

ALBERT BATTS

9589 L/Cpl Albert Batts, 2nd Bat Ox&Bucks LI. Born 1876 KIA 25th Sept 1915

Albert Batts was born in 1876, the eldest child of Frederick & Jane Batts, who then lived in Ducklington near Witney. Fred was a farm worker and by 1900 the family had moved to Roke, near Benson, via a few years living in Eynsham. With six children in the family, it is not surprising that Albert left home early and he joined the army in 1893 aged 18.

Albert enlisted in the Ox & Bucks Light Infantry on 19th Dec 1893, and by 1895 was serving in India. He is recorded as being 5ft 6 inches tall, with a fresh complexion, hazel eyes and had six tattoos on his left arm. He extended his service in 1901, but took his discharge from the army in 1908. In 1911 he was back in **Benson**, a single man lodging with the Belcher family in Berrick and working as a labourer. Albert's sister Amelia had married John Belcher, so he lodged with his brother in law. His father & mother lived just up the road in Roke, where Fred senior worked on a farm.

Albert would have been a reservist after his service, and was called up when war was declared in August 1914. He went to France on 28th April 1915 with the 2nd Battalion Ox & Bucks LI.

On 25th Sept 1915 Albert's battalion took part in the disastrous Battle of Loos. At that time he was 39 years old and would have been one of the oldest men in his platoon. The Ox & Bucks men were in 5 Brigade – about 2,500 strong – who had the task of making a diversionary attack at Givenchy at 6am before the main attack started at 6.30. The artillery bombardment started at 4am, and intensified at 5.30am when the British released poison gas for the first time.

Sadly, with a very weak wind the gas failed to move and mostly hung over the British trenches rather than being blown over the German lines. Even worse, the Germans knew the attack was coming (a deserter from one of the Indian Divisions had documents on him) and were prepared. The attackers stormed easily through the German wire and took the German front line without opposition. However, as they advanced on the second German line, a withering storm of machine gun and artillery fire hit them. This was also where the British troops discovered that the German grenades (mounted on throwing sticks) were superior to theirs and had a longer range.

By 9.30, the survivors were back in their original trenches having taken 950 casualties (about 35%) and gained not a single foot of ground. Sadly, Cpl Albert Batts was not one of the survivors – he was killed on 25th September 1915 – and was posthumously awarded the Victory, British and 1915 Star medals.