Private Albert Waters - Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry 26169, Labour Corps, 532967

His first taste of service life would have been at Cowley Barracks Oxford , the depot of the Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

After kitting out and initial training he was assigned to the:

6th (Service) Battalion Formed at Oxford, September 1914, as part of K2.
September 1914 : attached to 60th Brigade, 20th (Light) Division.
15 February 1918 : disbanded in France.

The 6th operated as part of the 20th Light Division.

20TH (LIGHT) DIVISION - New Army

FORMATION, BATTLES, AND ENGAGEMENTS

This New Army Division had no existence before the outbreak of the Great War.

Army Order No. 382 of the 11th September 1914 authorized the further addition of 6 Divisions (15th-20th) and Army Troops to the Regular Army (see Appendix 1). This augmentation formed the Second New Army, and during September, 1914 the 20th (Light) Division, the junior division of the Second New Army, began to assemble in the Aldershot area.

At first the infantry brigades formed at Blackdown, Deepcut, and Cowshott Camp; and all units encountered the usual difficulties which were eventually overcome by goodwill and keenness. The divisional artillery was started by sending to Deepcut two officers and two drafts of nearly 2,000 men each. The available artillery accommodation, which had been built for two brigades with a total peace-time strength of 700, was strained to its upmost : rooms originally intended for 20 men had now to accommodate about 50. By December, in the Artillery, the men were clothed partly in full dress blue uniforms, partly in canvas suits, and partly in shoddy thin blue suits. By this time a few horses had also arrived, and the available saddlery was made up of civilian-pattern snaffles, regulation bridles, hunting saddles, and colonial saddles. Each artillery brigade also possessed enough harness for one six-horse team, and each brigade also had 4 guns (2 French 90 m/m. and 2, 15-pdrs.) but no sights. In February 1915 twelve old 18-pdr. Q.F.'s arrived from India and each 18-pdr. battery received one gun, henceforward proudly known as "our battery's gun."

Later in February 1915 the Division moved to Witley, Godalming, and Guildford ; but part of the divisional artillery had to go by train as there was not enough harness to move all the vehicles. The issue of khaki now began, additional horses and harness arrived, and the divisional ammunition column was completed with mules.

In April 1915 the Division marched to Salisbury Plain, covering the 63 miles in four days. On arrival the artillery drew its remaining harness, and modern 18-pdr. Q.F. equipments were received ; but it was somewhat later before the 4-6" howitzer equipments were issued. From the outset the 4.5" howitzers were equipped with No. 7 dial sights, whereas until July 1916 there were only No. 1 dial sights for the division's 18-pdrs. In June all the batteries went to gin-practice. The training for war was now nearing its final stage.

On the 24th June H.M. The King inspected the 20th Division on Knighton
Down. Embarkation for France began on the 20th July and by the afternoon of the 26th July the Division completed its concentration in the area to the west of St. Omer. For the remainder of the Great War the 20th Division served on the Western Front and Belgium and was engaged in the following operations:-

1915 25 September ...Attack towards Fromelles (III Corps, First Army).

1916 2-13 June ...Battle of Mount Sorrel (XIV Corps, Second Army).

BATTLES OF THE SOMME
21 Aug.-3 Sept. ...Battle of Delville Wood (XIV Corps, Fourth Army).
3-5 September ...Battle of Guillemont (XIV Corps, Fourth Army).
16-20 September ...Battle of Flers Courcelette (XIV Corps, Fourth Army).
27 September ...Battle of Morval (XIV Corps, Fourth Army).
1-8 October ...Battle of the Transloy Ridges (XIV Corps, Fourth Army).

1917 14 March-5 April ...German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line (XIV Corps, until 2.p.m. 25/3 ; then XV Corps, Fourth Army).
26 May-16 June ...Actions on the Hindenburg Line (IV Corps, Fifth Army, until 10 a.m., 31/5 ; then Third Army).

BATTLES OF YPRES
16-18 August ...Battle of Langemarck (XIV Corps, Fifth Army).
20-25 September ...Battle of Menin Road Ridge (XIV Corps, Fifth Army).
26-28 September ...Battle of Polygon Wood (XIV Corps, Fifth Army).

BATTLE OF CAMBRAI
20 and 21 November ...The Tank Attack (III Corps, Third Army).
23-28 November ...Capture of Bourlon Wood (III Corps, Third Army).
30 Nov.-2 Dec. ...German Counter-Attacks (III Corps, Third Army).

1918 22 March-2 April ...FIRST BATTLES OF THE SOMME
22 and 23 March ...Battle of St. Quentin (XVIII Corps, Fifth Army).
24 and 25 March ...Actions of the Somme Crossings (XVIII Corps, Fifth Army).
26 and 27 March ...Battle of Rosieres (XVIII Corps, Fifth Army).

THE ADVANCE TO VICTORY
2-6 October ...The Final Advance in Artois (VIII Corps, Fifth Army).

