

## Private Albert Hartland

21676

4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment

88<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 29<sup>th</sup> Division

died 18<sup>th</sup> October 1916



Albert Hartland was born in the Autumn of 1877 in Stone. He was the son of Edmund George, born around 1855 in Salwarpe near Droitwich and of Eliza (née Barnbrook), born around 1857 in Stone. The couple married on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1876 in Stone church. Edmund was a platelayer on the railway and he and Eliza had 16 children during their marriage but sadly only 9 survived their infancy. Albert's eight siblings were George, (born around 1876), Andrew (1881), Lizzie (1885), Bertie (1889), Mary (1890), James (1892), William (1893) and Florence (1898). Edmund died in 1900 aged 46 and Mary died in 1908 aged 18. George, James and William also enlisted in the army and William was awarded the Military Medal in 1916.

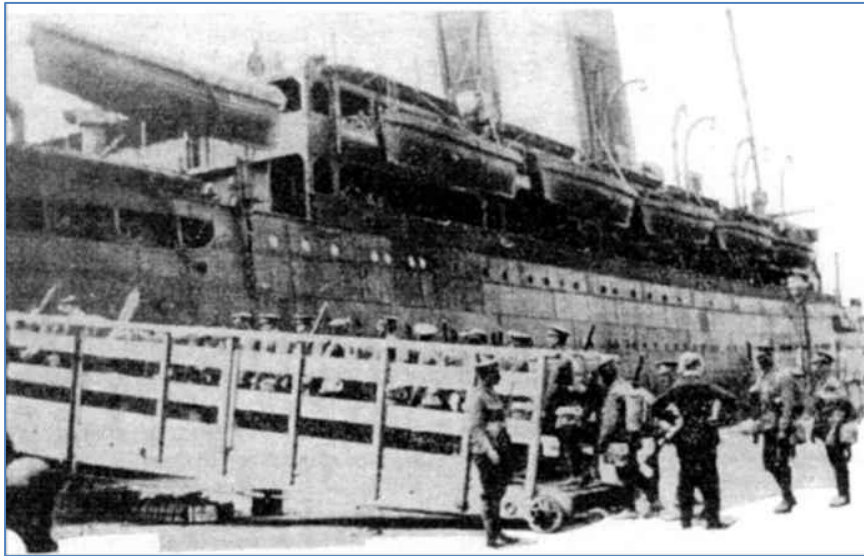
Albert lived in the Stone area for all his life. In 1881 the family were in Stone parish in a property near Spennalls Farm [sic] and from 1891 they were in Hoobrook. In 1911 Eliza was living in Woodbine Cottage, Hoobrook. The children of the family worked from an early age in woollen mills – Albert is listed as working in a Spinning Mill at the age of 13 in 1891 and in 1901 he was a Machine Minder in a Woollen Mill.<sup>1</sup> When he enlisted, he had been employed by Messrs Greatwich Ltd as a Stoker for some years.<sup>2</sup>

On 4<sup>th</sup> June 1906 Albert married Lilian Monks in St. John the Baptist Church, Kidderminster and the couple had three children: Doris Lilian born in the spring of 1907, Albert E in the winter of 1913) and Frances V in the summer of 1916. In 1911, the couple were living at 17, Hoo Road and in 1916 they were living at 4, New Square.

Albert enlisted sometime around March 1915, joining the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment, and he was given the service number 21676.

We have very little hard evidence about Albert's war service but we do know from his Medal Index Card that his first destination after leaving Britain was the Balkans and he arrived there on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1915. His unit was serving in Gallipoli at that time and he would have joined the action there until the British evacuation in January 1916 when the men went to Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

On 15<sup>th</sup> March 1916, after some months of rest, the 4<sup>th</sup> Worcesters embarked on the *Transylvania* at Alexandria, landing in France five days later.



**The 4th Battalion embarking on the *Transylvania* at Alexandria**

Once ashore the Battalion travelled by rail to Pont Remy and then on foot to billets. They continued to move around the Somme area before marching in the pouring rain to Mailly Maillet where they worked on defences behind the lines before going into trenches south of Beaumont Hamel on April 18<sup>th</sup>. The Battalion remained in trenches facing Beaumont Hamel or in billets behind the line until the end of June 1916.



**4th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment men resting at Louvencourt, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1916**

Towards the end of June, Albert's Battalion marched up to the line in preparation for the start of the Battle of the Somme. The preliminary artillery bombardment had started on 24<sup>th</sup> June and a few days later the 4<sup>th</sup> Worcesters moved into their position. The war diary recorded that all ranks were:

"going about singing, and as cheerful as could be."

