

2) 10065 Private Francis Charles George **BUCKLAND**
(St Mary's Aldermaston)

Kia 09/05/15, **Age** 37
2nd Bn. Royal Berkshire Regiment

Born Basingstoke
Enlisted Reading

Awarded: 1914-15 Star
British War Medal
Victory Medal

Date arrived in theatre of war: France, 17/2/1915

The 2nd Royal Berkshire had been in India when war broke out in August 1914, but had returned to the UK in October. They then set out for France the following month and held the then quiet sector near Fauquissart in northern France through the winter.

Francis Buckland would have been sent out with a party of fellow replacements in February 1915 and would indeed join his battalion at Fauquissart. He would not have long to wait before seeing action. He would take part in two major British battles of 1915, smaller in scale compared with those of later years and now, almost totally forgotten – 'Neuve Chapelle' and 'Aubers Ridge'.



Private camera photograph of the 2nd Royal Berkshire in the trenches 1915

On the night of 7/8th March 1915, the 2nd Royal Berkshire moved up to trenches astride the road leading south-east from Rue Tilleloy to Neuve Chapelle. At 8.05am the next morning they made their advance to capture the village of Neuve Chapelle:

'The German front-line trenches were carried with little opposition and the first objective line was reached and made good'.

Many casualties were sustained from 'shorts', British artillery falling short into the lines of the advancing Royal Berkshire men. The fighting around Neuve Chapelle would soon become confused, opportunities would be lost through poor communication. Although the remains of the village of Neuve Chapelle had been taken, there was no breakthrough. The cost to the 2nd Royal Berkshire between 10-15th March had been 328 killed, wounded and missing. On 16th March, they were relieved to west of Neuve Chapelle but returned to front line trenches at Bac St Maur on the 23rd.

The month of April 1915 was quieter as the battalion was able to rebuild taking tours in the trenches in sectors to the north, moving back to Brigade Reserve at Fleurbaix. However by the end of the month they were moved back to the Fauquissart sector.

On 8th May 1915, the 2nd Royal Berks moved up to the front line trenches again and took up their assembly positions to take part in the Battle of Aubers Ridge the following day.



Trench Map – the 2nd Royal Berks were attacking in a southerly direction from the British lines at 'Le Trou'

Their war diary records the events of this day and presents a very confused picture. Leading the attack in their sector would be the men of the 2nd Rifle Brigade who would capture the first German line. The 2nd Berkshire would move up in support and effectively advance through them onto the final objective of the village of Aubers.

5:40am – The Guns lifted and the Rifle Brigade rose from the Breastwork and as soon as they appeared on the top they were met by a terrific rifle and machine-gun fire...the Royal Berkshire advanced over the parapets of the assembly trenches...and arrived at the Breastwork.

The Royal Berkshires arriving at the front lines positions could see out into No-Man's Land the men of the Rifle Brigade who had led the attack lying dead in the undergrowth. The following waves were handing back. The officers of the Royal Berkshire took charge of the situation organising a joint second attack with the remnants of the Rifle Brigade and also men of the Irish Rifles who had caught up with the Royal Berkshire.

'I told them we would make two low rushes of it, the first about halfway...then some Irish Rifles and Rifle Brigade came rushing back from the German Breastwork shouting, "Retire at the Double"...as it appeared to be a retirement in earnest, I ordered my men to crawl back to the trench'

This story was backed up by a fellow officer and two sergeants. The attack had been a failure, no ground had been gained and many casualties suffered. After the attack questions appear to have been raised above exactly where this order to retire had come from – it is quite possible this order may indeed have been a ruse by the Germans to give this order in English to effect this result. Lessons would be learned from this attack, one of them was that codewords would be issued at the last minute to officers and NCOs before the attack for the order to retire, so that a genuine order to retire would be clearly understood.



Aerial photograph showing direction of 2nd Royal Berkshire attack 9/5/1915

The Battle of Aubers Ridge was to last a single day, but would cost the British Army 11,000 casualties, a majority killed as they left their front line trenches. Although a fifth of the casualties that would be suffered on the first day of the Battle of the Somme in 1916, the area over which the attack at Aubers was undertaken was significantly smaller and although forgotten and uncommemorated, this action saw some of the highest densities of British casualties in the whole war.



The 2nd Royal Berkshire view of the German positions 9/5/15 - today

The 2nd Royal Berkshire on 9/5/1915 lost 5 officers and 39 other ranks killed, 9 officers and 198 other ranks wounded and 6 officers and 36 other ranks missing. These total would represent nearly all the officers and about half the soldiers who had taken part. Francis Buckland would be amongst the known 39 killed or 36 missing this day (most of the latter would later be found to have been killed). His body was never recovered and identified. Today he is commemorated on:

PLOEGSTEERT MEMORIAL, Belgium, Panel 7 and 8.

SON OF CHARLES AND JANE BUCKLAND, OF ALDERMASTON, READING.

