

WILLIAM LEEDHAM



4th September 1918

1892-1918 Aged 26

Second Lieutenant 15th (Hampshire Yeomanry) Battalion Hampshire Regiment.

William was the son of Isaac Leedham (also spelled Leedam) and his second wife Janet Driver. Isaac was from Bingley where, like his father, he had been a tailor. Janet was the daughter of a farmer in Morton. When they met Janet worked in her mother's grocery shop in the Undercliffe area of Bradford. They married in 1887 and Isaac embarked on a new and successful career in the grocery trade, probably in association with his brother-in-law Edmund. When the latter died in 1914 his provision importing business had fifteen branches in the Bradford area and his effects were valued at £2.5 million.

Isaac and Janet had two sons, John Edmund and William, who was born on 6th November 1892. He attended Belle Vue Boys School on Manningham Lane, and then went to Bradford Grammar School for two years starting in 1906. He was an average pupil. He left when he was fifteen. His elder brother joined the family business, which he would inherit, so William went to work for their uncle Edmund Driver. William cannot be traced in the 1911 Census, so it is possible he was travelling abroad in connection with the provision trade. He was aged twenty-one when the war began and he did not volunteer to serve. It was only when the Group Scheme was introduced late in 1915 that he attested for service on 8th December. He was called up two months later and posted to the reserve battalion of the 7th Duke of Wellington's Regiment (T.F.) at Clipstone Camp, Notts. He showed some leadership qualities and over the next year he was promoted several times reaching the rank of Sergeant, and he was transferred to 3/6th battalion. As he saw no active service through 1916 and 1917 he was probably engaged in training. In March 1917 William agreed to serve overseas; he also submitted an application for officer training. His preferred branches of the service were the A.S.C. (Motor



Transport), Artillery or Engineers. He was accepted in September and proceeded to 12th Officer Training Battalion at Newmarket. He was gazetted temporary Second Lieutenant on 14th January 1918.

Leedham was not posted overseas until 15th April 1918. He was sent to join 15th Battalion Hampshire Regiment, although the precise date he joined it in the field is not recorded. The battalion had returned from Italy in March, and in early April was sent to hold trenches in the Passchendaele sector. When the salient was evacuated the battalion remained in the Ypres area, manning the defences of the city and sectors to the south. On 9th August it made an attack from the Westoutre line, which cost it 142 casualties. On 2nd September the battalion took over part of the defences near Mount Kemmel, relieving 106th U.S. Infantry Regiment. The allied breakout from the Ypres salient commenced on 31st August. At very short notice 15th/Hampshire received orders to attack at 4.30 a.m. on 4th September. The barrage was inadequate and left several German machine guns to fire unmolested on the attackers. Over three hundred men became casualties. Leedham was killed in this attack, one of sixteen officer casualties. He is buried with over one hundred men killed in that attack in Vormezeele Enclosure No.3.



Acknowledgements:

William Leedham'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 and *Kelly's 1912 Bradford Directory*. His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1907-8 and 1908-9. There was another 'W. Leedham' at B.G.S. from 1909-1913. I used <http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/bills/article-1633409/Historic-inflation-calculator-value-money-changed-1900.html> to calculate the modern value of Edmund Driver's estate (accessed 4.9.2018). Leedham's death was recorded in the *Bradford Weekly Telegraph* 20.9.1918. His Officer Personal Record was obtained from T.N.A. WO-339-106539. His Medal Index Card records the date he arrived in France. The 15/ Hampshire War Diary from March 1918 is T.N.A. WO 95/2634/6, consulted on Ancestry.com. The early pages are cursory, but Leedham was not listed among the Officers on the roll at the end of June. His father was informed that he was discharged to duty from 8th Red Cross Hospital Boulogne on 1st June 1918, but no more is known about this. The diary ceased to list officers joining the battalion after June.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in September 2018. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>.