

25) 30058 Private Oliver **TAYLOR**

Kia 29/04/17, **Age** 28
1st Bn Royal Berkshire Regiment

Born Aldermaston
Enlisted Maidenhead

Awarded: British War Medal
Victory Medal

Date arrived in theatre of war: not known

It is not known when Oliver Taylor arrived in France to join the 1st Royal Berkshire regiment as a replacement, however from his medals; this must have taken place after 1st January 1916.

Following the 'end' of the Battle of the Somme in November 1916 (though the troops in the field at the time, would not have known the battle had 'ended'), the worst winter in living memory set in with temperatures regularly dropping below -20°C with heavy snow. Shells falling on the iron hard ground would detonate on impact rather than detonate at some point below the surface – thus sending out a greater quantity of shell fragments to deadly effect. There were times of thaw too when the hard ice and snow gave way to freezing slush filling the trenches.



Winter 1916-17 on the Western Front

Men standing in this would soon lose feeling in their feet and legs. If action was not taken, this could turn into the dreaded 'trench foot' – a form of frostbite, acutely painful. Thankfully, limiting exposure, removal of boots and puttees and rubbing the feet with whale oil could less the occurrence.



Foot inspection – Graphic photographs of ‘trench foot’ are available on the ‘Net

Militarily for the Allies, 1916 had been a very costly one though it was considered successful. For the French, the situation at Verdun had not only been relieved by the Battle of the Somme, it had been reversed. After 10 months of fighting at Verdun, both sides found themselves almost back where they had started. For the British fighting on the Somme, they were now bearing the full weight of the war and knew they could match the German army in the field. At the beginning of the Somme, Britain’s army was still ‘class-ridden’ with Regulars, Territorials, Kitchener’s Army and Derby Men/Conscripts. After the Somme, the whole army was now unified. Come the Spring, they expected to pick up where they left off on the Somme and carry on the offensive.

For the Germans, their own tactics at Verdun and the Somme had been very costly and the German General Staff knew they could ‘not fight another Somme’. Instead in early 1917, they staged a strategic withdrawal from the Somme battlefield to well prepared positions. The British too this as a sign of victory from the Somme fighting, it wasn’t, by holding a shorter, stronger line – they had just saved tens of thousands of troops to hold their better lines.

A change of leadership in the French Army gave command to General Nivelle. For 1917, he favoured another joint offensive. The British would provide a diversionary attack at Arras, leaving the main attack to the French on the Chemin des Dames. On 9th April 1917, Canadian troops with British support to the south in a massive snowstorm launched a massive attack on the Vimy Ridge that had defied all previous attempts to take it. This was a masterpiece of planning as is regarded by Canada as the formal foundation of the modern country of Canada.

However, the French attack was a complete disaster, poor French security and German intelligence had cost the French 100,000 casualties in a few days for no result. Units of the French army now simply refused to take part in further costly attacks, but would hold their ground if attacked. Nivelle resigned. Time was needed to rebuild the French Army and re-instate confidence in their leadership. In order to buy the time to do this, the British would now have to stage further attacks in various parts of the line to occupy the Germans and prevent them from fully realising just how weak the French position was and exploiting it.

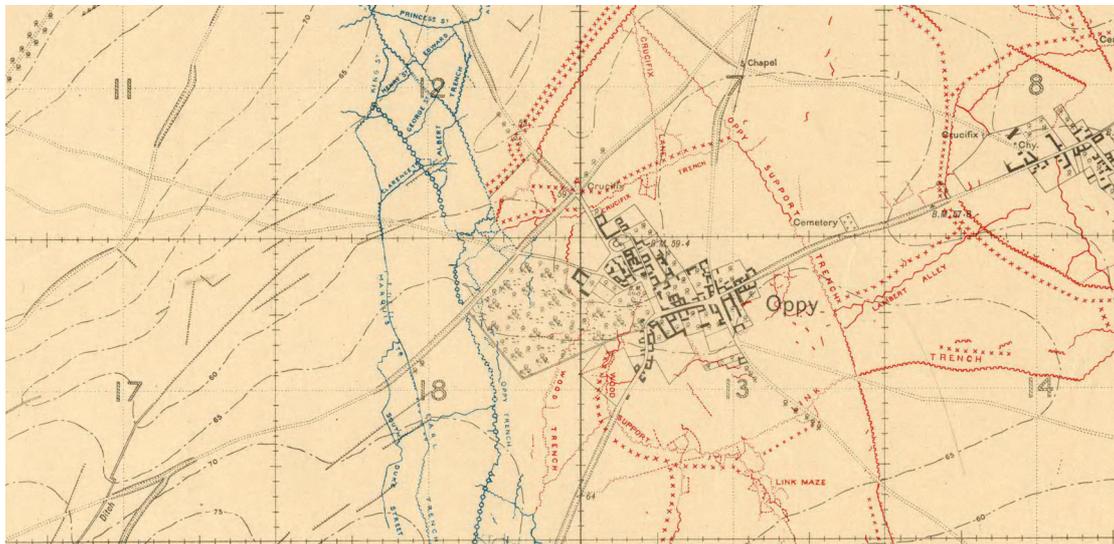
For the British this would become known as the Battle of Arras, though less costly than the Somme overall, it was shorter and the average daily casualty rate was higher...

