

Pte. FRANK DUTFIELD ser no. 17430

2/4th Battalion, Ox & Bucks ~Light Infantry

Frank Dutfield was born in Whitchurch Oxfordshire in 1888. He was baptised Francis Henry (Bradfield 2c 326). His parents were Henry and Emma. In the 1901 census they were living at Newney Green Mapledurham. Frank was 13 and there were two sisters Margaret 9 and Gertrude 4. In the 1911 census they were still living at this address. Henry and Emma had been married for 34 years. Strangely there was a daughter Elsie aged 14. Had she changed her name? It was mentioned that they had 4 living children and 7 had died.

It was unsure when Frank enlisted but when he married Minnie Pether at St Helens Church Benson on April 7th 1917. He was stationed at Cosham Hants and was a private in the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry.

We have no more information regarding Frank until his death on 21 March 1918. It seems his body was not recovered as in the letter to Mrs Dutfield, his wife, it said "his death is assumed". From the information gained, on the 21 March just to the north of St Quentin on the Somme, the German attack was planned. At 5:40 am extensive gas and high explosive shells were used and continued until 9:30. There was thick fog at this time and the defenders were overwhelmed before they realised what was happening. The 2/4 Battalion started to retreat but 525 men were missing with 400 taken prisoner. The remainder, including Frank, were killed.

Private Frank Dutfield is commemorated on panel 50 on the Pozieres Memorial. Frank left a widow and a baby daughter called Dorothy Frances who was born on December 26th 1917.

Minnie later remarried in 1925 to Henry Smith. They had a son Frederick (Fred) Sydney Smith and they lived in the small house next to The Crown in the High Street Benson. Minnie died in 1967. Dorothy, who moved to London, died on 7th July 2009. She was buried in Benson churchyard and shared a grave with Fred who died on the 7th October 2005.

Frank was awarded :

The British War Medal (silver issue), The Victory War Medal (British Type)

Following his death his widow received:

Memorial Plaque (Death penny), Letter from Record Office about medal award, Commemorative scroll, a condolence letter from Buckingham Palace

We also have a large picture of Frank in uniform.

All the above were given to us by a relative, Shirley Mallinson, who lives in the village and are available to display.

On the night of 18/19 March the Battalion went into the front line. C Company was on the right, in front of Fayet; B Company, under the command of Wallington, was on the left, just south of Gricourt. A went to Fayet itself and D Company, commanded in Robinson's absence by Rowbotham, provided the garrison of Enghien Redoubt, which was a quarry near Selency Château; Battalion Headquarters also were at this redoubt. During the night of March 20 a raid on the Battalion's right was carried out near Cepy Farm by the 182nd Brigade. It was successful. German prisoners from three divisions corroborated our suspicion that the great enemy offensive was about to be launched. From headquarters to headquarters throbbed the order to man battle stations. Ere dawn was due to lighten the sky a dense mist shrouded everything and added a fresh factor to the suspense.

Early on March 21, only a short time after the Colonel had returned from visiting the front line posts, the ground shook to a mighty bombardment. At Amiens windows rattled in their frames. Trench mortars of all calibres and field guns, brought to closest range in the mist and darkness, began to pound a pathway through our wire. Back in artillery dug-outs the light of matches showed the time; it was 4.50 a.m. The hour had struck. Our guns, whose programme in reply was the fruit of two months' preparation, made a peculiar echo as their shells crackled through the mist. Some 'silent' guns [\[11\]](#) fired for the first time.

On all headquarters, roads, redoubts, and observation posts the enemy's howitzer shells were falling with descending swoop, and battery positions were drenched with gas.

In the back area the fire of long-range guns was brought with uncanny accuracy to bear against our rest billets, transport lines, and dumps. Cross-roads, bridges, and all vital spots in our communications, though never previously shelled, were receiving direct hits within a short time of the opening of the bombardment. The Berks had casualties at Ugny. Some English heavy batteries, recent arrivals on the front and seemingly undiscovered by the enemy, were now knocked out almost as soon as they had opened fire. The Artillery level crossing was hit by an early shell which blocked the road there with a huge crater. Never in the war had the Germans flung their shells so far or furiously as now.

By daylight all front line wire had been destroyed, and our trenches everywhere were much damaged. The mist hung thick, but the Germans did not yet attack. About 9.30 a.m. the barrage was felt to lift westwards from Fayet and the fitful clatter of Lewis guns, firing in short bursts with sometimes a long one exhausting a 'drum,' was heard. In the front line showers of stick bombs announced the enemy's presence. Everywhere it seemed that quick-moving bodies in grey uniforms were closing in from either flank and were behind. In the mist our posts were soon over-run. Few of our men were left to rally at the 'keeps.' A messenger to A Company's platoons, which had been stationed in support at the famous 'Sunken Road,' found that place filled with Germans. Before noon the enemy had passed Fayet and his patrols had reached Selency and the Cottages.

At Enghien Redoubt Battalion Headquarters had received no news of the attack having begun; the dense mist limited the view to fifty yards. The earliest intimation received by Colonel Wetherall of what was taking place was enemy rifle and machine-gun fire sweeping the parapet. At one corner of the redoubt some of the enemy broke in but were driven out by D Company with the bayonet. Outside Headquarters the first three men to put their heads over were killed by Germans, who had crept close along the sunken road which leads from Favet to Selency Château. The rifles and machine guns of the garrison opened up and gained

superiority. The defence, destined to last for many hours, of Enghien Redoubt proved an important check to the enemy's advance and helped to save many of our guns.

At 12 noon, after several patrols had failed to find out whether the enemy had captured Holnon, the Colonel himself went out to see all that was happening. He did not return, and shortly afterwards Headquarters were surrounded by the enemy, who had made ground on either flank. Nevertheless till 4.30 p.m. Cunningham, the officer left in command, held out most manfully. Of all the companies, Jones and less than fifty men had escaped capture. They reached the 'Battle Line' of trenches east of Holnon Wood, and there joined the Gloucesters, who had not yet been engaged in the fighting. The enemy, having captured Maissemy, Fayet, and Holnon, paused to reorganise as evening fell.

Towards evening on the 21st the Berks, who were in reserve when the attack started, were sent to counter-attack against Maissemy, which had been lost by the division on our left. Near the windmill, which stands on the high ground west of the village, Dimmer, the Berks V.C. Colonel, was killed leading his men on horseback. This local attempt to stem the German onslaught proved of no avail. At 10.30 a.m. on March 22 the enemy, whose movements were again covered by mist, pressed the attack against the Battle Line. Almost before the Gloucesters knew they were attacked in front, they found themselves beset in flanks and rear.