

## Herefordshire Soldiers and 'The Redan Ridge' On 'The Somme'

The Somme Battle had been launched on 1 July 1916, and the slog through the mud of the Somme Valley against a determined enemy had taken its toll; casualties were high and many units were no longer 'battleworthy'. Immediate reserves had been used up yet there was still a requirement for more manpower.

It was in this scenario that men of The Herefordshire Regiment were transferred to other Regiments, including the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry, The Suffolk Regiment, The Gloucestershire Regiment and the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion<sup>1</sup> of The Border Regiment and fought on the Somme. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Herefordshire Regiment were in Egypt and had been brought up to strength with reinforcements from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion based in Park Hall Camp Oswestry. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion based in Lowestoft was up to strength with generally fit and available soldiers. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was still over strength having held and trained recruits since August 1914, and the surge of Derby Scheme recruits in December 1915 and January 1916 – these men were now trained and ready for deployment.

Several drafts were formed up and in late September 1916 one such draft of some 250 men being identified to reinforce units in France and the men formed a greater contingent with soldiers of The Kings Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI) and set out for France. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> October they sailed from Southampton to Rouen and spent several days at the infamous 'Bull Ring' training camp at Etaples before being re-allocated and 'sent up the line' to join the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion The Border Regiment.

Army Form B. 103. **Casualty Form Active Service.** Regimental Number 20442

Rank Pte Surname Humphrey Christian Name James  
 Religion of C Age on Enlistment 19 years 6 months.  
 Enlisted (a) 2.3.16 Terms of Service (a) Re 11 Service reckons from (a) 2.3.16  
 Date of promotion to present rank \_\_\_\_\_ Date of appointment to lance rank \_\_\_\_\_  
 Extended ( ) Re-engaged ( ) or Corps Trade and Rate \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Officer in Charge \_\_\_\_\_

Report	Date	From whom received	Record of promotions, transfers, casualties, & other service events, as notified on Army Form 103 (a) or (b) or other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place of Casualty	Date of Casualty	Remarks
			Embarked ...	Southampton	2/10/16	
			Disembarked ...	Rouen	5/10/16	
	5/10/16	O.O. & I.B.D.	Posted to 5/10/16	Rouen	5/10/16	Roll.
	11-10-16	-do-	Transferred to 11th Bn. The Border Regt under A.O.204 & A.O.I.1499 of 1916 & allotted New No.		11-10-16	
			Officer in Charge: Inf: Section No. 3.			

(a) In the case of a man who has re-engaged for, or called into Section D, Army Reserve, particulars of such re-engagement or enlistment will be entered.  
 (b) Signaller, Shering Smith, & Co.  
 (c) Wt. 100/1000. 1/20/000. 1/16. P.P.Ltd. Form B. 103.

They would have probably travelled by train, in the wagons known well to the First World War soldiers by the legend stencilled on them '40 hommes/8 cheveux'. The reinforcements moved forwards probably via Amiens to join the 11<sup>th</sup> Border Regiment who were out of the line. Here they would have been allocated to companies and platoons as required, and undertaken unit familiarisation and training.

In November the Battalion moved back to the Front; at 0610hrs on 18<sup>th</sup><sup>2</sup> they took part in an attack to capture the high ground of the Redan Ridge; this high ground dominated the lower ground; by capturing it a breakthrough was hoped for. The assault crossed the mud of no-man's land and passed through the German Front Line (Munich Trench) and occupied the German reserve trench (Frankfort Trench), only to find that their flanks were 'open' and the Germans had reoccupied the Munich trench and had encircled them and they were cut off.

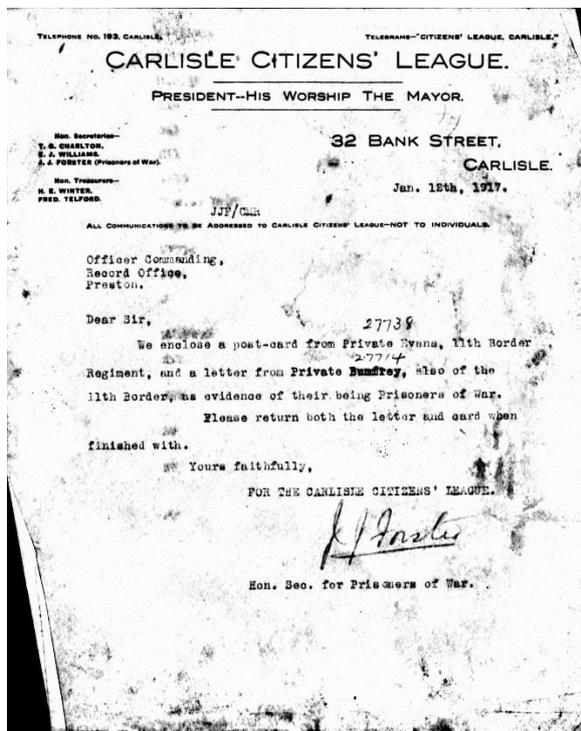
<sup>1</sup> - Formed as a Pals Battalion by the Earl of Lonsdale (of boxing fame and known as the yellow earl) and known as 'The Lonsdales'.  
<sup>2</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> November is the official last day of the Battle of The Somme.

It is thought that 7 officers and about 120 soldiers had become isolated, about half of these were from the 11<sup>th</sup> Border Regiment and almost certainly included some of those transferred from the Herefords. The group sent messengers back to the British lines, but could not evacuate en-masse due to the high number of casualties. They were running short of water, food and ammunition and parties went out to recover these items from bodies lying in no-mans' land. On one occasion a patrol brought in 8 German prisoners. On 2 occasions fighting patrols were sent out from the British lines in an attempt to relieve the isolated force; on both occasions the attempt failed. The Germans were becoming increasingly agitated by this pocket of British troops holding out against them and launched several attacks, eventually a 2 battalion assault (1500 men) was launched.

The troops had held out for 8 days with no resupply and enduring increasing hardship and casualties. Eventually on the 25<sup>th</sup> November, after a vicious assault involving hand to hand fighting with clubs and bayonets, all ammunition having been expended, the troops had no option but to surrender. Only 15 unwounded men emerged from Frankfort Trench to be taken Prisoner of War by the Germans; many wounded also were taken into captivity.

The full story of the British resistance at Redan Ridge was not known until after the war when POWs were released. There were 2 recommendations for (pothumous) Victoria Crosses<sup>3</sup>, but they were not awarded. Sgt Charles Davies (ex Herefordshire Regiment) was taken POW on 18<sup>th</sup> November, he escaped from captivity in January 1918 and was awarded the Military Medal.

Ninety two men of the Herefordshire Regiment who transferred to the 11<sup>th</sup> Border Regiment were Killed in Action, or Died of Wounds on the Somme during the period 18<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> November. Many others were taken Prisoners of War – as was Pte Bumfrey.



The impact to Herefordshire was immense, many lost friends and family; many towns and villages suffered a loss.



Redan Ridge Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery

<sup>3</sup> - Sgt J Lee and LCpl J Veitch