At 6 p.m. on the 6th October the 12th Division relieved the 20th Division in the front line and
the 20th Division spend the remainder of the month training in the Monchy Breton area. On the 31st October the 20th Division moved to Cambrai area and was transferred to XVII Corps, Third Army. On the 1st November the divisional artillery (XCI and XCII Brigades) went into action to support the 19th Division ; and on the 10th November the 60th Infantry Bde. relieved two brigades of 24th Division (VI Corps, Third Army), and the 60th Brigade remained in the front line on the Maubeuge-Mons road until Armistice brought hostilities to a close at 11 a.m. on the 11th November. At this time 20th Division headquarters and the 61st Brigade had reached Feignies, midway between Bavai and Maubeuge ; and at 4 p.m. on the 11th the 20h Division relieved the 24th in the front line.

On the 23rd November the 20th Divusion began to move back through Cambrai to the Toutencourt-Marieux area, and by the 2nd December the move was completed. The remainder of December was spent in training, education, recreation, and in preparing for demobilization.

On the 7th January 1919 the first party (6 officers and 74 other ranks) left the Division for demobilization ; by the end of the month the Division had lost 85 more officers, and 2,702 more men from this cause, and during February an additional 74 officers and 2,691 other ranks left to be demobilized. Thus the Division shrank. On the 11th April, the command of the skeleton of the division devolved on a lieutenant-colonel. On the 28th May the cadre of divisional headquarters left for England and the war story of the 20th (Light) Division came to an end. During the Great War the 20th Division lost 35,470 killed, wounded, and missing.

The Division was withdrawn after the heavy fighting in the Somme battles, moving on 20th April 1918 to an area south west of Amiens. During the summer months it received many new drafts of men, and from October 1918 it took part in the general advance that resulted in victory.

Demobilisation began in January 1919, and was completed in May. Since first moving to France four years previously, the Division had suffered 35,470 casualties.

Albert landed in France on 24th July 1915

All troops landing in France went straight into further training in trench warfare before moving up to the line and getting used to the trench rota system. This consisted of 4 days in the front line, 4 days in the rear and 4 days in reserve (just behind the front line), in fact the rear positions could be just as dangerous as the front due to heavy constant shelling.

A sector of the front would be allocated to an army corps usually comprising three divisions. Of these two divisions would occupy adjacent sections of the front and the third would be in rest to the rear. This breakdown of duty would continue down through the army structure, so that within each front-line division, typically comprising three regiments , two brigades would occupy the front and the third would be in reserve. Within each front-line brigade, typically comprising four battalions, two battalions would occupy the front with two in reserve. And so on for companies and platoons. The lower down the structure this division of duty proceeded, the more frequently the units would rotate from front-line duty to support or reserve.

During the day, snipers and artillery observers in balloons made movement perilous, so the trenches were mostly quiet. Consequently, the trenches were busiest at night, when cover of darkness allowed the movement of troops and supplies, the maintenance and expansion of the barbed wire and trench system, and reconnaissance of the enemy's defences. Sentries in listening posts out in no man's land would try to detect enemy patrols and working parties or indications that an attack was being prepared.

Advancing troops were not allowed to stop and care for wounded soldiers. All men carried an emergency field-dressing and if possible attempted to treat their own wounds. The wounded soldier then had to wait until the stretcher bearers arrived. Once the injured soldier had been picked up by the stretcher-bearers, he would be taken to the Regimental Aid Post that was usually based in the reserve trenches. The Regimental Medical Officer

and his assistants cleaned the wounds, applied dressings, and gave injections. The injured man was then taken to the Advanced Dressing Station. Wounds were again treated and sometimes emergency amputations took place. The wounded soldier was then moved to the Casualty Clearing Station where surgery, if needed, was carried out.

Some of the problems of this war handled by the RAMC:

Gas.

This odious type of warfare was first used at 3 `o` clock in the afternoon of 22nd April 1915 when chlorine gas was released by the Germans in the Ypres sector. There was no defence for this and 402 officers and 11,778 other ranks of the 27th Division alone had been admitted to the field ambulances by 30th of that month. The immediate remedy was to urinate onto a handkerchief and hold it over the nose and mouth. Paris was scoured for ladies face-veiling and the medical services of the 1st and 2nd Armies, assisted by the women of the locality in which they were billeted, made up emergency masks using the veiling to wrap pads of horsehair and cotton waste soaked in Hyposulphate of soda, and 98 thousand of these were sent into the front line. A solution of 10lbs of water, 10lbs of Hyposulphate, 2.5lbs of soda and 1lb of glycerine was placed in buckets in the trenches to renew the effectiveness of the pads. This, then, was the first British military respirator.

The gas first used was Chlorine, which led to a slow death by asphyxiation. Mustard gas, first used in 1917, delayed any effect for up to 12 hours, and then began to rot the body from both within and without and a very painful death took from four to five weeks. Lachrimatory gasses caused blindness. Gas hung around in sunken roads for weeks, and it was possible to be overcome merely by removing a patient's clothing, so it was not only during an attack that one could become gassed.

Trench Foot.

