

The story of Albert Squires

By Eddie Pullen

Albert Benjamin Squires

Albert Benjamin Squires was born in 1880 in Felpham to Charles and Anne Squires, their 8th child. Charles was born in Aldingbourne and Anne in Eastergate, by the 1881 census the family had moved to 19 Chalcroft Lane, North Bersted. Charles was 48, Anne 44 and their children ranged from 20 down to 1 year old Benjamin. In the 1891 census they are listed at 18 Chalcroft Road and the family had two grandchildren now living with them.¹ By 1901 they had moved to 32 Bury Lane, Bersted Village². Horses must have played a big part in the family, Charles' occupation was always given as Carter but now 2 of his sons were also Carter's including the 21 year old Benjamin. On the 29th July 1906 Benjamin married Ellen Paul in St Mary's church South Bersted, she was 23, her father was a Bailiff farmer and Ellen was born in Beaminster, Dorset. Both their addresses are given as Philpott Cottage, North Bersted.³ They had a son, Alfred William, born 3rd September 1906 at North Bersted, two years later they had another son, Sydney Frank born 10th September 1908 also at North Bersted. In 1910 a daughter Olive Rose Blanch born 13th February 1910 but now they had moved to Shripney.⁴ The 1911 census records them at Flint Cottage, Near Robin Hood, Shripney.⁵ The Great War had raged for over 12 months but on the 1st November 1915, Albert Benjamin joined the Royal Sussex Regiment signing his attestation papers in Bognor possibly at the Hambleton Chambers or the drill hall in Belmont Street. Both Albert's occupation and age would have been in his favour if he hadn't wanted to volunteer but the pressure to do so must have been great from every angle. He gives his address still as Flint Cottage, still as a carter and now 36 years old. His physical description was 5 ft 4 inches in height, a chest measurement of 39 inches with a 2 inch expansion and of a good development.⁶

Albert Benjamin Squires G/8133 RSR is posted to the 10th battalion as reserve unit at Shoreham. After 4 months, Benjamin leaves Shoreham for the 9th battalion in the field on the 1st March 1916. His emotions must have running high as the troop carrier sailed for France and the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). By now any thoughts of glory and easy victories had long disappeared. Benjamin joined the 9th in time for their relief from Belgian Chateau, back to Camp E, this was the dreaded Ypres Salient where constant action and shelling occurred daily. On the 16th March inspections were held, on the 17th baths are held (these were normally makeshift affairs with any large container). 18th March 1916, all day routine marches, then on following day the 9th moves to Meteren, 17 km South West from Ypres passing through Resinghelst, Westroute and Shaexken. The 20th is taken up with more marching as the battalion is rather soft after having not much marching? 21st and 22nd company training. On 23rd March they move to Red Lodge relieving the 13th Canadian Battalion. 24th move up to trenches 135-140, this was brigade reserve and a very quiet night is spent. The quiet is ruptured on the 25th as shelling occurs on their left where the 7th Northants held the line. On the 26th it's the 9th battalions turn to be shelled causing 10 casualties. The 27th to 29th quiet returns, except the afternoon of the 28th when shelling of the reserve companies occurs, the weather is recorded as fine. During this

time Albert Benjamin dislocates his right knee and is listed at depot on the 3rd August still recovering from this painful injury before being shipped back to England on HMHS St Patrick from Boulogne on the 19th August. Recovery is slow and Albert Benjamin is hospitalised at Shoreham. Some improvement must have taken place by the 14th November 1916 as Albert is put on a charge of Neglect of Duty when Hut Orderly i.e. not having any drinking water on the table at dinner time. His sentence is two days confined to barracks. On the 5th December 1916 he is discharged from hospital. During this time you wonder if he was able to see any of his family, certainly his service papers records no home leave before he is posted on the 3rd March 1917 to the 12th battalion back again to the Ypres Salient and the Flanders mud. The previous two days the 12th had been heavily bombarded with artillery and trench mortars so much so that an attack seemed imminent, but effective return fire from the British Artillery and machine guns this was frustrated. The 1st March records 3 Other Ranks (O.R.) killed and 22 wounded, the 2nd a quiet day, slight artillery activity by enemy, 3 O.R. killed.⁶ So this was the scene Albert returned to, on the 3rd the 12th are relieved by the Cheshire Regiment. They march back to Ypres and entrain to Brandhoek marching from there to Montreal Camp. On the 4th-9th training, on the 5th inspected by Corp Commander and a concert held in the evening to celebrate the anniversary of landing in France.⁶

