

4) 23467 Private Albert Richard **SKEATES**

Kia 31/08/15

6th Bn. King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

Born Aldermaston

Enlisted Andover

Awarded: 1914-15 Star
British War Medal
Victory Medal

Date arrived in theatre of war: France, 12/8/1915

It may seem strange that an Aldermaston man served and died with a Yorkshire regiment having enlisted in Andover. Albert Skeates, along with thousands of other men joining the army at the outbreak of war as a willing volunteer actually joined the 13th Reserve Cavalry Regiment (Reg. No.19167) and would have spent 1914 and the early part of 1915 training with a view to joining a cavalry regiment.



A Reserve Cavalry Regiment in training - 1914

However by mid-1915 it was realised with the stalemate of trench warfare on the western front, that retaining such a large body of men in England as cavalry could not be justified and as such, many trained cavalymen became 'dismounted' and were sent to France piecemeal as replacements for losses in existing infantry regiments. Albert Skeates was one such.

Albert Skeates crossed to France on 12/8/1915 and was destined to join the 6th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI). This battalion had also been formed at the outbreak of war in Pontefract from volunteers. They had been fighting in France since May 1915, being one of the first of 'Kitchener's/New' Army to arrive in France.

The war diary gives that a series of replacements to the battalion of 79, 51 and 50 other ranks joined then on 20th, 22nd and 27th August respectively. It is not known on which of these days Albert Skeates would have joined the 6th KOYLI. This battalion had just completed another tour of duty in the Ypres Salient and were at one of the many rest camps situated west of Ypres along the Vlamertinghe-Ypres road:

26-28/8/1915: Rest Camp. On the 27th another draft of 50 men arrived making us over strength. But there are so many employed outside the battalion that we are pleased to get them.

In the Great War soldiers got very little 'rest' at Rest camps behind the lines. When they were not allocated to working or carrying parties they endured long spells of training and drill. Soldiers were never allowed to be 'idle' for long or simply 'rest'.

29/8/15 10am: Signallers. Machine-gunners and Bombers went up in advance of battalion to take over their positions in Railway Wood.

Took over trenches round RAILWAY WOOD just south of ROULERS railway...The relief was very much delayed by rain and slipperiness of the roads and was not completed till 12.45am [30th].



May of the trenches showing Railway Wood and the Bellewaarde Ridge

30/8/15: The night was very quiet, no casualties on the way up.

The day was quiet except for the usual 'whizz-bangs' over Railway Wood. A German working party was observed..., a machine-gun opened fire and dispersed party. The parapet at ... was blown in by way of retaliation. A sniper was discovered behind a mound between the trenches and silenced.

Rations were brought up on a trolley to...by railway. This is not nearly such a success as the pack-animal system. The night was very quiet but work was delayed by having to go right back to fetch the water for the battalion.

A 'whizz-bang' was a light German shell of high velocity and low trajectory, meaning there would be very little warning of its arrival. It is evident the 6th KOYLI positions in Railway Wood were very close indeed. Rations could only be brought up at night, given the distance and conditions, these would not likely be hot meals but tins of 'bully beef', bread and cheese. Water came up in used petrol tins, still tasting of their original contents. Given such circumstances making hot food or tea could be quite difficult and would rely on unofficial

'cooperation' between the two sides at certain times – however the description here would suggest here there was no such cooperation, and living conditions were miserable and very dangerous.

31/8/15: A certain number of 'crumps' landed in Railway Wood in the morning.

Nothing to report during the remainder of the day. Tonight the rations were brought up by pack-animals with the result that all the rations and water were up by the companies at 11pm. Sgt Bateson and a Lance Corporal went out to examine our wire in front of...last night, but owing to the closeness of the enemy's trenches they found themselves in the German trenches and before they realised where they were, they met four unarmed Germans. They threatened them with their fists and managed to get of their trenches, but on their way back, Sgt Bateson was wounded. He managed to get back but unfortunately he afterwards died on the way to the Field Ambulance.



A rare private photograph taken in front of Railway Wood - 1915

A 'crump' was a larger German shell of a higher trajectory and generally could be heard coming many seconds before its arrival. Experienced troops could which way to go to avoid the place where it was going to land. Newly arrived troops would have to learn this from such men.

There are no details of the casualties sustained by the 6th KOYLI within this diary entry save that of Sgt Bateson. However, details of such casualties were kept and it is known that the 6th KOYLI suffered 6 killed in action, 2 died of wounds and 18 wounded on 31/8/15. One of those six killed in action is listed as Pte Skeates. He had been in the trenches less than 48 hours.



A modern view of Railway Wood, Ypres

Albert Skeates's body was one of those relocated after the War to a larger cemetery:

YPRES RESERVOIR CEMETERY, Belgium, X. D. 26

YPRES RESERVOIR CEMETERY



Location Information

The cemetery is located to the North-West of Ieper.

Historical Information

From October 1914 to the autumn of 1918, Ypres (now Ieper) was at the centre of a salient held by Commonwealth (and for some months by French) forces. From April 1915, it was bombarded and destroyed more completely than any other town of its size on the Western Front, but even so certain buildings remained distinguishable. The ruins of the cathedral and the cloth hall stood together in the middle of the city, part of the infantry barracks stood in an angle of the south walls and the prison, reservoir and water tower were together at the western gate.

Three cemeteries were made near the western gate: two between the prison and the reservoir, both now removed into the third, and the third on the north side of the prison. The third was called at first the "Cemetery North of the Prison," later "Ypres Reservoir North Cemetery, and now Ypres Reservoir Cemetery.

This cemetery was begun in October 1915 and used by fighting units and field ambulances until after the Armistice, when it contained 1,099 graves. The cemetery was later enlarged when graves were brought in from the battlefields of the salient and the following smaller burial grounds:-

YPRES RESERVOIR SOUTH CEMETERY, between the prison and the reservoir (also called "Broadley's Cemetery" and "Prison Cemetery No.1"). It was used from October 1914 to October 1915, and contained the graves of 18 soldiers from the United Kingdom.

YPRES RESERVOIR MIDDLE CEMETERY, immediately North of the last named (also called "Prison Cemetery No.2" and "Middle Prison Cemetery"). It was used in August and

September 1915, and rarely afterwards. It contained the graves of 107 soldiers from the United Kingdom (41 of whom belonged to the 6th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry) and one Belgian soldier.

The CEMETERY at the INFANTRY BARRACKS (also called "the Esplanade"). It was used from April 1915 to July 1916 and contained the graves of 14 soldiers from the United Kingdom, ten of whom belonged to the 6th Siege Battery, R.G.A.

In Plot V, Row AA, are the graves of 16 officers and men of the 6th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, who were billeted in the vaults of the cathedral and killed on 12 August 1915 by shelling from the "Ypres Express" firing from Houthulst Forest. The survivors were rescued by the 11th King's Liverpools, but these bodies were not recovered until after the Armistice.

There are now 2,613 Commonwealth servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in the cemetery. 1,034 of the burials are unidentified.

The cemetery was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield.

