

Fact File

Name: Alfred Ebenezer Bingham

Rank: Gunner

Service Number: 115334

Regiment: Royal Garrison Artillery, Italian Front

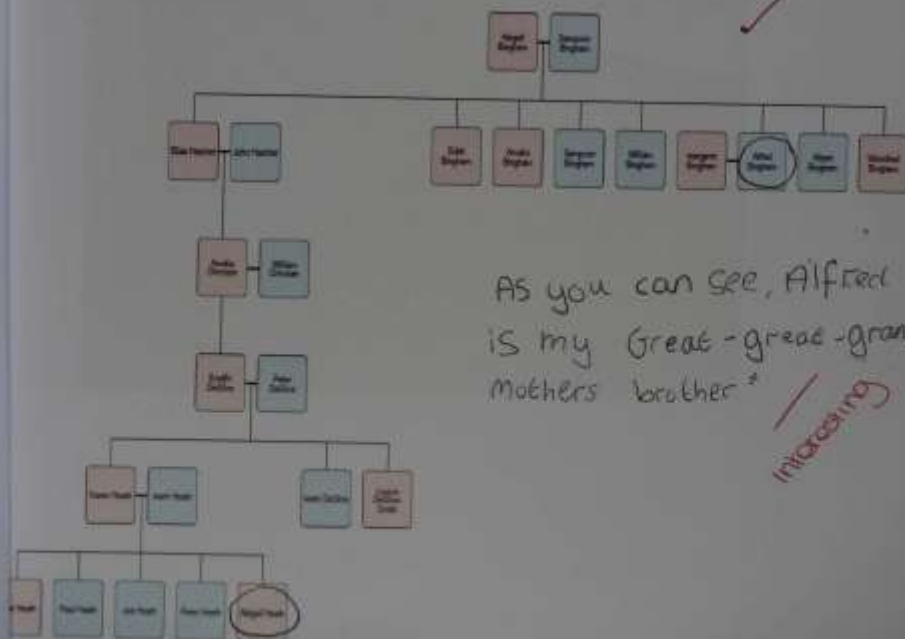
Battalion: 315th Siege Battery

Date of Death: 27/10/1918 (age 30)

Place of Death: No. 29 Base Hospital Cremona Italy

Enlisted: Hove

Buried: Cremona Town Cemetery Italy



* Source: www.ancestry.com

Where He Lived

This is where Alfred lived with his wife Margaret before he enlisted the address is 65 High Street Shoreham which is now an off licence. I am certain he lived here because it says on both the Sussex roll of honour website and on the CWCG website and these are both official websites.

✓
Good



Royal Garrison Artillery

Alfred was in the royal garrison artillery during the First World War. Men in this branch of the British artillery regiment had to control immensely destructive guns some way behind front line. Before the war, the RGA had the task of manning the guns of the British Empire forts and fortresses including coastal artillery batteries. From 1914 when the army possessed very little heavy artillery it grew into a very large component of the British forces. All men had to be over 5feet 4inches tall. ✓

Military historian John Terraine said 'the war of 1914-18 was an artillery war: artillery was the battle winner, artillery was what caused the greatest loss of life, the most dreadful wounds and the deepest fear.' This source is very reliable because he was a leading historian and had, had many years to research the subject. Also the book this quote is from was published in 1982 therefore the author would have had access to those who had fought in the war and had first-hand experience. ✓

✓
Gator



315th Siege Battery

During World War 1 there were 4 different types of batteries in the RGA

- Siege batteries
- Heavy batteries
- Mountain batteries
- Anti-aircraft artillery

Alfred was in the 315th siege battery. Siege Batteries, had the job of using their huge guns to destroy or neutralise enemy artillery as well as putting destructive fire down on strongpoints, dumps, stores, roads and railways behind enemy lines.

The 315th siege battery was based in Italy during the war controlling the heavy artillery. Like all soldiers they would have received basic training while remaining in Britain such as how to follow commands, march and safely handle their weapons.