On the 9th March relieve Cambridgeshire regiment in Division Reserve at the observatory ridge sector. 10th – 13th engaged in working parties in front line and wiring in front of support lines. On the 13th they relieve 13th Battalion R.S.R. in front line of the observatory ridge and you can imagine the banter and black humour that probably took place between these two units of the South Downs Battalions. 14th – 17th front line, considerable work done in wiring before the trenches. Except for desultory shelling, enemy very quiet, 2 O.R. killed, 4 wounded. 17th March relieved by 13th R.S.R. (more black humour) and went into brigade reserve. On the 22nd March Albert is transferred to the previously mentioned 13th Battalion. The 13th were at the cavalry barracks in Ypres and cellars at Kruisstraat, the cellars must have been a good billet as Ypres was under an almost constant barrage and every building reduced to ruins. On the 17th April the 13th were back in the frontline on observatory ridge, much tit for tat artillery duels had been waged here for the past few weeks and Albert would have been no stranger to this hostile landscape with both the 12th and 13th battalions, how the former Carter's nerve held I will never know.

April finds the battalion in the Hooze sector, the war diary records the 11th as intensely cold with frequent snowfalls, but the enemy tried to make things hot by shelling the battalion. On the 15th they were relieved by the 10th Northumberlands but 17th found them at Hill Top again in Hooze sector.⁶ May must have been a less tense month as the Battalion were training at St Omer and Wormhoudt. This must have been in preparation for the attack out of Ypres Salient that was to become known as the Passchendaele offensive. By June, the 13th were back in the Ypres Salient on the canal bank. The war diary records Sunday 3rd June church services are held in the chapels. At 11pm gas started to drift up the canal, it continued to grow stronger and all men were warned. Gas helmets were

worn til 3pm by which time all gas had cleared. There were no casualties in the battalion though the gas was a mixture of Lachrymatory and Ashixiating gases. On the 7th June southern army attacked Wyschaete, the 39th division (of which the 13th R.S.R. were part of) made a demonstration to distract the enemy , dummies were placed in trenches overnight, artillery and machine guns opened on the enemy and he retaliated, quiet by 6 am. 11th June on canal bank. On the 23rd the battalion entrained at Poperinge station, although Poperinge is 8 miles from Ypres it still attracted the occasional shell and most soldiers going from or into the Salient passed through this town, it was here formed Toc H at Talbot House, which today remains much the same and can be visited. At 12:30 the battalion arrived at Watten. 4 pm marched to Houille by train. Early July was spent practicing for an attack. On the 5th battalion allotted to Baths. 16th July left Houille by train from Watten to Hopoutre siding, arriving to camp 1 am.⁶ The battalion must have been awash with rumours and things would have been tense. Even the enemy knew they were coming they would have watched the build up of equipment etc. Also on the 16th the preliminary bombardment opened. By the 31st, 4.3 million shells were fired⁶ (in complete contrast to the bombardments of 1915 when shells were rationed. It illustrates by how much the war effort has intensified in 2 years. 30th June Y day (the battalion had waited and heard the shells screaming overhead for two weeks, I wonder if it that helped knowing or hoping the enemy was taking a pasting and any rate it must have cranked up the tension. At 9:20 pm Albert and the 13th Battalion occupied assembly positions, how the pulse would have raced, how the stomach churned at 2:50 am on the 31st it was reported wire cut, the men were provided hot tea and ready to move into attack.⁶

