

40) 270918 Sergeant Augustus James **SMITH**  
(St Mary's Aldermaston)

**Kia** 23/08/18, **Age** 29  
1st Bn. Hertfordshire Regiment  
Formerly 8518 Royal Berks Regt

**Born** Abingdon  
**Enlisted** Reading  
**Residence** Dover

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

**Date arrived in theatre of war:** 27/8/1914

Augustus Smith was either a pre-war regular soldier or reservist with the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Berkshire and arrived with them as part of the first members of the British Expeditionary Force, an 'Old Contemptible'. He would have seen action with them at the beginning of the war. At some stage, he obtained a transfer to the 1<sup>st</sup> Hertfordshire Regiment. It is not known what the reason for this was, the most likely reason would be that he had been wounded and returned to the UK for a period. At this late stage of the war, every available man was needed at the front. Many enlistment regulations would be relaxed, especially age – the minimum would now be 18, but the maximum would be increased to 50 – medically too, someone who could carry a rifle and pack for 10 miles would be allowed in. Britain was genuinely running out of eligible men. The phrase in use was 'combing out'.

The Allies had withstood the massive German offensives in Spring 1918 and had not broken, the Germans had used up their reserves brought in from the Eastern front, in fact had squandered them in one final gamble. It was now only a matter of time before the tide turned once again, for the last time. The Allied counter-offensive began in July 1918 with a now rejuvenated French Army, together with the now sizable US Army breaking through the German lines in the south at Verdun and the Meuse-Argonne. On 8<sup>th</sup> August, the British (mainly Australians and Canadians) attacked at Villers-Bretonneux and likewise broke through. With tanks now playing a full part, and better tactics, these actions more resembled those of 1940 rather than 1916. The Germans broke and retreated, open warfare would now become the norm, daily Allied gains would be in miles, German prisoners in thousands. General Ludendorff said in his memoirs that the 8<sup>th</sup> August 1918 was the 'Black Day' of the German Army. Thus began what became known as the 'Advance to Victory' or the 'Last 100 Days'. Daily attacks by the Allies now would just about always be successful, but measured so as not to over-extend supply lines. German morale had been broken.

Having lost the 1916 Somme battlefield in a day in March, it was re-taken in a similar time in August. Towards the end of this month, British units found themselves continuing the break-out on the Somme pushing once again towards Bapaume. Augustus Smith may well have been thinking that it was now nearing the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his first arrival in France. His new battalion, the 1<sup>st</sup> Hertfordshires would now take part in this by making an attack on the village of Achiet le Grand. The battalion war diary carries neither few details of the plan nor any report of the attack itself. Here is what has survived:

**15/8/1918 – Souastre**

*Battalion relieved by 13<sup>th</sup> Bn Royal Fusiliers and moved into support in PIGEON WOOD*

**16-18/8/1918 – Pigeon Wood**

*Battalion in support. Working parties found daily*

**18/8/1918**

*Battalion [sic] took over from 111<sup>th</sup> Brigade in front line in ABLAINZVILLE-BUQUOY Sector*

**20/8/1918**

*Relieved in Front Line by 111<sup>th</sup> Brigade [sic] and moved back to position of readiness in MISTY TRENCH*

Having been brought up, the three battalions of each Brigade could now expect to successively take part in regular attacks. These would be well coordinated, against an enemy that would still be putting up resistance but also with a mind to their next place to retreat to.

**21/8/1918 – Trenches**

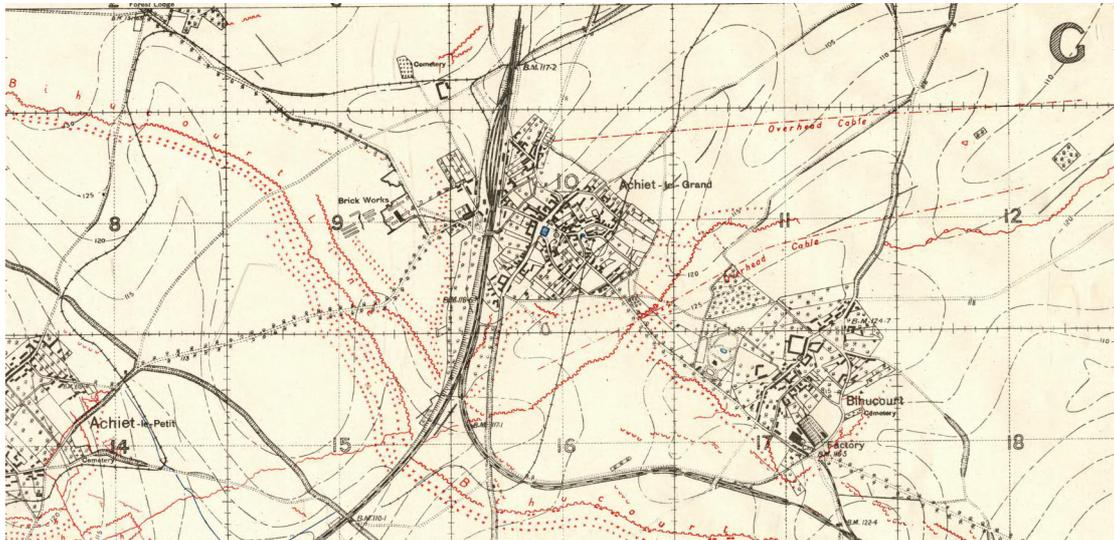
*111<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade attacked at 4.55am. The Battalion found carrying parties and working parties for Strong Points. Battalion moved back to trenches in support at 4.30pm*