366. SIEGE BATTERY, ROYAL GARRISON ARTILLERY

There are no pictures of the 315th siege battery but it would have looked like this

Weapons He May Have Used

The Royal Garrison Artillery used a range of heavy guns and howitzers during the war unlike the Royal Horse Artillery and the Royal Field Artillery who used smaller and lighter horse-drawn guns. Siege batteries in the RGA used heavy howitzers rather than guns. They were generally 6 inch, 8 inch or 9.2 inch howitzers although occasionally they used huge 12 inch howitzers which were mounted on railways or on roads. These howitzers were used to send large calibre high explosive shells into enemy lines.

Howitzer normally fired their shells at an angle of 45° or more therefore they did not go as far as guns but could go over objects or men in front of them.



A 9.2 inch howitzer



This picture shows RGA gunners filling a huge 12 inch howitzer with shells marked 'for fritz'.

What Did Gunners Do?

During world war gunners had a very important role as the only way to destroy enemy troops and counter attack enemy fire was using these devastating guns and howitzers. In the Royal Garrison Artillery the men had to use very large guns which when moved had to be broken down into smaller pieces and dragged by horses or motorized vehicles to another position.

Alfred's battery specifically would have been in charge of a large howitzer. RGA officer Monty Cleave said 'A howitzer fires upwards in a rather curved trajectory, so that when it arrives at the target it drops rather from the sky... a howitzer is superb for shooting at targets which are behind a hill' This is reliable evidence demonstrating the way a howitzer was used as the quote is from someone who was there and would have no reason to change or embellish the truth.

Gunners not only had to load and fire guns but they also had to carry heavy shells around. Unfortunately firing handling highly explosive shells came at a risk and one of the major dangers for gunners was premature firing shells. Gunner S Baker said 'before we got into the place where we were, a phone call came down and said that there was a terrible premature. There was two killed and one wounded.'

Death

The only information I can find out about Albert's death is that he died on the 27th October 1918 just over two weeks before the end of the war and that he died in no.29 base hospital Cremona. From this I can infer that he either died as a result of injuries or from the 1918 influenza pandemic which struck the world between January 1918 and December 1920.

It is likely that his death was due to the flu because soldiers were normally affected by it worse than other people due to their close proximity living conditions. Also unlike other pandemics it affected those between the age of 20-45 most therefore Alfred would have been susceptible (as he was 30 at the time). Finally Italy was one of the worse affected countries and that is where Alfred died.

If Albert did die from injuries then it is likely that they were sustained in the battle of Vittorio Veneto the last major battle of World War I. The battle took place between 24th October and the 3rd of November 1918 and signalled the end of the war on the Italian front with an Italian victory. This map shows where the battle took place.



Grave

Alfred is buried in Cremona Town Cemetery amongst around 80 other WW1 casualties from many different regiments. His headstone is inscribed with the words 'they miss you most, who loved you best' it also has his name, regiment, military number and date of death on it. Additionally, the headstone depicts a cross with the Royal Garrison Artillery logo inside it. Also buried in the cemetery are A. Bailey, James Gilliland, George Smith and A. Nichols all of whom served in the RGA and Edwin Thomas Howells who was in the 315th siege battery with Alfred and died 19 days after him of pneumonia.

There is a memorial for all those who died from Shoreham-by-Sea is on the wall of St Mary de Haura church and Alfred's service to his town and country is remembered there.



Medals

Even though I can't find any records of the specific medals that Alfred was awarded, there are some medals he would have definitely have received due to his service to his country.

He would have definitely have got the British War Medal as all soldiers who went overseas with the army during the War were issued with it even if they did not enter a theatre of war. Approximately 6,610,000 British War Medals were issued and the soldiers regiment and number was inscribed around the rim.



He would have also received the Victory Medal (which was given to every man who entered a theatre of war) because he was entered the

Italian theatre of war. Around 5,725,000 Victory Medals were issued.



Many soldiers were also issued with the 1914-15 Star but as Alfred didn't sign up until 1917 then he would not have.

