

ALAN STEVENSON



26th September 1916

1887-1916 Age 29

Captain, 13th (Reserve) Battalion Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment), attached 9th (Service) Battalion.

Alan Stevenson was the son of a Wesleyan Minister and the grandson of a 'missionary', both of whom were from Manchester. He was born near Blackpool, in Lancashire in the spring of 1887, the third of four children and the elder of two sons born to William Stevenson and Ann Jackson Worsley. William's first recorded employment was as Clerk to a Workhouse, but he subsequently trained for the ministry and was ordained in 1874. Four years later he married Ann in Manchester. She was the daughter of a joiner and binder from Didsbury. It was in the nature of William's vocation that he was transferred regularly from one Methodist circuit to another: he is recorded at Welshpool in mid-Wales, Stalybridge in Cheshire, Blackpool, Huddersfield, Ormskirk in Lancashire and Mossley in Manchester.

While William Stevenson worked on the Huddersfield circuit, Alan attended Bradford Grammar School from the years 1898 until 1901, from the ages of eleven to fourteen. He was on the Classical side of the school. When his father was moved across the Pennines, Alan continued his studies at Manchester Grammar School (September 1902-July 1904). At seventeen, Alan won a scholarship to Manchester University, where he completed an Honours course in Classics. He made a great impact on those who knew him, as Professor Conway wrote later to the Manchester Guardian:- 'He was one of the most lovable of pupils', whose death would be mourned by all 'who had felt, in work or play, his sunny companionship'. After university he became a school master. His first position was at Sandbach School, Cheshire, where he was teaching in 1911, followed by an appointment to the Duke's School at Alnwick in Northumberland.

Alan was one of the early volunteers when the war began, enlisting in the Sherwood Foresters Regiment as Private 15485. He was promoted to Lance-Corporal, and he then received a subaltern's commission in November 1914. This suggests that he was both a useful soldier, and that he had some military training with the Manchester University Officer Training Corps. He was first posted to the 13th Reserve Battalion, with promotion to full Lieutenant in August 1915. He was transferred to the



9th Battalion, which he joined at Suvla Bay, on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey, on 19th October 1915. In December Alan was promoted to Captain and his battalion was evacuated to Egypt. He was hospitalized at Malta before rejoining his men. They were sent to France in July 1916, and arrived at the Somme in early September.

The month of September was a period of intense activity along the Somme front. For the 9th Sherwood Foresters their main action was the capture of the fortified village of Thiepval at the end of that month. Stevenson was in command of 'B' Company. On 26th September, they took up position at 3.30 am, and their attack started shortly after midday at 12.35 pm. By 1.17 pm Stevenson was able to report that his men had taken their second objective Zollern Trench, and were pushing on to the third. He was shot while directing the consolidation of the position. His Colonel wrote to Alan's parents:- 'Your son's death is a great loss to his battalion ... Personally, I have the very highest opinion of him as a soldier ... He will be very much missed by his brother officers and by the men in his Company, for whom he was always thinking.' His body was recovered and was buried some distance away at Bouzincourt. His name is on the War Memorials of his schools, university, Sandbach School and Alnwick.



Acknowledgements:

Alan Stevenson's photo is courtesy of the O.B.A. Roll of Honour. The family history was researched using Ancestry.com (accessed 24/25-9-2016). For his father's ordination, http://www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk/page/wesleyan_methodist_ministers-19?path=0p3p27p, accessed 24-9-2016. Alan's biography was published in the M.G.S. School magazine Ulula in November 1916 (http://www.worldwar1schoolarchives.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/ULULA_1916_11.pdf p. 231, accessed 25-9-2016).

For his promotions, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29316/page/9766/data.pdf>; <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29509/supplement/2904/data.pdf> accessed 23-9-2016). For Sandbach School's war memorial, http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/names/listing/42890?items_per_page=10&page=2; for Alnwick, <http://www.newmp.org.uk/detail.php?contentId=6171> 23-9-2016 accessed 25-9-2016.

For the Somme, Chris McCarthy, The Somme. The Day-by-Day Account (1998 edition, London), pp. 119-20. The 9th Sherwood Foresters war diary, available on Ancestry.com, contains very detailed orders and reports for the 26th September attack.

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