...At the end of April 1917, the 1st Royal Berkshire would take part in such an action in the Battle of Arras, at a particularly strong place called Oppy Wood...



'Oppy 1917 – evening' Paul Nash (War Artist)

Taken from their war diary:



Contemporary Trench Map of the British (blue) and German (red) lines at Oppy (Wood)

26/4/1917 – ROCLINCOURT

Front line was evacuated by day as 'heavies' were wire-cutting. Battalion relieved at 9pm by 2nd Highland Light Infantry. Relief completed 1am. Battalion returned to old German front line...in front of ROCLINCOURT

27/4/17 – ROCLINCOURT TRENCHES

Battalion rested during the day, weather fine.

28/4/17 – ROCLINCOURT TRENCHES

2am – D Coy moved to, and came under orders of 1st King's Royal Rifle Corps

4.25am – 5th and 6th Brigades attacked OPPY and trench system N and S of the village. 9th Brigade was in reserve.

7.30am – 20 Other Ranks proceeded forward to ANZIN to assist 100th Field Ambulance in evacuating wounded.

5am – 3pm – 3 Officers and 85 Other Ranks stood by for use as emergency stretcher-bearers but were not called upon.

1pm – Battalion moved forward to position in vicinity of A 24 b 6.6

3pm – Orders were received to prepare for an attack in OPPY WOOD and vicinity that night. The time for attack was continually put forward to 4 am.

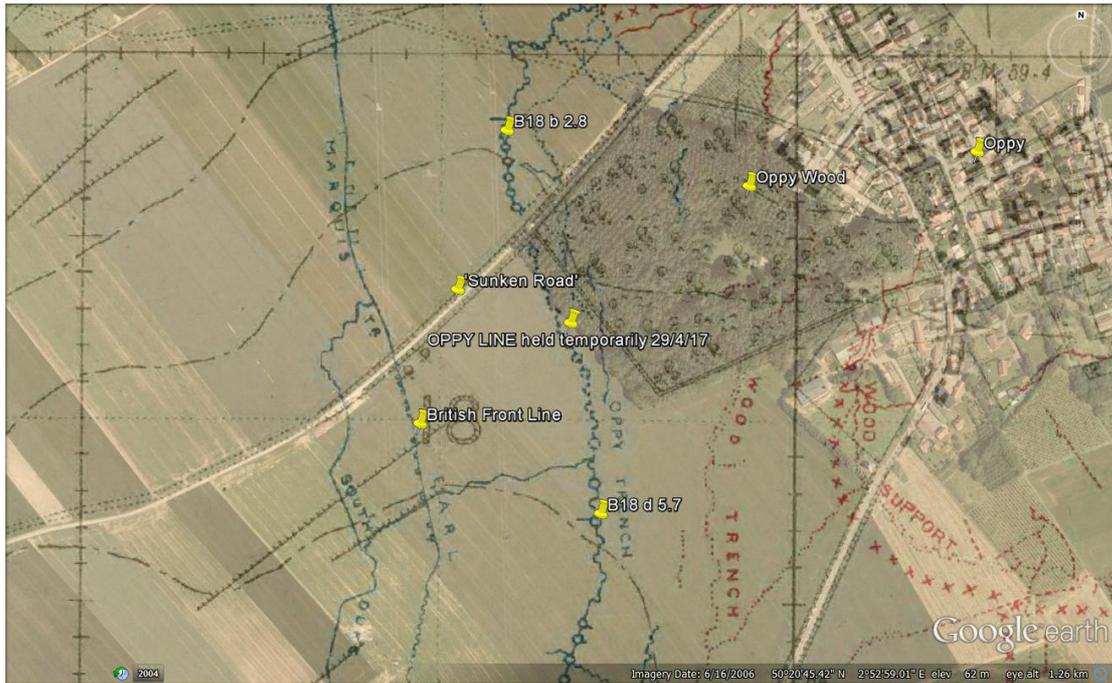
9pm – The Battalion, less D Company, moved forwards by companies and relieved units of 6th Brigade in the front line which was the same as that held previous to the attack. Relief complete at 1am 29/4/17