Other medals that were issued include the 1914 star, the allied victory medal, The Territorial Force War Medal and the silver war badge.

Local historian Brian Roote says 'these were ordinary men called upon to do extraordinary things and passed the test with courage, dignity and honour. Recordemur Semper' (always remember)

Royal Garrison Artillery Uniform

Alfred would have worn a uniform like the one of this gunner in the RGA 355th siege battery. He is recognised as being in the Royal Garrison Artillery mainly by the logo on his shoulder.

They were also recognised by the logo on their caps. All gunners were issued with a white lanyard which is shown in both these pictures on the right shoulder. This was attached to a fuse key used to fire guns. Gunners generally are pictured with a bandolier. Like all soldiers gunners wore thick woollen tunic dyed khaki and khaki coloured trousers. Underneath they would have worn a thick shirt and vest.



Another unknown
RGA gunner

How Did The War Affect Shoreham?

Before he enlisted, Alfred lived and worked as a shopkeeper in Shoreham-by-Sea a small coastal town in Sussex. At the time Shoreham was more rural than today and much of the farmland and fields were turned into an army training camp at the beginning of the war.



This is a postcard that was sent home from a soldier in the Shoreham training camp. It shows neat lines of tents where the soldiers slept. This may not be an accurate portrayal of the camp as the area, being on a slope, would have collected rainwater and the conditions may have been more

muddy and not so ordered. They would not show this on the postcard because it may discourage others from joining the army.

In the early 20th century Shoreham had a relatively small population and as many of the men went to fight (pictured below) and many died, most jobs will have gone to women changing the way Shoreham functioned as a town altogether.



Conclusion

I chose my soldier because I knew I had an ancestor in the war called Alfred Bingham and I was interested to know more about him while researching for this project. I found his name, rank, regimental number as well as a small amount of information about his family on the Shoreham roll of honour site. I found my information from a variety of websites but those most helpful were:

- www.roll-of-honour.com
- www.cwgc.org
- www.1914-1918.net
- www.historylearningsite.co.uk
- www.ancestry.co.uk
- www.wartimememoriesproject.com
- www.plansofmice.co.uk
- www.shorehambysea.com
- www.greatwar.co.uk
- www.roll-of-honour.com
- www.twgpp.org
- www.1914.org/podcasts/podcast-32-gunners/

These websites were very useful as they provided quotes, information and pictures. Unfortunately not all information I found was reliable as this all happened nearly 100 years ago, but if I found a quote from someone at the time or a picture to back up a statement then I knew I was more likely to be accurate. For example one website said Alfred was a mechanic and another said he was a shopkeeper but I found a statement from him, in writing on his military record on ancestry, saying he was a shopkeeper therefore I know that that was his occupation. *Good*

I have had many difficulties researching for this project as I frequently couldn't find appropriate information for example when I was looking at his regiment and battery it wasn't always

clear which one was which and how large they were. Also there was a lot of information about the RGA siege batteries up until siege battery 257 but after that there was very little data. As my soldier was in the 315th siege battery it took a long time to find information on him. As well as this most websites with accurate information required a subscription and even then I would not know how reliable they were. To overcome these challenges I did thorough searches of all the websites and looked instead for pictures that can often give more information and I looked at public forums such as the 'great war forum' to discover how others found out more about their ancestors.

Despite the difficulties I encountered, I have enjoyed this project. I have found out a lot more about World War 1 including the mental and physical hardships the soldiers faced. It has also given me a better perspective on the war and more of an idea of how many men suffered and died. Before I did this project I didn't realise the importance of the Italian front, how it shaped the war and how many British soldiers fought there.

It would have been easier to do this project if there was more information on the activities of different regiments during the war. Despite this, if I hadn't have had to look on a range of websites I don't think I would have found out as many interesting details.

Overall I found this project very interesting despite the difficulties I faced. I also found it a little upsetting at times because I didn't realise the magnitude of the destruction of the war. I think it's important that we learn about the war in order to prevent such things happening again.

By Abigail Heath