

Hertfordshire Lad & Ypres survivor pays the ultimate sacrifice on the Somme

The date was the 12th October 1916 & the costly battle of the Somme was drawing to an end as winter approached.

Leonard George Fisher (known as Len) aged 23 was a member of "D" Company of the 2nd Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment involved in a strategic attack on German held trenches known as Gird and Bite in the vicinity of Eaucourt-l'Abbaye. This particular phase of the battle is known as the Battle of the Transloy Ridges.



The battlefield having been pounded by artillery and the boots of millions of men for months, was nothing more than a quagmire. Desperate for the breakthrough that would never happen, a last series of allied attacks were launched despite the protests of many senior commanders who felt it would prove a fruitless exercise.

On 30th September, away from the fighting at Vignacourt, the 2nd Bedfords played in a football match drawing 1 – 1 with the 17th Bn, the King's Liverpool Regiment. Tragically this would be the last match for some of those involved.



Between the 4th to the 9th October the Bedfords had been billeted at Dernancourt. On the morning of 10th they left for Bazentin-le-Grand where they rested for 4 hours south of Mametz Wood. At 5pm the Battalion left to relieve the 20th Bn. Cheshire Regiment. They were heavily shelled twice on the way up to this relief.

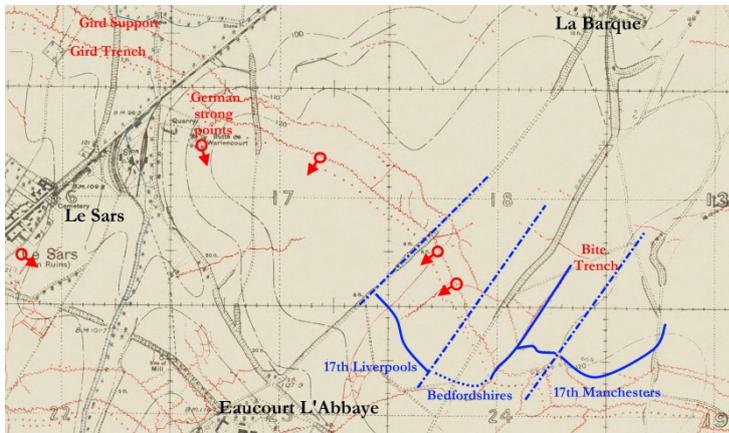
On the morning of the 12th it looked at one stage as though German troops holding Gird Trench may surrender, 2 German Officers & 50 men appeared, unarmed.

But during a dialogue with a British officer an unidentified marksman took a shot at the commanding German Officer who immediately retreated with his men.

The Bedford's plan was to attack the enemy trenches in 4 waves of men with a distance between each wave of 100 yards.

At 2:05 pm the allied attack commenced with the advance of C & D Company. The first wave came under terrific machine gun & rifle fire causing many casualties. They progressed to within 50 yards of Gird Trench. To give some idea of the intensity of the fire that they faced, after only 25 minutes of the attack being launched the 17th Liverpools, advancing alongside the Bedfords, had lost 13 officers and 409 men and the Bedfords had lost 5 officers and over 100 men.

The two Companies on the right “C” and “D”, made better progress and passed over the southern end of Gird Trench towards Bayonet Trench. However they also came under heavy machine gun fire from Gird Support Trench and got held up.



On “B” Company reinforcing them they pushed on again and captured 200 yards of Bite Trench, which was a shallow communication trench.

Seeing that Gird Support Trench and Bayonet Trench were very strongly held and being under very heavy fire from Gird Support Trench, Officers decided it was useless to attempt to get further,

so they dug in along the captured portion of Bite Trench.

The reported total gains of the day were about 200 yards of Bite Trench and about 70 yards of Gird Trench. The Bedfords were the only Battalion to gain any ground on the whole of the Corps Front, all the others having to withdraw to their front trenches.

From a battalion of a 1,000 men, 250 Bedfords were listed as dead, wounded and missing as a result of this attack. Len Fisher, who has no known grave, was one of the Bedfords who made the ultimate sacrifice.

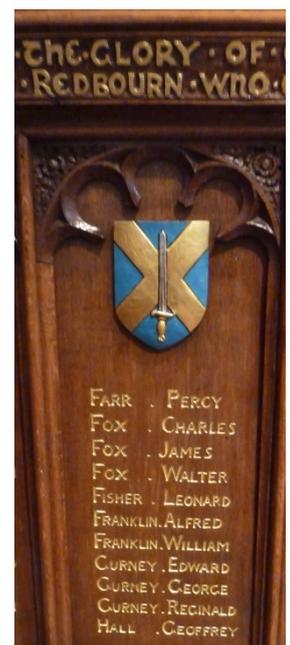
Leonard Fisher’s passing was reported in the Herts Advertiser on the 18th November 1916, and was reprinted in The Luton News And Bedfordshire Chronicle

“Pte. L.G. Fisher – Flamstead Bury Lad Falls On The Somme

After fighting in France for two years Pte Len G Fisher, Beds Regiment, son of Mr. Fisher Flamstead Bury, Redbourn, was instantaneously killed on October 12th when taking part in an attack on a German trench on the Somme.

A sergeant friend of deceased writing to the bereaved parent says “He died doing his duty a brave and noble lad. We reached a part of the trench we were fighting for and it was while holding on to that piece of ground that your son was killed. He was hit in the head by a bullet and died an almost painless death. On behalf of the company and myself I extend to you out heartfelt and deepest sympathy”

Len was born in 1892 at the thatched cottage that still stands today at Batford Mill, now part of Harpenden. One of seven children, his father William worked on a local farm and his mother Emily was involved in hat making, sewing plait into men’s straw boaters.



Len & his older brother William (Bill) attended St Nicholas School, Harpenden before the family moved to Linces Farm, Welwyn. Len & Bill had to walk two miles to attend Ayot St Peter school & sing in the Church Choir directed by Canon Henry Jephson. Leaving school at 12 Len worked on the farm but like many young men in their late teens was struggling to find regular employment. Len attended Welwyn Evening School circa 1907/08 where his occupation was listed as stock-boy.

The Family moved to Flamsteadbury (near Redbourn) where William (Leonard's father) had become head man on a large farm.

Len had enlisted in the Army at Hertford in 1911 and was serving in South Africa when the war broke out. He fought in the First Battle of Ypres (October 1914). A letter he sent home describing that battle was published in the Herts Advertiser under the heading "Bed's Terrible Losses - Redbourn Man's Account of Very Hot Work".

During the last quarter of 1915 Leonard was sent back to Languard England, to convalesce from enteric fever (severe typhoid). He attended his sister Annie's funeral. This would be the last time he saw his brother, as William sailed to Mesopotamia with the Herts Yeomanry a few days later.

Len is commemorated at Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, Redbourn War Memorial and on a plaque in St. Mary's church.



Compiled by Jonathan Sinfield, great-nephew of Len Fisher, Harpenden, July 2016.
JSinfield@bcs.org – 020 3468 3226