British shells bursting over Oppy 1917

29/4/17 – FRONT LINE E OF BAILLEUL

4am – Battalion, less D Company, with troops on either flank attacked and captured the OPPY LINE from B 18 d 5.7 to B18 b 2.8. The troops on our right failed to get in and the right flank was consequently exposed. At about 5am the enemy commenced to bomb the right flank and fighting continued until about 10am when owing to lack of Bombs and SAA we were forced to give way and withdrew to the jumping off trench via SUNKEN ROAD in B 18 b. C Coy, on the left withdrew Northwards along the OPPY LINE and placed themselves under the orders of the 17th Royal Fusiliers establishing a block at about B 12 d 1.4 taking with them 3 captured machine guns. The enemy shelled our front line heavily throughout the remainder of the day and there was a great deal of MG and rifle fire. Patrols were sent out at dusk and found the OPPY LINE still held by the enemy.



Composite of the attack by 1st R.Berks 29/4/15 on the ‘Oppy Line/Trench’

11pm – The Battalion was relieved by the 13th East Yorks and returned to the trenches E of ROCLINCOURT through a barrage of gas shells without sustaining any casualties. About 70 prisoners and 3 Machine Guns were captured by the Battalion during the day and severe casualties were inflicted on the enemy.

Casualties: Officers 1 killed, 2 wounded and missing, 4 wounded
 Other Ranks 15 killed, 89 wounded, 47 missing, total 151 of 250 who
 attacked (60.4%)

The 1st Royal Berkshire had been forced to give up their hold on the OPPY LINE and had been forced back to their starting positions. Oppy Wood would not be captured until June 28th.



Taken from the 1st R.Berks Line of 29/4/17 towards the ‘Oppy Line’ (in front of wood)

Many of the 47 missing would later have been found to have been killed. One of these would be Oliver Taylor, his body would not be identified and thus his name is commemorated on:

ARRAS MEMORIAL, France, Bay 7

**SON OF MATILDA TAYLOR, OF POPLAR HILL, SULHAMSTEAD, READING, BERKS,
AND THE LATE JAMES TAYLOR**

ARRAS MEMORIAL



Location Information

The Arras Memorial is in the Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery, which is in the Boulevard du General de Gaulle in the western part of the town of Arras. The cemetery is near the Citadel, approximately 2 kms due west of the railway station.

Historical Information

The French handed over Arras to Commonwealth forces in the spring of 1916 and the system of tunnels upon which the town is built were used and developed in preparation for the major offensive planned for April 1917.

The Commonwealth section of the FAUBOURG D'AMIENS CEMETERY was begun in March 1916, behind the French military cemetery established earlier. It continued to be used by field ambulances and fighting units until November 1918. The cemetery was enlarged after the Armistice when graves were brought in from the battlefields and from two smaller cemeteries in the vicinity.

The cemetery contains over 2,650 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, 10 of which are unidentified. The graves in the French military cemetery were removed after the war to other burial grounds and the land they had occupied was used for the construction of the Arras Memorial and Arras Flying Services Memorial.

The adjacent ARRAS MEMORIAL commemorates almost 35,000 servicemen from the United Kingdom, South Africa and New Zealand who died in the Arras sector between the spring of 1916 and 7 August 1918, the eve of the Advance to Victory, and have no known grave. The most conspicuous events of this period were the Arras offensive of April-May 1917, and the German attack in the spring of 1918. Canadian and Australian servicemen killed in these

operations are commemorated by memorials at Vimy and Villers-Bretonneux. A separate memorial remembers those killed in the Battle of Cambrai in 1917.

The adjacent ARRAS FLYING SERVICES MEMORIAL commemorates almost 1,000 airmen of the Royal Naval Air Service, the Royal Flying Corps, and the Royal Air Force, either by attachment from other arms of the forces of the Commonwealth or by original enlistment, who were killed on the whole Western Front and who have no known grave.

In addition, there are 30 war graves of other nationalities, most of them German.

Both cemetery and memorial were designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, with sculpture by Sir William Reid Dick. The memorial was unveiled by Lord Trenchard, Marshal of the Royal Air Force on the 31 July 1932 (originally it had been scheduled for 15 May, but due to the sudden death of French President Doumer, as a mark of respect, the ceremony was postponed until July).

