

39) 13016 Private Roland (Ronald) Henry **WALTERS**  
(St Mary's Aldermaston)

**Dow** 2/05/18, **Age** 23  
2nd Bn. Royal Berkshire Regiment

**Born** Aldermaston  
**Enlisted** Reading  
**Residence** Hungerford

**Awarded:** 1914-15 Star  
British War Medal  
Victory Medal

**Date arrived in theatre of war:** 25/7/1915

Roland Walters joined up at the outbreak of war in the Royal Berkshire Regiment; his number is in the same group as those Aldermaston men who joined the 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Berkshire in the village itself. However, he enlisted in Reading and from his date of entry to an active theatre of war (July 1915) it is quite likely he may have joined a Territorial battalion in the hope he might get out to the front sooner. However by April 1918, he had become a member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire. There is no doubt after almost three years at the front, he would have seen a substantial amount of action.

After the initial German breakthrough and push towards Amiens in March 1918, units were brought in, made up to full strength with reserves and sent in to try and stop this advance.

Here are salient Battalion War Diary entries:

*5<sup>th</sup> April 1918 – Battalion billeted in Le Quesnoy, reorganising and training, 383 other ranks joined battalion*

*9<sup>th</sup> April 1918 - Battalion billeted in Le Quesnoy, reorganising and training, 168 other ranks joined battalion*

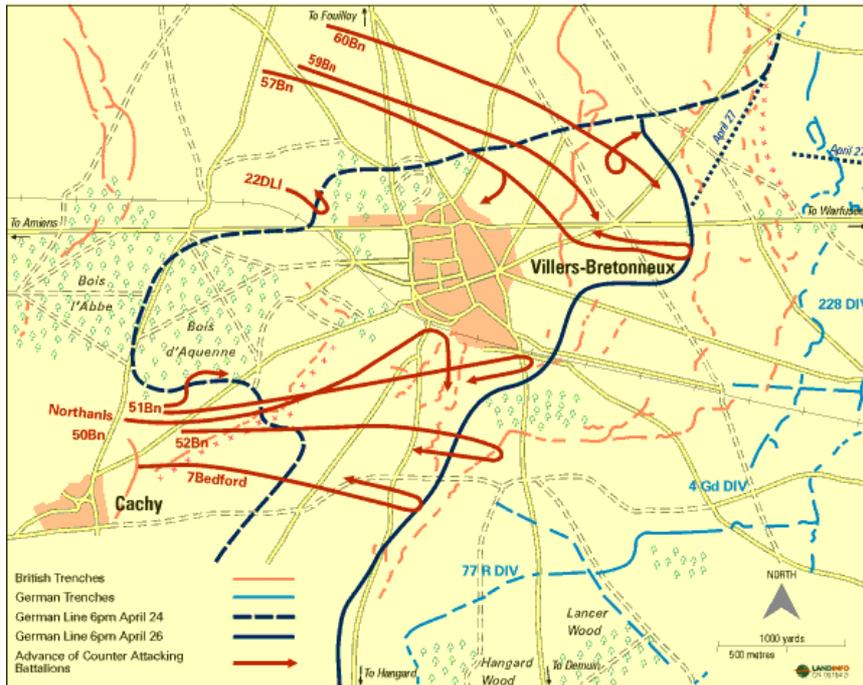
The battalion had now been made up to full strength and with only a minimum of battalion training were sent up the line. It is quite possible that Roland had only joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire in these days from reserves. The 11<sup>th</sup> April had seen Haig's famous 'Backs to the Wall' speech when things seemed at their darkest.

*12<sup>th</sup> April 1918 – Battalion moved by march route and rail from Le Quesnoy to the Rivery Area, entraining at Hangest.*

*13<sup>th</sup> April 1918 – Battalion billeted at Lamotte Berbiere and in Divisional Reserve and Training.*

There would now be a few days respite in which full battalion training could be carried out. However orders soon came:

*20<sup>th</sup> April 1918 – 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade relieved 14<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade (5<sup>th</sup> Australian Division) in the line on the night of 20/21<sup>st</sup> April. Battalion relieved 54<sup>th</sup> Australian Battalion in the line on night of 20/21<sup>st</sup> April and became "Counter Attack Battalion" North of Villers Brettoneux*



### **Actions around Villers Bretonneux 24-26 April 1918**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire now held a very important role – it would be they who would effectively be ‘mobile’ in being brought forward to stage a counter-attack against an advancing enemy. Villers Bretonneux had been the scene of some desperate fighting by the Australian Divisions already and would see more yet. The village would become ‘sacred soil’ for Australia, as much so as Pozieres on the Somme or even Gallipoli. Today there are memorials to their heroism here in 1918 – even the school, when re-built after the war, bears the legend ‘Remember Australia’ in its walls. A formal ceremony occurs each year on 25<sup>th</sup> April, thousands attend – ANZAC Day – from the Gallipoli landings in 1915, but just as applicable in 1918!