31st July, Z day, Albert and his comrades had waited 6 ½ hours for the orders to go over the top and now at 3:50 am they were given (these men knew what they were going to face, prayers would have been offered, Albert would have thought of Ellen and his 3 children back home in Shripney and now a deep breath, teeth gritted in a dry mouth and up and over). I don't know at what time or phase of the days battle Albert fell but I know that the 13th forded the Steenbeck stream, captured the ruined village of St Julien (one of the 1st objectives), despite those 4.3 million shells being ineffective the enemy front line was neutralised but they had concrete machine gun posts further back and these took a high tally of men before being subdued in a series of individual battles. HQ knew of the situation before going ahead with the attack but decided to carry on. The 13th swept on past St Julien before having to pull back so that a further artillery barrage could commence, it seemed strange because this was an already captured territory. The next objective was Gravenstafel but because of the various actions against those concrete machine gun positions the men were scattered and a few were at the sharp end. And now the enemy artillery came to life and increased in intensity, our own artillery had slackened and the 13th battalion and 39th division were in an adjourned position. Casualties had not been light, 4000 in 39 division alone. The 39th including 13th Royal Sussex Regiment (R.S.R.) had little choice but to withdraw. St Julien was given up and the division had to fight off counter attacks around the Steenbeck. Also at 12 o clock it started to rain heavily and didn't stop for almost the next 3 weeks.⁶ All

those millions of shells had destroyed every tree, every drainage ditch and every culvert for miles and so the ground turned into a morass of mud and men would drown in the ooze and slime. Casualty figures of the 13th were 14 officers, 250 O.R. between 31st July and 2nd August. It would take until November before Passchendaele fell.⁷ God knows what cynical wit christened those splintered stumps Inverness Copse and Sanctuary Wood, who named that quagmire Dumbarton Lakes and who ordained that those treacherous heaps of filth should be known as Stirling Castle.⁸

So the telegram boy would have ridden out from Bognor with the achingly sad news to Ellen in the hamlet of Shripney, one of the 324 names on the memorial in Bognor Memorial Hospital. Ellen moved to Bridport (possibly to be near her parents) but the sadness continued. She was sent Albert's effects, a leather belt and photos but had to return the photos as they were not his. She moved again to Bournemouth and was granted a pension for herself and 3 children of £1 6Sh 3d in 1918.⁵ Albert is buried in Buff's Road Cemetery, a very short distance from where he fell on the first day in Passchendaele in 1917. Albert Benjamin Squires is not related to myself and please don't think I chose him at random but on our first trip to Belgium in 2010 whilst looking for a particular site, North of Ypres my wife noticed a small war grave cemetery and being as we had the time, decided to visit it. It was Buff's Road Cemetery and after paying our respects, my wife noticed a comment in the visitors book against Albert Benjamin Squires name: "Just visiting a lad from Bognor." So when we got home I looked him up in the CWGC [Commonwealth War Graves Commission] lists, so maybe Albert Benjamin chose us.

Roll of Honour - Ships - HMHS St Patrick

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H.M.H.S. St PATRICK

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She was driven by 3 steam turbines, her tonnage was 2531, length 350 ft and breadth 41 ft. She was owned by Fishgard and Rosslare Railways and was used a ferry between Fishgard and Rosslare. From 1914 to 1919 she was requisitioned as a hospital ship HMHS St Patrick. She was destroyed by fire at Fishgard in 1929.¹⁰

SS St. Patrick was built by John Brown Clydebank in 1906 and launched Saturday 24th February 1906.

British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920

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Army Form B. 103. Regimental Number. 8133

Casualty Form - Active Service.

Regiment or Corps 1st

Rank Plt. Surname Quarrier Christian Name Alfred Thomas

Religion Age on Enlistment 25 years months

Enlisted (a) 1.9.15 Terms of Service (a) 5y. 6m. Service reckons from (a) 1.2.15

Date of promotion to present rank Date of appointment to lance rank

Extended Re-engaged Qualification (b)

or Corps Trade and Rate

Occupation Signature of Officer

Report	Place of Casualty	Date of Casualty	Remarks
<p>Received of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc. during active service, as reported on Army Forms B. 103, Army Form A. 28, or on other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.</p> <p>Date From whom received</p> <p><u>Posted to 12th Bn</u></p>	<p>Embarked <u></u></p> <p>Disembarked <u></u></p>	<p><u>1917</u></p>	<p>Taken from Army Form B. 103, Army Form A. 28, or other official documents.</p> <p><u>4.10.18</u></p>
<p><u>40 S.B.D. Reported to 13th Bn</u></p> <p><u>of 6 Bn</u></p> <p><u>Killed in action</u></p>	<p><u>Field</u></p>	<p><u>23 1917</u></p> <p><u>31.7.17</u></p>	<p><u>13th Bn</u></p>

