

7) 13146 Private Herbert **GREATRIX**
(St Mary's Aldermaston)

Kia 25/09/15, **Age** 29
8th Bn Royal Berkshire Regiment

Born Longdon, Staffs
Enlisted Aldermaston
Residence Longdon, Staffs

Awarded: 1914-15 Star
British War Medal
Victory Medal

Date arrived in theatre of war: France, 7/8/1915

The 8th Royal Berks were formed in Reading in September 1914 at Kitchener's call for men to join the army. They were to follow the Earl of Derby's promise that 'men who joined up together as friends would serve together as friends'. This was the start of the 'Pals battalions'. As well as recruiting in Reading, 'mobile' recruiting would have taken place in local villages – Aldermaston being just one of them. The men undertook their training in the local area as well as Salisbury Plain and Sutton Veney. They would be some of the very first of 'Kitchener's Army' to be sent to France arriving at Le Havre on 10/8/1915.

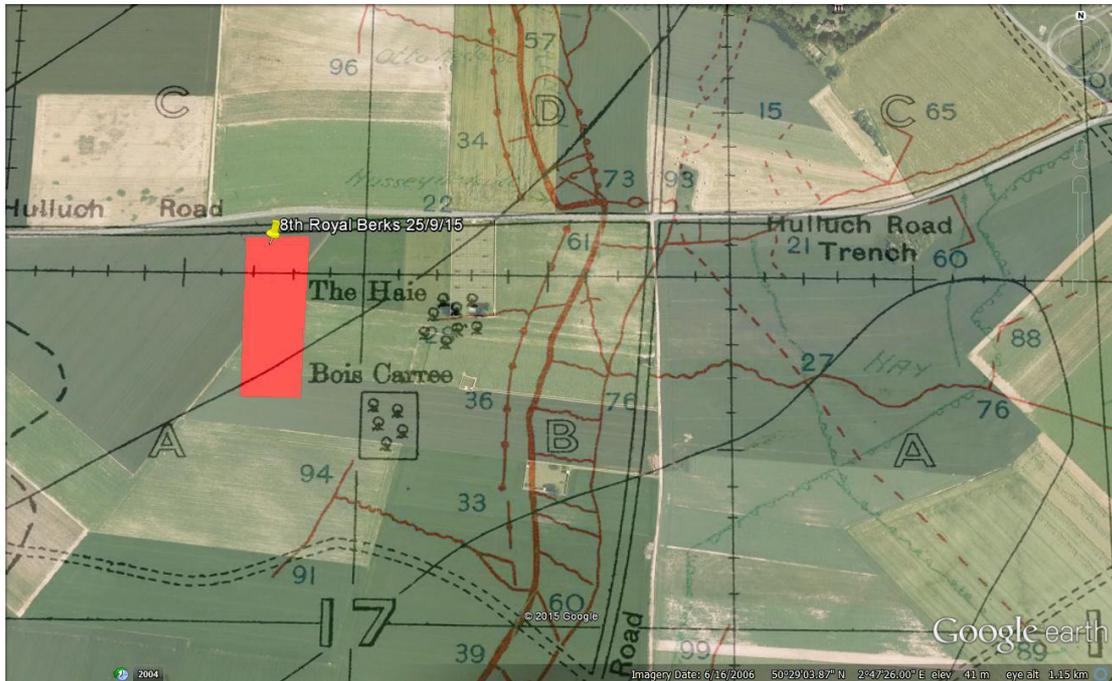


Soldiers of the Royal Berkshire Regiment in training

Here there was a twist of fate – at this time a Guards Division was being formed in France. This would leave gaps in existing divisions and the 8th Royal Berks would now find themselves being substituted from the 1st Coldstream Guards in the 1st Brigade of 1st Division. This was a tremendous honour. Other units of the brigade included the 1st Black Watch and 1st Cameron Highlanders, regular army units, well experienced, fighting in France since Mons at the beginning of the war...but here too was a tragedy in the making...the 8th Royal Berks, totally inexperienced and inadequately trained, would now be expected to fight alongside these seasoned troops in what would become one of the most dangerous spots in the largest battle the British Army had yet fought, just weeks after their arrival.'

