

SIDNEY JAMES BUCKLEY



24th March 1918

1885-1918 Aged 32

Second Lieutenant 5th Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment, attached 2nd Battalion, attached 6th (Light) Trench Mortar Battery.

The Buckley family originated in Lancashire and moved to Manningham, Bradford around 1890. Robert E. Buckley was a cotton goods salesman from Salford, which may explain how he met Helena Constantine Butcher whose father was a draper in Chorley. They married in 1880 although she was Robert's junior by nine years. Sidney was their second child and in all they had two sons and three daughters. In Bradford Robert worked as the cashier to a 'Silk Worsted Mill', probably Lister's, until he retired. Both his sons went to Bradford Grammar School, Herbert the elder from 1893 to 1897 and Sidney from 1897 to 1902. He won an honourable mention for the prize for Third Modern (1899), but he struggled when promoted straight into Fifth Modern. At different points of his school career he showed aptitude in a number of subjects, however his results suggest flagging interest and he left in summer 1902 after taking his Lower Certificate, by which time he was nearly seventeen. He went to work for a woollen cloth merchant and continued to live with his family on Leylands Lane, Heaton, until in 1909 he married Barbara Shewan. Her father had given up farm labour in Aberdeenshire to move to Bradford in the 1870s to work as a railway clerk. While Sidney's family were Anglicans, Barbara's were Presbyterians so the marriage was at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on Infirmary Street. They had one child, James Edward Buckley, born in August 1910. They lived at Cornwall Place off Manningham Lane.

After school Sidney had served with the 'Bradford Rifles', the local Volunteers, from 1904-1906 but he did not renew his enlistment, and when the war began he did not volunteer. In June 1916 he was enrolled for General Service under the Military Service Acts, and he was called up in December. He was posted to the 2nd Artists Rifles (2/28th London Regiment) at Hare Hall, Romford in Essex as Private 9943 (renumbered 766507). As this was an O.T.C. it is likely he was already intending to seek a commission. In April 1917 Buckley was ordered to join 15th Officer Training Battalion, in the same



camp. Although he expressed a preference for the Artillery he was commissioned into the South Staffordshire Regiment.

Second Lieutenant Buckley crossed to France on 11th October 1917. Although he was commissioned into the 1/5th Battalion, in France he was attached to the 2nd Battalion (part of 6th Infantry Brigade, 2nd Division) - he may have been one of the four officers who arrived during October - and subsequently to the brigade Trench Mortar Battery. The occasion for the latter may have been the loss of half its 3-inch Stokes guns and crews in fierce fighting holding off the German attack west of Cambrai on 30th November-2nd December. He was reportedly wounded in February, but had returned to his unit by March. When the German Spring Offensive began, 6th Brigade were moved forward from reserve into support in the Green Line on 22nd March as the Germans broke through the main British defence line. Four mortars were positioned to cover the front line battalions and to provide covering fire in event of a withdrawal. On the morning of 24th March the first German attack was held, but a heavier assault in the afternoon could not be stemmed. The brigade fell back several miles and what happened to the four mortars and their teams, Buckley among them, was unknown. For a year his family hoped he was a prisoner. It was only when one of his men was released from German captivity that he confirmed he had seen Buckley killed. His name is on the Arras Memorial to the Missing.



Acknowledgements:

Buckley'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. The Buckley brothers' school record is from the B.G.S. Annual Reports 1894-1902. Information about Buckley's life, military service and death is found in his Officer Personal Record, TNA WO374-10570. A letter from the War Office dated 22nd March 1919 stated 'the Army Council are regrettably constrained to conclude, for official purposes, that Second Lieutenant Buckley is dead, and that his death occurred on 24th March ... the Army Council have, unfortunately, no doubt as to the death of this officer.' The soldier was Corporal 4/8773 Augustus Letts who was perhaps one of the mortar crews. For the Artists Rifles, <<http://artistsriflesassociation.org/regiment-artists-rifles.htm>> accessed 31st January 2018.

I have been unable to find a reference to Buckley in the War Diary of either 1/5th or 2nd Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment (both available on Ancestry.com). There is no War Diary for 6th Trench Mortar Battery, however there are references to its activities in 6th Brigade War Diary, also accessed through Ancestry. This and the 2/South Staffords diaries provide detailed accounts of the calamity that befell 6th Brigade on 24-25th March when it was reduced to 150 men. The brigade diary noted 'No information is to hand as to what happened to the 4 guns and teams in the line on 24th instant. The 4 guns in Reserve were dismantled and rendered useless. Reserve personnel then acted as Infantry with the 17th R. Fusiliers and assisted in covering retreat.' The Green Line was the former German line. The British position consisted of a shallow trench and the old German wire. Both diaries contain many interesting documents.

Barbara Buckley did not remarry. By 1930 she lived at 3 Cunliffe Terrace, and died in 1943. Their son James Edward Buckley died in Bradford in 1990.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in January-February 2019.

For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <<http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>>.