

24) 43909 Shoeing Smith James Henry **GAY**
(St Mary's Aldermaston)

Died 25/02/17, **Age** 40
"A" Bty. 66th Bde. Royal Field Artillery

Born Guildford
Residence Addlestone, Surrey

Awarded: 1914-15 Star
British War Medal
Victory Medal

Date arrived in theatre of war: Egypt, 1/7/1915

It is evident from his medal records that James Gay joined up at the beginning of the war and was very likely to have worked extensively with horses probably as a farrier/blacksmith prior to it. Becoming a Shoeing Smith with the Royal Field Artillery would thus have seemed a natural progression.



Army Shoeing Smith at work – 1914

It was not possible to obtain a copy of the War Diary of the 66th Brigade RFA, the following information was found from other sources. Thus it is possible to put together a timeline of James Gay's war service:

LXVI Brigade

This unit was formed as part of the raising of the First New Army, K1 in August 1914. It is also sometimes shown as 66 Brigade RFA.

History

This brigade was originally comprised of numbers 208, 209 and 210 Batteries RFA and the Brigade Ammunition Column. It was placed under command of the 13th (Western) Division with whom it remained through the war.

In February 1915 the three six-gun batteries were reorganised to become four four-guns batteries and were titled as A, B, C and D.

The division moved to the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force as part of the reinforcement of the Gallipoli theatre. 66 Brigade RFA sailed from Avonmouth on 17 June 1915, arrived at Alexandria (Egypt) on 4 July; re-embarked there on 21 July; trans-shipped at Mudros and landed at Cape Helles (Gallipoli) 26-28 July 1915.

The brigade was withdrawn from Gallipoli between 1 and 7 January 1916 and moved to Mudros, from where it sailed on 12 January for Alexandria. It disembarked on 18 January and arrived at Port Said on 29 January 1916.

The division was now ordered to join Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' for operations in Mesopotamia. It left Port Said on 15 February 1916 and arrived at Basra on 2-6 March. The brigade then proceeded up river and arrived at Sheikh Sa'ad on 20 March 1916.

On 23 November 1916 the brigade was joined by 72 (Heavy) Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery, comprising four 4.5 inch howitzers and a section of an ammunition column). It had joined 13th (Western) Division on 24 August 1916 but underwent reorganisation before joining 66 Brigade RFA.

From this it can be seen that James Gay had sailed from the UK in June 1915 to Egypt (arriving 17/7/15) and thence to serve in the Gallipoli campaign. With the closure of this campaign, James and the Brigade would have returned to Egypt before being sent to Mesopotamia (Iraq) to continue the fight against the Ottoman (Turkish) Army there.