By 3am on 30<sup>th</sup> June the men were in position waiting for their time to attack. The order came at 11.30am and the men attempted to move to the front line but were subject to a barrage of shells



**4th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment men marching towards trenches at Acheux on the 28th June 1916**

that killed or wounded six officers and 96 men before they reached the front line. The Battalion prepared as best they could for attack, but it soon became clear that the initial assault had failed and it was feared that the Germans would counter attack so orders were received to hold the line at all costs and the Battalion prepared for defence. The war diary noted:

"everyone worked hard in repairing the broken trenches under most trying conditions"

This work lasted for 13 days without relief and then the men marched to a reserve camp for rest before being moved to Poperinghe on 27<sup>th</sup> July and later to Ypres. They stayed in this area until 8<sup>th</sup> October, alternating between trenches on the slope of Bellewaerde Ridge between the Menin Road and the Roulers Railway and time in the Brigade Reserve in Ypres itself. Although there was no major offensive in this area there were raids and enemy counter attacks. On 1<sup>st</sup> October the Battalion witnessed two German observation balloons being brought down in flames by a British aeroplane. Soon afterwards persistent heavy rain started making life very difficult for Albert and his comrades.

On October 8<sup>th</sup>, the 4<sup>th</sup> Worcesters travelled by train from Houputre to Corbie in the Somme. Although some ground had been gained since the start of the battle in July, the situation was made very difficult due to the heavy rain at the end of September and early October, which turned shell-holes into slimy pools and the churned soil of the Somme ridges into knee-deep mud.

Despite this, Albert's division were tasked with taking a ridge which lay between the village of Gueudecourt and Le Transloy. The Division started in reserve and watched men from other Battalions start the assault but, although ground had been gained in places, no definite success had been achieved. Finally, on 13<sup>th</sup> October, the 4<sup>th</sup> Worcesters moved into the front line and faced heavy bombardments. The men worked hard to improve their position prior to an attack which was due to take place on 18<sup>th</sup> October, despite both very cold and very wet weather.

The attack opened with a bombardment at 3.40 am and then the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion went "over the top". The attack was partly successful and some objectives were reached – the enemy were driven out of Hilt Trench, Bayonet Trench was partly taken and Grease Trench was also mostly captured. Over 200 prisoners were taken and some enemy dugouts were demolished. By the time dawn broke the attack was over. The British troops held their gains despite heavy enemy

bombardments and the constant rain which meant that men were up to their hips in mud. At the end of the day losses amounted to three officers and 16 other ranks killed, nine officers and 80 other ranks wounded and one officer and 30 other ranks missing.<sup>4</sup>

Albert was amongst these casualties. There is some confusion about when he actually died. The St Mary's Church Roll of Honour says it was 11<sup>th</sup> November whereas the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website says 18<sup>th</sup> October. The "Register of Soldiers' Effects" states that it was on or since 18<sup>th</sup> October "death presumed". Even more confusing is the notice in the Kidderminster Shuttle from 25<sup>th</sup> November which states that Albert had been wounded and was in hospital.

All that we can be sure about is that after his death, Albert's widow Lilian received a payment of £1 12s 5d, which was the final balance of pay owed, and later, in 1919, a war gratuity of £7.<sup>5</sup>

Albert is buried in Bancourt British Cemetery which is around 3 miles due east of Bapaume. This is a "concentration cemetery" in which men originally buried in other small cemeteries in the area were reinterred after the war. One of these smaller cemeteries was Sunken Road Cemetery, Lesboeufs, between Gueudecourt and Le Transloy, which contained the graves of 50 soldiers who fell in October, 1916. Bancourt British Cemetery, which was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, now contains 2,480 burials and commemorations of the First World War.<sup>6</sup>



## References

Please note that these references refer to all information in the preceding paragraphs since the previous reference, not just to the immediate sentence in which the reference number appears.

1. Census documents: <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>
2. The Kidderminster Shuttle, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1916

3. <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-british-infantry-regiments-of-1914-1918/worcestershire-regiment/>
4. [http://www.worcestershireregiment.com/bat\\_4\\_1916.php](http://www.worcestershireregiment.com/bat_4_1916.php)
5. Register of soldiers' effects: <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>
6. <https://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/21001/bancourt-british-cemetery>