*24<sup>th</sup> April 1918 – Battalion at Villers-Bretonneux Defences NE of Villers-Bretonneux*



**British/Australian Defines lines – Villers Bretonneux**

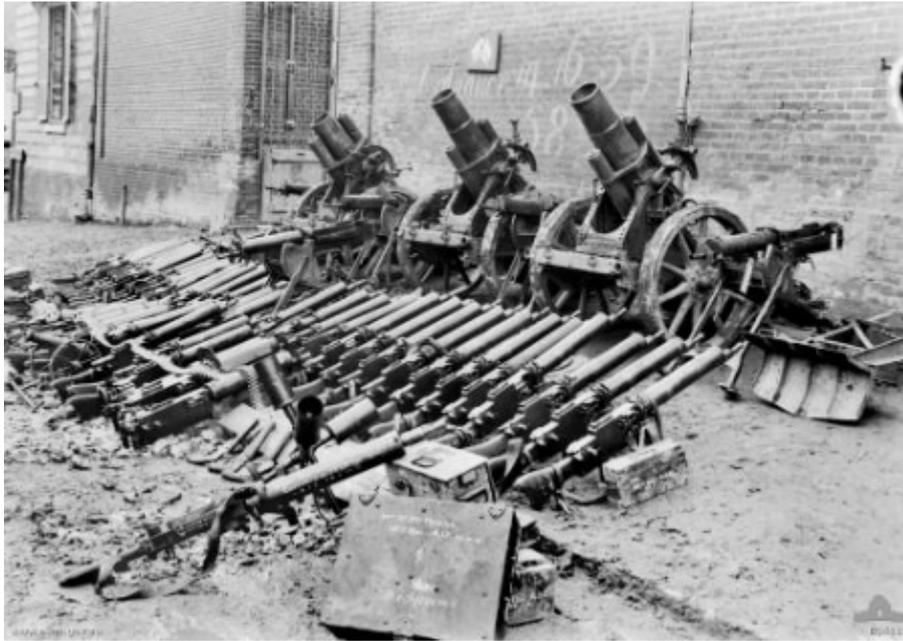
**25<sup>th</sup> April 1918 – Counter Attack by Battalion at 6.30am on Villers Bretonneux. Village cleared and mopped up. 36 Machine Guns and 300 Prisoners captured.**



**Villers-Bretonneux Battlefield**



**German prisoners Villers Bretonneux 25/4/1918**



**Captured German machine-guns etc. 25/4/1918**



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

E02157

**The ruins of Villers Bretonneux – April 1918**

This very successful action by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire and other units had stopped the German advance in its tracks and had inflicted terrible losses on them. This action stopped the whole German advance and push towards Amiens. They would get no further, all they now could do was hang on and hope that other advances elsewhere along the front might be more successful. In reality, the Allies had finally and decisively held them here, they had not broken, Amiens was safe. The Germans might hold a large tract of captured territory, but this was useless to them and would be difficult to hold if subsequently attacked. This attack had been their first and largest attack and the most costly to the Germans – the troops they lost could not be replaced. Indeed it would be here, in August 1918 that the British would indeed launch a massive counter attack that would cause the German resistance to crumble and to ultimately lead to their defeat.

After this attack the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire were pulled out of the line to have a well-earned rest. They could now count their casualties. These would amount to 3 officers killed, 6

wounded together with 55 other ranks killed, 166 wounded (of which 19 had been gassed) and 10 missing.



**Villers Bretonneux – wounded soldiers, blinded by mustard gas**

Ronald Walters is known to have died of his wounds on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1918 and is buried in:

ST. SEVER CEMETERY EXTENSION, ROUEN, France, P. XI. M. 8A.

Rouen was the site of a major hospital complex for treatment of those soldiers who could not be evacuated to England (including both lightly and seriously wounded men). It is highly probable that Ronald Walters had been one of the 166 other ranks wounded on 25/5/18, who joined up at the start of the war had given his life in the action that would ultimately decide the outcome of the war.

**SON OF HENRY AND EMMA WALTERS, OF ALDERMASTON, BERKS.**

## ST. SEVER CEMETERY, ROUEN



### **Location Information**

St Sever Cemetery and St Sever Cemetery Extension are located within a large communal cemetery situated on the eastern edge of the southern Rouen suburbs of Le Grand Quevilly and Le Petit Quevilly.

### **Historical Information**

During the First World War, Commonwealth camps and hospitals were stationed on the southern outskirts of Rouen. A base supply depot and the 3rd Echelon of General Headquarters were also established in the city.

Almost all of the hospitals at Rouen remained there for practically the whole of the war. They included eight general, five stationary, one British Red Cross, one labour hospital, and No. 2 Convalescent Depot. A number of the dead from these hospitals were buried in other cemeteries, but the great majority were taken to the city cemetery of St. Sever. In September 1916, it was found necessary to begin an extension.

St. Sever Cemetery contains 3,082 Commonwealth burials of the First World War. There is also 1 French burial and 1 non war service burial here.

The Commonwealth plots were designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield.



13016 PRIVATE  
R. H. WALTERS  
ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT  
2ND MAY 1918



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