

27) 37575 Lance Corporal William James **SLADE**  
(St Mary's Aldermaston)

**Kia** 3/05/17

1st Bn Royal Berkshire Regiment  
Formerly 1493 Royal Berkshire Regiment

**Born** Beenham

**Enlisted** Aldermaston

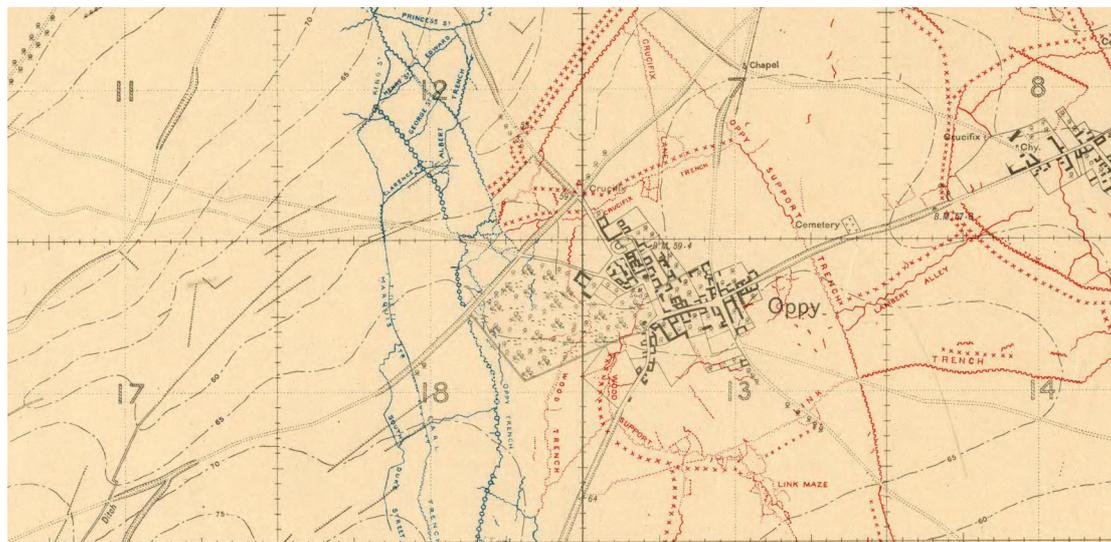
**Residence** Wantage

**Awarded:** British War Medal  
Victory Medal

**Date arrived in theatre of war:** not known

William Slade has two regimental numbers with the Royal Berkshire Regiment. His first (1493) would indicate an 'early' number which might mean that he was already with the regiment (indeed the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion) when the war broke out. However, his medal entitlement would indicate he did not arrive in France until after 1/1/1916 and his second number (37575) is indeed a late one. One explanation for this is that for some reason (assisting with recruitment, training), William Slade was retained in the UK until shortages of replacements meant that he was 'combed out' as he was needed with his battalion in France.

At the end of April 1917, the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Berkshire had just already taken part in an action in the Battle of Arras, at a particularly strong place called Oppy Wood. Another casualty in this battalion had been Pte Oliver Taylor who was killed on 29/4/1917 (qv).



**Contemporary Trench Map of the British (blue) and German (red) lines at Oppy (Wood)**  
**The attack on 3/5/1917 would take place just to the NE of figure '12' in this map**

The remainder of the battalion had been pulled back, what was left after this attack now needed to be re-organised:

*30/4/1917 (Roelincourt trenches) – Battalion rested during the day, weather fine and warm*

*1/5/1917 (Roelincourt trenches) – Weather fine and hot. Battalion was formed into two companies of 4 Officers and 100 other ranks each to be formed into 'C' Battalion with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers under the command of Lt Col Vernon DSO. The two companies moved up to the front line at 8pm. No.1 Company commanded by Capt Green, No.2 Company by Lt Merrick.*

In addition the Battalion Transport etc. was now pulled back to Ecurie awaiting the return of the survivors of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Berkshire from this 'makeshift' battalion who would now again see action in the Oppy area.

After the initial attacks at Vimy Ridge and the French failures on the Chemin Des Dames in April, the British efforts to keep the fighting going to give the French time to re-organise had been piecemeal. All along the line, the British had come up against strongly defended positions, Oppy being just one of them. On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1917, it was decided there would be a major attack all along the Arras front and into the Somme. This wider attack, it was hoped, would prevent the Germans rapidly moving up reinforcements to defend against small-scale attacks by the British that had been beaten off. The attacks on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1917 would commence at 3.45am, the darkness giving much needed cover to the operations.



### **British shells bursting over Oppy 1917**

The war diary of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Berkshire does contain a report regarding the actions of this composite battalion for their attack on Oppy on 3/5/1917:

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> May 1917**

**1am** – At about 1am 3<sup>rd</sup> May companies got into line along road from about B12 b 3.3? north-westward. Capt B? Company of the King's Regiment was on the right of this but he stated his support and right flank companies were not up as late as 3am.

**2am** – At 2am Companies went out to taped line the first wave going about 100 yards in front. This was done to avoid the worst of the hostile barrage which came on. The barrage consisted of heavies on the road mentioned above and lighter guns on the ground nearer the German line. Barrage seemed to be controlled from OPPY village and WOOD. Our troops must have been seen moving into position as the night was bright – moon behind them.

**3am** – Our two companies Royal Berks were in position lying down in two waves of four platoons each with two special parties for strong points behind.

**3.45am** - It is stated that troops on the right and left did not seem to be quite ready at 3.45am when our barrage commenced but that they all moved forward together. There was a tendency to converge from both sides as the advance was made. Direction was difficult to

keep. The hostile barrage commenced at once and is believed to have caused considerable numbers of casualties to the left Company and two (at least) Lewis guns were damaged. There was no rifle or machine-gun fire. The wire was well cut and the enemy offered little resistance though the trench was fairly strongly held. Some made off across the open and through communication trenches. A good many were shot. For about an hour the captured trench was consolidated but no block was made, the companies having joined hands with units to left and right. Bombs were called for and passed to the left where the bombing died down. To the right a severe bombing fight arose and bombs were called for. These were sent along together with what German bombs had been collected.

**5-5.30am** – After a sharp fight some little distance to the right, men were seen to be getting out behind and running along apparently looking for room in the trench, but finding it congested they dropped into shell craters. The congestion increased and more men on the right got out and back to shell craters. The companies were at the time without bombs of any sort and only 3 Lewis Guns when a hostile counter attack commenced from the front over the top and along communication trenches. The hostile bombing attack from the right had reached the right of the Companies.

**6.10am** – Considerable casualties were caused to the enemy's frontal attack which however came on and the Companies were driven out, but mainly by the bombing attack from the right. The men remained in shell craters all day and were withdrawn at dark. The majority of the casualties occurred whilst getting back from the German front line and were caused chiefly by machine-guns and snipers near OPPY.

8 Officers and 210 NCO's and men went into action of which 2 Officers (both slightly wounded) and 94 other ranks are now with the battalion.



**Site of the Attack on 30/4/1917 by 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Berkshire, today**

For the two companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Berkshire, things had gone well after a poor start as they captured their part of the German front line to plan. Counter-attacks on both flanks had used up all their supplies of bombs meaning they had little chance themselves if attacked. This duly happened and the German attack from the front and the right forced the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Berkshire out of their captured positions into the open to then be caught by German machine-guns operating from Oppy. These two companies had lost over 50% casualties for no gain. William Slade had been one of the fatalities. His body would either not be recovered or identified and so his name is commemorated on:

ARRAS MEMORIAL, France, Bay 7

## 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).