Boots and Putees were intended to keep small stones, etc., from causing problems whilst walking, but when standing for hours on end in a trench that is over ones ankles in water, the skin takes on the effect that one sees when keeping the hands emerged in the washing up bowl. This eventually causes the skin to break down and fall away thus exposing the muscles underneath.

Gas Gangrene.

This was caused by any one of four bacillus that entered either directly into wounds, or was implanted by fragments of shell that burst after burying themselves into the ground. Flanders was a very wet country due to the water table being so near the surface; consequently prior to the war the farmers had plenty of water drainage ditches. These, however, were destroyed by the constant shelling, and the result was water everywhere and the ground was infiltrated with bacillus that entered the wounds of the casualties, or into the skin of trench foot. Difficult to treat, it even re-entered a wound after amputation.

Shellshock.

The effect of "no heart for the fight" was recorded as far back as 480 BC and was, indeed, known to the Pharaohs. In Napoleonic times it was called "The Wind of the Ball" and did not really manifest itself into the British Army until the Great War. It was extremely difficult to separate the shirkers and malingerers from those with genuine neurosis and, despite the efforts of medical officers on the spot, the higher eschelon castigated it as cowardice which, processed through the system, produced dire results. It is interesting to note that the officers were allowed to be diagnosed with neurestheniа whilst the other ranks received rough justice. There were, however, specialist hospitals put aside to treat the ever-increasing condition, followed by long periods of convalescence. The French recognised the condition from the outset, but their treatment was often worse than the cause of the effect in the first place.

Lice.

These creatures carried trench fever, relapsing fever, and typhus. They laid their eggs in the seams of clothing, and in the tails of the men's shirts, in fact where it was warm and where the clothing was not frequently changed. The men normally cleansed their clothing by passing the seams over a candle flame, but they forgot that they also hatched out in the body hair, thus the clothing was re-infected. Serious cases of fever were treated in the specialist Stationary Hospitals, and the men usually returned to their units. The infestations were however continuous and created a virtual war on their own.

Killed in the fighting area

The varying nature of mens deaths in the front line and the specific conditions at the time of their death meant that their ultimate fates differed widely. For example:

Some men would have been identifiable, and probably buried close to the front line. This would have included, for example, men killed by a sniper or shell explosion whilst holding a trench or on a road behind the lines; men dug out of a collapsed mine, trench, sap or dug-out; and men dying of wounds having begun their evacuation, but whilst still in the Battalion or Brigade area. These men would be identified by comrades, NCOs or officers.

Some men would have been less identifiable, and probably buried in cemeteries or burial plots still quite close to the firing line. This might typically have included those men who had attacked and been killed or died of their wounds, but whose bodies could not be brought in because the place they were lying was under fire. Eventually when the fighting moved away, their bodies would be buried if possible. In this category too would be men who died in a successful advance, whose bodies would be cleared by other units than their own. Identification would be through pay books, tags, and other physical means by men who did not know the individuals.

Some men would be unidentifiable, if the damage to them was such that they ceased to exist as a body. Fragments of men, once found, would be buried if possible.
Many men were simply not found, although post-war battlefield clearance reduced the total of missing.
Many thousands of small burial plots were created on or very close behind the battlefields. They were often damaged by shellfire, and in 1918 many were over-run first by the advancing enemy and later by the Allies pushing eastwards again. Plots were destroyed as the ground was shelled, and the locations of many graves that had been registered and known about were made uncertain.

Monthly average casualties WW1 had increased in every year of the war from
19,000 in 1915 44,000 in 1916 56,000 in 1917 75,000 in 1918
Total UK military deaths - 885,138
Total UK military wounded - 1,663,435
I regret if the above was upsetting but I do limit the details to suit the enquiry, however I do include this depict the nature of war and conditions at that time.

Coming back to Albert Waters.

His first action was Fromelles followed by many other actions, please ask me about any particular battle. The important thing is he survived. At some point he might have been wounded, there is no mention of this on his card or in my database.

At some point he was transferred to The Labour Corps as 532967 , if he was not wounded there is another reason this could have happened, soldiers who had endured a lot of hardship over 2/3 years and survived were given in many cases a further chance to survive, by transferring them to units away from the front line.

However well meant this was, it was not a sure way to escape death as the Labour Corps often worked in great danger from snipers and shelling, the casualty rate was high, Alberts job would have been as guard over work details and looking out for sniper shots, he was still lucky to survive.

Medals he was awarded:

British War Medal

The British War Medal 1914-1920, authorised in 1919, was awarded to eligible service personnel and civilians alike. Qualification for the award varied slightly according to service. The basic requirement for army personnel and civilians was that they either entered a theatre of war, or rendered approved service overseas between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918. Service in Russia in 1919 and 1920 also qualified for the award.

Victory Medal

The Victory Medal 1914-1919 was also authorised in 1919 and was awarded to all eligible personnel who served on the establishment of a unit in an operational theatre.

WW1 medals had the soldiers name and number engraved on the rim.