

JOHN HENRY BRIDCUTT

Lt Col R Irish Rifles

Born 1874

Killed In Action 1.10.1918

John Henry was the eldest son of John Bridcutt, a farm labourer, who was himself the son of Elisa Bridcutt an unmarried mother of two in Benson. His humble background did not improve when his mother Amelia died when John was just five and his father remarried quickly. With ten siblings, times must have been very hard and John left home at an early age.

He enlisted 3.7.1893 in 1st Bat Coldstream Guards (nr: 9509) for 7 years initially. Despite early problems with discipline, he was a Cpl by 1895 and Sgt Major by 1901. He served with distinction in the Boer War, with two Mentions in Despatches, and was clearly regarded as an exceptional soldier.

He returned to Britain in 1902, where he married Florence Martha Scott in Camberwell, Middx. They lived in barracks in Aldershot, where they lost their first child – Eva – in 1903, but had two more children – Henry Owen & Norah.

In August 1914, John was due to take up the post of Garrison Sgt Major London District, when the war intervened. The high losses amongst officers in 1914 led to many NCO's being awarded the status of “temporary gentlemen” and being commissioned. John Bridcutt was made 2nd Lt in the Somerset LI on 6/3/1915 but went straight to join the 7th Battalion Bedford Regt. Within months he was promoted to temporary Captain.

John was adjutant of the 7th Bedfords when they went over the top at 07.30 on 1st July in the Battle of the Somme. The 7 Bedfords lost 321 casualties that day, but Capt Bridcutt survived and his bravery was rewarded by again being mentioned in despatches and by the DSO in June 1917, by when he was an acting Major.

His abilities and outstanding service record were further recognised in August 1917 when he was promoted to Lt Col and given the command of the 2nd Bat Irish Rifles, a remarkable promotion for a man who started in the ranks.

It was this battalion he led into action on 30th Sept 1918 at Klythoek near Ypres during a major British offensive. The attack stalled under heavy fire, with men seeking whatever cover they could find on the battlefield. Next morning Lt Col Bridcutt gallantly attempted to reorganise his men to attack again, but was killed in the attempt.

His widow Florence Bridcutt never remarried, she later moved to Sussex where she died in 1938 at the early age of 59. John's son Henry Owen Bridcutt later lived in Hammersmith, becoming a motor salesman. He married twice (in 1925 & 1966) and died in Bracknell in 1987, aged 82.