This day, the 1<sup>st</sup> Hertfordshires would have been acting as support battalion, to be used if required, but mainly used to bring up supplies to carry on the offensive and take back the wounded.

**22/8/1918**

*Battalion resting in BRADFORD, LEEDS and HALIFAX trenches, moved up to assembly positions South of LOGEAST WOOD at 11pm*

Final preparations would now to be made for an attack by the 1<sup>st</sup> Hertfordshire the following day.



**Contemporary Trench map of Achiet le Grand, tip of Logeast Wood at top left.**

23/8/1918



Contemporary aerial photograph of Achiet le Grand (note compass rose)



Satellite image of this area today



### Panorama of the attack of 1<sup>st</sup> Hertfordshire 23/8/18

*Battalion attacked at 11am. Attack successful. Railway cutting in front of ACHIET-LE-GRAND taken. Casualties 2 officers killed, 7 wounded, 26 other ranks killed, 140 wounded.*



### Postcard of Achiet le Grand Railway Station ca. 1914

Very little detail here, the rapid progress of the British breakout left little time for officers to compile detailed daily accounts. However, more information was found from the records of the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex attacking alongside them:

*'At 11 a.m., on one of the hottest days of the year, the barrage came down 200 yards east of the outpost line, and at 11.08 a.m. the Fusiliers and Essex moved forward. The former battalion immediately met with strong opposition from the brickworks on the left flank and a trench nearby, but the resistance was overcome by an outflanking operation, in conjunction with Stokes and Lewis gun fire. Over sixty of the enemy surrendered with eleven light*

machine guns. The advance was quickly resumed and caught up with the bararge. Moving on, the Fusiliers gained a footing on the railway, despite heavy machine gun and rifle fire, and pushed a Lewis gun team across the metals in time to fire into the backs of the enemy to the south.



**View from attacking positions of 1<sup>st</sup> Hertfordshires 23/8/18 looking towards Achiet le Grand**

*Hertfordshires lost three of their company commanders early in the action, but instead of jumping through the Fusiliers they went further to the south, also gaining the cutting and taking many prisoners and machine guns. The railway securely in our hands, the Fusiliers moved to their final objective, and Hertfordshires, in line with them, also progressed and captured a battery of artillery.'*



**Achiet le Grand Station ca 1919**

**24/8/1918**

*Battalion moved to position SE of BIHUCOURT*

**25-31/8/1918**

*Battalion in Divisional Reserve in shelters SE of Bihucourt.*

The part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hertfordshire in this series of attacks was over. Augustus Smith would never see his 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being in France, nor would he see his home again, he was one of the 26 other ranks killed in action during this attack on Achiet le Grand.

Sgt Augustus Smith is buried in nearby:

BUCQUOY COMMUNAL CEMETERY EXTENSION, France, B. 18.

**SON OF WILLIAM AND ROSETA SMITH, OF ALDERMASTON, READING  
HUSBAND OF LOUISA M. O. SMITH, OF 5, YOUDENS COURT, MARKET ST., DOVER.**

### **BUCQUOY COMMUNAL CEMETERY EXTENSION**



#### **Location Information**

Bucquoy is a village in the Pas de Calais approximately 16 kilometres south of Arras.

#### **Historical Information**

The village of Bucquoy was occupied by the 7th Division on 17 March 1917, and was the scene of very heavy fighting in March and April 1918.

Bucquoy Communal Cemetery Extension was made by the Royal Naval Division burial officer at the beginning of September 1918. It contains 68 First World War burials, all dating from 23-28 August 1918.

The extension was designed by W H Cowlshaw.



270918 SERJEANT  
A. J. SMITH  
HERTFORDSHIRE REGIMENT  
23RD. AUGUST 1918 AGE 29



FATHER IN THY GRACIOUS  
KEEPING  
LEAVE WE NOW OUR LOVED ONE  
SLEEPING