

ALAN WILLIAM BEDFORD



20th November 1917

1897-1917 Age 19

Second Lieutenant attached 2/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Territorial Force).

Alan Bedford was born and brought up on Laisteridge Lane, Great Horton, Bradford. He was the eldest of two children of William Isaac Bedford and Emily, nee Horsfall, and was their only son. Both parents were from Bradford. William worked for his father John who owned a cotton spinning mill, first as his clerk and later as managing director. Emily's father was a wool merchant. Alan was born on 16th December 1897 and was baptized at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel on Eastbrook Road. He attended Bradford Grammar School for seven years from 1907, on the Modern side of the school. He did well at French throughout his school career. In his final year in the Matriculation Form he came top in Chemistry and Physics, second in French and fourth in Maths. He was sixteen when he left school, and in December 1914 he went to Manchester University to study Textile Industries Technology.

While at university Alan joined the O.T.C., then shortly before his eighteenth birthday, in December 1915 he attested for military service. He was allowed to continue his studies until he was called up in March 1917. Although he had not passed his O.T.C. certificates, he was sent directly to 20th Officer Cadet Battalion on the 10th, and after a twelve week course was commissioned on 26th June 1917. He was posted to 2/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment which had gone to France as part of 62nd West Riding Division in January. When Bedford reported for duty on 6th September his battalion was still in the Bullecourt sector where it had suffered severe casualties on 3rd May. In the days after Bedford arrived it mounted a successful raid, to which the Germans responded with their own attack on an advanced position. At some point during his short time with the battalion Bedford was mentioned for gallantry in 62nd Division's routine orders. In October the Division was relieved from the line and after a period of rest, in early November it began preparations for an attack being planned near Cambrai.



This operation had several novel features, including the absence of a preliminary bombardment and the massed use of tanks for the first time. In the second week of November the 2/6th Battalion practised new formations for the attack behind tanks, and then it moved forward to take position in Havrincourt Wood. The attack began at 6.20 a.m. on 20th November. Although the battalion took all its objectives by 10.45 a.m., the tanks which were intended to spearhead the attack did not arrive on time so the infantry had to make their way through the enemy barbed wire under fire. Bedford was one of three officers and twenty-three other ranks killed, with a further 127 wounded and missing. On 29th November his parents received a telegram announcing he had been killed in action on 22nd November, which was later corrected to the 20th. His original burial place was in Havrincourt Wood British Cemetery. His body was moved to Hermies Hill British Cemetery in 1920.





Acknowledgements:

Alan Bedford's photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family was researched using Ancestry.com. His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the 1908-1914 Annual Reports.

His military service is taken from his Officer Personal Record, T.N.A. WO339-89575. The reference to his mention for gallantry is from <https://archive.org/stream/rollofservice00univuoft/rollofservice00univuoft_djvu.txt> accessed 24-10-2017. For the events of his service with 2/6th Battalion, I consulted the War Diary available on Ancestry at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/interactive/60779/43849_3082_0-00769?pid=658492&backurl=http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=Kih1940%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26indiv%3D1%26db%3DUKWarDiariesWW1%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26_F0007CF4%3DWest%2520Yorkshire%26_F00088EF%3D2/6%26MSAV%3D1%26uidh%3D6n6%26pcat%3D39%26fh%3D312%26h%3D658492%26recoff%3D%26fsk%3DBEK8RZclgADtawAEUM0-61-%26bsk%3D%26pgoff%3D%26ml_rpos%3D313&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=Kih1940&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true#?imageId=43849_3082_0-00970>, which includes a report on the attack of 20th November, and Capt. E.C.Gregory, History of the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, vol. ii (Percy Lund, Humphries & Co, Bradford, 1923), 103-146. For the Battle of Cambrai in general, I consulted Bryn Hammond, Cambrai 1917. The Myth of the First Great Tank Battle (paperback ed., Phoenix, London, 2009), especially 139-140 for the 2/6th on 20th November.

Bedford's Officer Personal Record notes his original burial, while Soldiers Died in the Great War and <<https://www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead/results?initial=AW&lastName=Bedford&war=1>> gives his reburial. He was remembered on the Eastbrook Hall Wesleyan Mission memorial.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in October 2017. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <<http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>>.