

## 10. Sgt Jesse Tunmore - saved by Edith Cavell - carried her coffin in Norwich

One of the six pallbearers at Edith Cavell's funeral service was Sergeant David Jesse Tunmore, who came from Hethersett near Norwich and served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Norfolk Regiment. He was promoted Sergeant at 19 years old, believed to be the youngest Sergeant in the Army at the time.

During August 1914, Tunmore's battalion formed part of the rearguard at Mons. During this action, he became separated from his unit. With no officers present and the senior Sergeant lost, he took command of the remaining men. Tunmore recalled;

*"The Germans were everywhere and firing from the tops of the slag heaps"*

Wounded and completely surrounded, he lay in a stream, emerging only for air. Once captured by the Germans he was held in the Wiheries convent (along with Colonel Boger and Sergeant Fred Meachin from the Cheshires (who were the first men Cavell helped) and another Norfolk soldier, Private Billy Mapes).

He managed to escape from the convent after several weeks, along with Private Lewis from the Cheshires. They obtained civilian clothes in a nearby village and then met a Belgian agent deep in the woods in an old disused church. It was this agent who told them of Edith Cavell.

They arrived in Brussels on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1914 and found Edith Cavell at her Institute. Tunmore quashed Cavell's reservations of him being a spy by recognising Norwich cathedral in a photograph and speaking fondly of Norfolk. The men were welcomed in. Cavell sheltered them in a cellar behind the Clinique and provided them with money and passports.

The pair left for the Dutch frontier on December 28th but turned back just short of Antwerp as the passports they had were no longer what was required. They then returned to the Cavell clinique and with Edith Cavell's help in taking their photographs they set out again for the frontier on January 12<sup>th</sup> and succeeded in crossing to freedom.

On his return to England Tunmore wrote to Edith Cavell's widowed mother and told her of her situation. She wrote back to him, concluding: *'May God bless her and bring her home in peace that I may see her again. Life with me is uncertain as I am in my 81<sup>st</sup> year.'*

Sgt Tunmore returned home after the Armistice and was invited to carry the coffin at the Cathedral with other non-commissioned officers on May 15<sup>th</sup>.

### Sources:

Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum, Norwich Castle – *Edith Cavell and the Norfolk Regiment* (no date)

Rowland Ryder - *Edith Cavell*, Purnell, 1975

### PHOTOS:

Sgt Jesse Tunmore – from The Castle Museum in Norwich used with permission.

Edith Cavell's coffin entering the Cathedral 5.30pm May 15 1919. From copy in Swardeston Archive

