolt also played a part in this victory, variously under the command of Colonel Lawrence.

After the war William Falcon resumed employment as a mining engineer in South Wales.