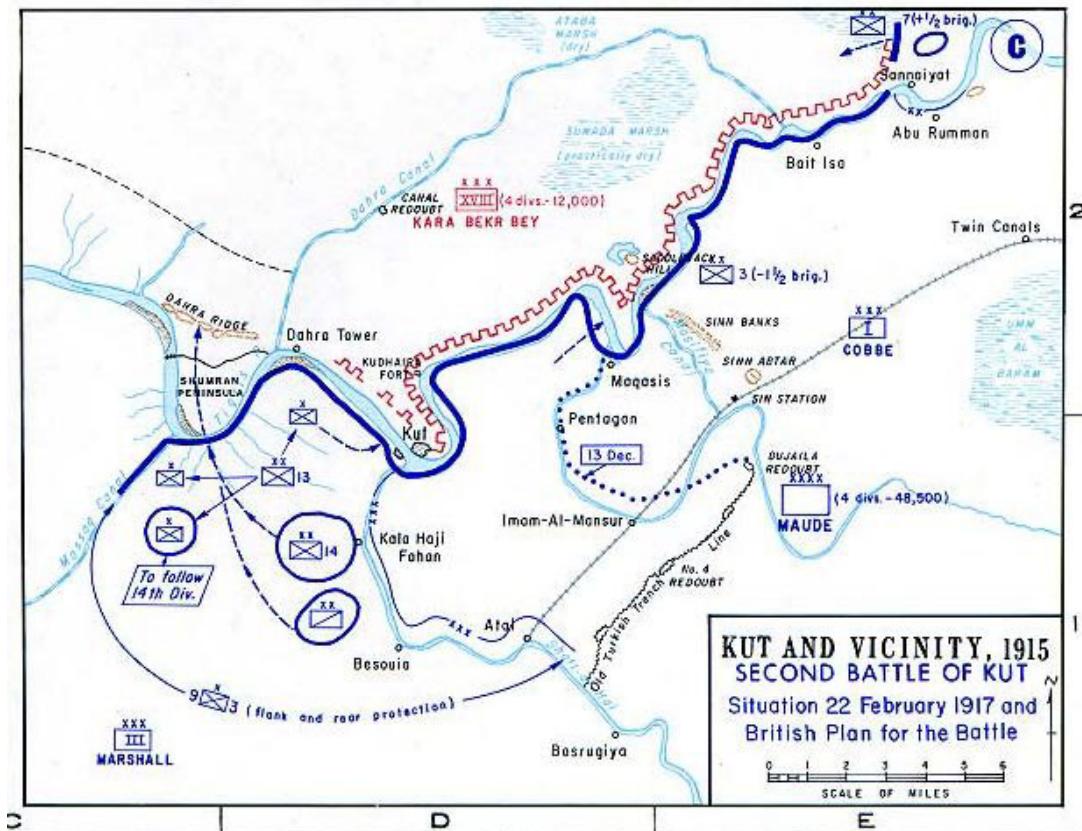


British troops in Mesopotamia 1916-17

In 1916, British troops led by General Townshend had marched along the Tigris River with the intention of capturing Baghdad. Although a bold plan, it was much too ambitious a plan with limited troops as the advance caused unsupportable long supply lines and came to a stop at Kut-al-Amara. The Turks turned and surrounded the British garrison here and eventually forced a surrender, despite valiant attempts by other British troops to break the

siege in December 1916. The captured troops were marched back to Baghdad. Although Townshend himself received excellent treatment, his troops did not and very few made it back to the UK following the Armistice.

In February 1917, the British once again advanced along the same route to Baghdad under General Maude, this time with 50,000 troops. This expedition was much better planned and a second Battle of Kut took place on 24th February 1917.



It is known that 66th Bde RFA was part of Maude's expedition and took part in this battle. The battle was successful and Kut was captured, though not the Turkish garrison who had defended it who escaped and retreated in good order.

It is known that James Gay died on 25th February and was buried in the cemetery associated with Kut-al-Amara and its associated hospital, it is thus likely that he died of wounds received in this battle.

Today he is commemorated at:

AMARA WAR CEMETERY, Iraq, Shaikh Saad Old Cem. Mem.

The original war graves were removed and names thereon were transferred to a memorial wall. Since the conclusion Second Gulf War, it has been planned that such graves might yet be reinstated.

**SON OF JOHN AND MARY GAY, OF ALDERMASTON, BERKS
HUSBAND OF MARTHA M. GAY, OF 15, CHESTNUT GROVE, STAINES, MIDDX.**

AMARA WAR CEMETERY



Location Information

Amara is a town on the left bank of the Tigris some 520 kilometres from the sea. The War Cemetery is a little east of the town between the left bank of the river and the Chahaila Canal.

Historical Information

Amara was occupied by the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force on 3 June 1915 and it immediately became a hospital centre. The accommodation for medical units on both banks of the Tigris was greatly increased during 1916 and in April 1917, seven general hospitals and some smaller units were stationed there.

Amara War Cemetery contains 4,621 burials of the First World War, more than 3,000 of which were brought into the cemetery after the Armistice. 925 of the graves are unidentified. In 1933, all of the headstones were removed from this cemetery when it was discovered that salts in the soil were causing them to deteriorate. Instead a screen wall was erected with the names of those buried in the cemetery engraved upon it. Plot XXV is a Collective Grave, the individual burial places within this are not known.