

5336332 L/CPL ALEC EDWARD BEAL

4th Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment

Killed in action 29 May 1940

Alec Beal was born on 2 March 1921 to Thomas and Evelyn Beal of Hale Farm Cottages, **Benson**. He attended Benson School and was remembered as a spirited boy who excelled at football, playing for the village team. In about 1936, while still technically under-age, he enlisted in the 4th Territorial Battalion based at the Drill Hall, Thames Street, Wallingford.

At the outbreak of the war, the unit became the 4th Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment and Alec Beal enlisted. After concentrating in Newbury in mid-September 1939 for four months training, the regiment embarked for France on 17 January 1940, arriving at Le Havre as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) to protect Belgium in the event of a German invasion.

The 4th Battalion travelled inland through Gruson and on 10 May news was received of the expected invasion. On 14 May, the regiment arrived at Machelen, some 10 miles north of Brussels and, in the following days, set up its defence positions at Gementee Bois, near Louvain.

Over the next few days, the 9th French army to the south and the Belgian army to the north were overwhelmed by the advancing Germans. The forward positions held by the 1st and 4th Battalions quickly became untenable and on 16 May, when the Dutch Army capitulated, the order was given to withdraw.

The 4th Battalion retired through Brussels towards Roubaix under constant sniping by enemy forces, the main bulk of the German Army being to the south, sweeping towards the Channel ports in an attempt to cut them off.

By 27 May, the Berkshires had reached Pypegaale, some 10 miles north of Ypres, where they attempted to hold back the enemy; casualties were high. By 29 May, the battalion had been split up and the section which included L/Cpl Beal had reached Diksmuide, near the Belgian coast. It was there that Alec Beal was hit by a sniper and died of his wounds. The remnants of the battalion managed to embark on some of the armada of ships that had been sent to rescue them.

L/Cpl Alec Edward Beal is commemorated on column 111 of the Dunkirk Memorial.