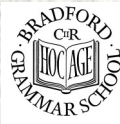


DAVID PRITCHARD



19th March 1916

1897-1916 Aged 19

Second Lieutenant, 1st Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers. David Pritchard was born on 28th February 1897 in Dewsbury. His father Joseph Pritchard was born in South Africa, his mother Edith Voss McKain in Hampshire. Joseph gained the Licence of the Royal College of Physicians, London, in 1885 and by 1901 he had a medical practice in Dewsbury. David was the second of their six children. With his elder brother Mervyn, David started at Bradford Grammar School in 1910, when they were 15 and 13; both played for the rugby XV and the cricket XI. The Bradfordian described them as *'both boys of the right sort, always willing to undertake any duty when asked and then to do their best.'*

On leaving school in 1914, Mervyn joined the South African Mounted Rifles, serving in the German South-West Africa campaign when war began. David won a place as an officer cadet at Sandhurst and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the 1st Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers (1/RWF) in April 1915. They had lost heavily in 1914, and again twice more in 1915, most recently at the Battle of Loos. Pritchard was sent out as a replacement in early October, followed in late November by Captain Robert Graves and Second Lieutenants Siegfried Sassoon and David Thomas. For a few months these four lives became intertwined.

The 1/RWF spent December and January training in 'open warfare', preparing for the planned offensive at the Somme. There was time also for relaxation as Graves, Pritchard and Thomas played rugby in inter-battalion matches. In February 1916 the 1/RWF moved to Fricourt, near the Somme, where German trench mortar fire was particularly galling. Pritchard was appointed to command the two Stokes trench mortars. Lieutenant Adams wrote later, *'He did not volunteer for the Stokes gun, in fact he was very sorry to take up that work, but characteristically put his full energy into it and for six weeks fired it well and with extreme courage. He must have done great damage to the Germans, for they were always trying to put his gun out.'* In his 1929 book, Graves reported a conversation with Pritchard: *"They're beauties, I've been trying them out, and tomorrow I'm going to get some of my own back. I can put four or five shells in the air at once."*

On the night of 18th March, Graves and Thomas were working in the front line when the latter was



shot in the neck. Captain Richardson was hit by a shell-blast when inspecting the wire. Both died of their wounds around midnight. Adams wrote *'I was with your son and he was anxious to give the Boches [i.e. the Germans] some back. We waited till after midnight [19th March]... Your son fired over forty shells, found six more and promptly sent them over.'* However, as he came off duty Pritchard was killed by a random German 'whizz-bang', a high velocity shell. The next night, the three officers were buried side by side. The Chaplain wrote, *'in the darkness I took the service. All the officers were present and many men. The moon came out and ... made the colours of the Union Jack which lay on the [bodies] gleam. The service ended to the roar of another [explosion], more fitting accompaniment than any organ.'* Graves and Sassoon were both there.

The Bradfordian recorded, Pritchard's *'loss is deeply regretted by many of his masters, who appreciated his public school spirit and his affectionate nature, and by many schoolfellows, among whom he was a general favourite.'* Adams wrote *'We all loved him. He was always good friends with everybody and always cheerful.'* The Chaplain added, *'Your son had the reputation of being the most recklessly gallant of a gallant band of young officers and all loved him.'* Joseph Pritchard wrote of his son, *'David was just an ordinary boy. He was afraid of the dark. He disliked to get hurt ... you will see what an ordinary boy can do if he sets himself to do it, and what one ordinary boy can do any ordinary boy can do.'* Joseph and Mervyn both served throughout the War, and both survived.



Acknowledgements:

Pritchard's family history and military service were traced using Ancestry.com and the CWGC website. The 1/RWF's history was researched through the battalion War Diary (WO-95-1665 downloaded from the National Archives). For Graves and Sassoon, see Helen MacPhail and Philip Guest, *On The Trail of the Poets of the Great War. Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon*, (Barnsley, 2001), passim; on p. 44, a photo of the officers of the 3/RWF taken at the Wrexham Depot in June 1915 includes Sassoon, Thomas and Pritchard. Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That* (Penguin ed. 1960), pages 161-4, concerns Pritchard and the death of David Thomas. Sassoon's diary for the same events was downloaded from <http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-09852-00001-00005/42> and 43: '*March 19th: And tonight I saw his shrouded form laid in the earth with his two companions (young Pritchard was killed this evening also). In the half clouded moonlight the parson stood above the graves, and everything was dim but the striped flag laid across them... once we could not hear the solemn words for the noise of a machine gun along the line; and when all was finished a canister fell a few hundred yards away to burst with a crash.*' Sassoon's account makes it clear he was in love with Thomas, and his grief drove him to take suicidal risks in seeking to inflict revenge on the Germans. His behaviour led to his being dubbed 'Mad Jack', and he won the Military Cross for organizing the collecting and bringing back of the wounded and dead under heavy fire during a failed trench raid near Fricourt (<http://www.rwfmuseum.org.uk/articles.html> 'Medals awarded to Siegfried Sassoon').

Joseph Pritchard volunteered in 1915 and served as a doctor with the RAMC. Mervyn returned from South Africa in 1915 and was commissioned in the Royal Artillery. Both survived the War.

The Bradfordian's biography for David (July 1916) was as long as that for Keeling, the Headmaster who served the school for forty years, in the same issue. The Bradfordian did not, as a rule, print biographies of the O.B.s who fell in the War.

Thomas, Richardson and Pritchard are buried in graves 3, 4 and 5 respectively of Row D in Point 110 New Military Cemetery, Fricourt. The Graves Registration Report (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/571136/PRITCHARD,%20DAVID>) wrongly gives their date of death as 17th March.

I have used the form Royal *Welch* Fusiliers, although officially the regimental was *Welsh* at the time of the First World War, as this is the form used by Graves and the regimental website.

My thanks to all the websites utilized. Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, March 2016.