G. H. Q. 3rd Edition

http://interactive.ancestry.co.uk/Print/1219/30600_193629-00208?landscape=true&sourcePlacement=0&query=backurl%3Dhttp%253A... 11/06/2013

(ancestry.co.uk)⁴

No 25 Lytham Road
Bournemouth

Dear Sirs.

will you please send any further communication to Ellen Squires, widow of the Alfred B. Squires.
3rd May 1918. To No 25 Lytham Rd Bournemouth

I have left the old address for good. have enclosed form sent to me last week. the leather belt was my husband's but I don't think the photos were his. Yours Faithfully
Ellen Squires. (ancestry.co.uk)⁴

Yours Faithfully

98133
P.E. A.B. Squires
13th May 1918

Full text reads: Dear Sirs, Would you please kindly send any further communication to Ellen Squires, widow of Private Albert B Squires, 13th RSR to number 25 Lytham Road, Bournemouth. I have left the old address for good, having closed forms sent to me last week, the leather belt was my husband's but I don't think the photos were his. Yours Faithfully Ellen Squires. (ancestry.co.uk)⁴

W12952-113674 250,000 4/17 HWV(P16142)

Any further letter on this subject should be addressed to:
 Officer i/c No. 2. Records,
Hounslow..
 and the following No. quoted,

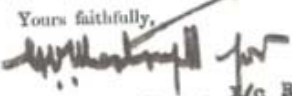
From
 No. 2 Infantry Record Office
Station Road, Hounslow
 To M. E. Ellen. Squires
43. West Allington.
Bridport. Dorset.
 Station Hounslow. Date 2.3.18.

24/3
 35 Lytton Rd
 M. E. Squires

SIR, MADAM,

I am directed to forward the undermentioned articles of private property of the late No. 916133. Rank Pte.
 Name A. B. Squires. Regt. 13th. Bn. Royal Sussex.
 and would ask that you will kindly acknowledge receipt of the same on the form opposite:—

These are the only articles at present forthcoming, but should any further articles be received at any time they will be duly forwarded.

Yours faithfully,

 Col.
 J. C. Records.
 Officer-in-Charge of Records.

SIR,
 I have to acknowledge receipt of the articles as stated opposite.

Yours faithfully,

(Sign here) Ellen, Squires.

The Officer i/c Records, Hounslow.
 Station Hounslow.

0203

Document sent with Albert Benjamin's effects. (Ancestry.co.uk)⁴

1906. Marriage solemnized at St. Mary's Church in the Parish of South Bersted in the County of West Sussex

Column	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
66	29 July 1906	Albert Benjamin Squires	27	Bachelor	Laborer	Wickham Green, South Bersted	Charles Squires	Farmer
		Ellen Paul	23	Spinster		Wickham Green, South Bersted	William Henry Paul	Farmer

Married in the parish church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by James Squires or after Canon by me.

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Ellen Paul in the Presence of us, Wm. C. Halsted Wm. C. Halsted James Squires James Squires

(166)

Marriage certificate of Albert Benjamin Squires to Ellen Paul, 29th July 1906 at St Mary's South Bersted.³

Endnotes

1. England 1891 census, Ancestry.com
2. England 1901 census, Ancestry.com
3. South Bersted parish marriages, West Sussex County Record Office
4. First World War Service Records. Ancestry.com
5. England 1911 census, Ancestry.com
6. War diaries of Royal Sussex Regiment, West Sussex County Record Office
7. R. Prior & T. Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story*, (Yale University Press, 2002)
8. J. Giles, *Flanders: Then and Now*, (After the battle, 1987)
9. Commonwealth War Graves Commission (www.cwgc.org)
10. Roll of Honour website:
www.roll-of-honour.com/ships/HMHSSStPatrick.html