PLOEGSTEERT MEMORIAL



Location Information

The Ploegsteert Memorial stands in Berks Cemetery Extension, which is located 12.5 Kms south of Ieper town centre, on the N365 leading from Ieper to Mesen (Messines), Ploegsteert and on to Armentieres.

Visiting Information

The sounding of the Last Post takes place at the memorial on the first Friday of every month at 7 p.m.

Historical Information

The PLOEGSTEERT MEMORIAL commemorates more than 11,000 servicemen of the United Kingdom and South African forces who died in this sector during the First World War and have no known grave. The memorial serves the area from the line Caestre-Dranoutre-Warneton to the north, to Haverskerque-Estaires-Fournes to the south, including the towns of Hazebrouck, Merville, Bailleul and Armentieres, the Forest of Nieppe, and Ploegsteert Wood. The original intention had been to erect the memorial in Lille.

Most of those commemorated by the memorial did not die in major offensives, such as those which took place around Ypres to the north, or Loos to the south. Most were killed in the course of the day-to-day trench warfare which characterised this part of the line, or in small scale set engagements, usually carried out in support of the major attacks taking place elsewhere. It does not include the names of officers and men of Canadian or Indian regiments (they are found on the Memorials at Vimy and Neuve-Chapelle) and those lost at the Battle of Aubers Ridge, 9 May 1915, who were involved in the Southern Pincer (the 1st, 2nd, Meerut and 47th Divisions - they are commemorated on the Le Touret Memorial).

EADS G. P.
EATON F. A.
EDWARDS I.

NICHOLS P.
QUINN

WOLLAND F.
WYATT G.
YOUNG G.

ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT

MAJOR

HARVEY R. P.

CAPTAIN

GUEST-WILLIAMS
W. A.

MOODY-WARD R. G. T.
OKI R. W. L.

LIEUTENANT

BUSBY E.

ROGERS G. B.

SLATTER V. J.

SPARKES N.

LAMB A.

TAYLOR A. M.

TEDDER M.

PRIVATE

CHIL

COOPER

GOODCHILD

HALL P.

HARRIS F.

HEDGES F. M.

HENRIEFY A. J.

LIEUTENANT

ATKINSON L. E. M.

GREGORY G. F. C.

HODGSON G. G.

LIPSCOMBE E. L.

TROTTER R. H. G.

VESEY J. M. C.

WATSON C. G.

TRIM F.

WAITE E. C.

WICKENS S.

WILLIAMS A.

WILLIAMS W. J.

HENNING A.

HEY G. I.

HICKS F.

HIGGINS M.

HICSON N.

HILL G.

HILLIER E.

HILLIER J.

HILLIER R. E.

HOBBS A.

HOBBS W.

HOLMES G. E.

HORWOOD G. W.

HOWARD W.

HUNT J. S.

HUTCHINGS A.

HYDE A. J.

HYDE G. W.

INGHAM E.

INGRAM G. A.

JAMES F. H.

JARRAD G. W.

JENKINS R. J.

JENNINGS J.

JEWELL G.

KENDALL A. E.

KING C. E. G.

KING J.

KIRK F. B.

KNOTT B.

LAMPSONNE A. E.

LANNAN W. J.

LAWRENCE A. M.

LAWRENCE E. W.

LEONARD G.

LEWIS W. C.

LIGHT H.

SECOND LIEUT.

ABINGER B. R. M. C.

SERVED AS

RUSSELL B.

BOURCHIER A. G.

CUNLIFF R. E.

DAY M.

DRUITT J.

SINIONS R. I. H.

WATKINS T.

PRIVATE

ALLEN F. J.

ALLUM G.

ANDERSON A.

ANDERSON G. T.

BAILEY A. J.

BARRETT E. W.

BEALES L. E.

BEAVER W.

BELLAMY W.

BEN H.

BISHOP S. C.

BITHEAD A. A.

BLISSETT H. J.

BODIE J. R.

BOLTON C.

BOLTON V. A.

POSLEY E.

BOURNE C. A.

BOXELL J. W.

BRITNELL A.

BROWN F. J.

BUCKLAND F.

BULLOCK J.

BUNCE H.

BURTON W. A.

BURNEY E.

CANNINGS E. C.

CARTER W.

CASSON J.

CHAFFERTON M. D.

SERJEANT

BERRY E.

BWETTLE O.

BUSBY J. H.

COOLING G. J.

FAIRMINER E. J.

FRANKUM G.

GARDINER W.

JOSEY J.

LEE J.

PHILLIPS A.

PRICE T. J.

WATTS F.

WEARTON P. C.

WYER P.

LIEUTENANT

ELTHAM E.

HOMER A. T.

CHILES W. E.

CLARKE G.

CLAYDON J.

CLAYTON G. E.

LLOYD J. A.

McARDLE H. V.

McGRATH W. R.

MACHEN A. J.