In their War Diary, the 8th Royal Berks, having landed in France would be more bothered about sore feet on marches (they had just been issued new boots) and the constant breaking down of their field cookers, than what was to come. On 17/8/15 they would undertake a few days training in quiet trenches near Bethune and the same again a week

later. In September, they along with the rest of 1st Brigade would be taken behind the lines for two weeks intensive training for the attack they would be making towards the end of the month. This is all the practical experience of war they would now get. For this battle, the British would be using poison gas as part of the attack for the first time.



Assembly positions 8th Royal Berks, Hulluch Road, Loos

As late as 20/9/15, the battalion's officers made their reconnaissance of the trenches they would be making their attack on just five days later. The 8th Royal Berks finally moved into their assault trenches, bringing more cylinders of gas with them, on the evening of 23/9/15. They would spend the following day reorganising their positions ahead of the attack scheduled for 6.30am the next morning.



British soldiers attacking through gas cloud – Battle of Loos 25/9/1915

At 5.50am on 25/9/15 the final British bombardment opened up to cut the German wire. The German artillery responded, causing but few casualties in the 8th Royal Berks

positions. Specialists turned up to open the gas cylinders in the front line. Due to faulty equipment, the cylinders leaked gas into the trench poisoning many of the 8th Royal Berks. At 6.28am the gas ceased and was replaced by smoke. Two minutes later, the British artillery lifted allowing the 8th Royal Berks to advance alongside their regular comrades. The German artillery and now machine-gun fire cut swathes through the lines of the advancing men, still the 8th Royal Berks went on. In this time, the wind had changed direction blowing the gas back into the advancing waves of British troops, more casualties. They found the enemy wire uncut and were held up here making stationary targets for the machine-gunners. Once through the wire, they found the German front line unmanned apart from the machine gunners. They continued to advance and took both the German second and third lines. They reached a German fourth line and even took part of this. They had lost too many men to hold this position and were gradually forced back during the day. The casualties for the 8th Royal Berks at this stage were estimated at 50%.



Location of 8th Royal Berks positions south of Hulluch Road, Loos - today

Herbert Greatrix's body was later found and identified at a time following the construction and completion of the British war cemeteries in the Loos Area. At this time, there were a small number of 'open' cemeteries along the western front that were used to receive such bodies. Herbert Greatrix's body was thus buried at:

CABARET-ROUGE BRITISH CEMETERY, SOUCHEZ, France, XV. M. 21

SON OF GEORGE AND AMY GREATRIX, OF UPPER LONGDON, STAFFS

CABARET-ROUGE BRITISH CEMETERY, SOUCHEZ



Location Information

Souchez is a village 3.5 kilometres north of Arras on the main road to Bethune.

Historical Information

Cabaret Rouge was a small, red-bricked, red-tiled café that stood close to this site in the early days of the First World War. The café was destroyed by shellfire in March 1915 but it gave its unusual name to this sector and to a communication trench that led troops up the front-line. Commonwealth soldiers began burying their fallen comrades here in March 1916. The cemetery was used mostly by the 47th (London) Division and the Canadian Corps until August 1917 and by different fighting units until September 1918. It was greatly enlarged in the years after the war when as many as 7,000 graves were concentrated here from over 100 other cemeteries in the area. For much of the twentieth century, Cabaret Rouge served as one of a small number of 'open cemeteries' at which the remains of fallen servicemen newly discovered in the region were buried. Today the cemetery contains over 7,650 burials of the First World War, over half of which remain unidentified.

The cemetery and shelter buildings were designed by former Canadian Army officer Frank Higginson. Higginson worked as an architect for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in the 1920s and later acted as Secretary to the Commission.

In May 2000 the remains of an unknown Canadian soldier were taken from this cemetery and buried in a special tomb at the foot of the National War Memorial in Ottawa, Canada. A focal point for remembrance, he represents more than 116,000 Canadians who lost their lives during the First World War. A headstone in plot 8, Row E, Grave 7 marks his original grave.

BELIEVED TO BE



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ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT
25TH SEPTEMBER 1915 AGE 29



NOT FORGOTTEN