ERNEST WILLIAM BLUNDEN

BY BETHANY COLLARD

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When we look at WW1 we only ever hear about the battles, the dates, the weapons. But what about the men that died in those battles from those weapons? They often get forgotten and over time just become a number, one of the millions of deaths that were the consequence of this war. All these everyday men are the interesting ones, and this book is about one of them; and his name was Ernest William Blunden.

NAME: Ernest William Blunden
BIRTH PLACE: Sompting, Sussex
DEATH DATE: 18 June 1916
ENLISTMENT LOCATION: Worthing
RANK: Private
REGIMENT: Royal Sussex Regiment
BATTALION: 9th Battalion
NUMBER: G/7021
TYPE OF CASUALTY: Gas Wounds

Despite it having nothing to do with the war, researching Ernest’s family was one of the most interesting topics; especially the Muster Book. In the 1911 Census, Mrs Blunden wrote that she had 3 living children. However, there is no trace of this third child in birth or death certificates. I guessed it was a girl because there was no military record for anyone else. Perhaps Mrs Blunden had an affair and this child is the result there reality? The documents were probably lost.

Ernest’s younger brother Henry was in the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders Regiment, and was a Corporal. He was killed in action on the 31st July 1917 aged 26.
1911 CENSUS

THE BLUNDEN

Edwin  Mary Jane  FAMILY TREE  Henry Edward

Ada Virgie  Ernest William  ?

Alice CM  Ernest J

All this information is very useful because it is just plain facts that tell me almost everything I need to know about Ernest, it's also very reliable as it comes from the website ancestry which collects official documents and is verified by experts. However, the "3rd child" did throw me off a bit.
The 9th Battalion

These are all the battles this battalion faced:

1915:
25-26 September  Battle of Loos

1916:
14th February  Hooge, Ypres Salient (VC action)
30th April  Wulverghem (German gas attack)
Battles of the Somme:
11-22 August + 31 August-2 September  Battle of Delville Wood
3-5 September  Battle of Guillemont

1917:
Battles of Arras
9-14 April  Battle of Vimy ridge
Battles of Ypres
7-14 June  Battle of Messines Ridge
Battles of Ypres (3rd Ypres)
31 July-13 September  Battle of Pilckem Ridge
16-18 August  Battle of Langemarck

1918:
First battles of the Somme:
21-23 March  Battle of St Quentin
24-25 March  Actions on the Somme Crossings
26-27 March  Battle of the Aune

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4th April  
Battle of the Aire

Battles of the Hindenburg Line
8-9 October Battle of the Cambrai
9-12 October Battle of the Sene
the final advance in Picardy
4 November Battle of the Sambre
5-7 November Passage of the grand Honnelle

The 9th Battalion was formed in Chichester in 1915. It was under command of 73rd Brigade in 24th Division. They landed in Boulogne on 1st September 1915.

Ernest died from gas wounds on 18th June 1916, and because of the gas attack on 30th April 1916 that seems to be when he was taken ill.
ARMY LIFE

Ernest would have worn khaki serge tunic trousers, with knee length wool puttees, and service cap with regimental pattern badge. His gun is the 303" short magazine Lee-Enfield rifle.

Before going to war, Ernest would’ve received some training. For a private like Ernest it would start with basic training in fitness, drill, march discipline and field craft. If then they were specialist, (sapper, signaler, bomber etc) they would receive training relevant to this role. Everyone would then get training in first aid, gas defence, wireless etc.

Once they were overseas they would be trained every so often in other skills.

Life in the trenches was both dangerous and horrible. There were rats andlice everywhere. The mud and rain buried the bodies in no mans land. Dead bodies were scattered everywhere and the constant fear all helped make the trenches a real nightmare. When the men weren’t fighting they spent time repairing sandbags and putting up barbed wire to stop them getting bored.

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GAS

At the start of the war, soldiers were given cloth dipped in urine or bloodstained soda to stop gas infecting them. Gas masks weren’t used until 1916 and were changed many times during the war.

Ernest died of gas poisoning on 17th June 1916, probably from chlorine or phosgene gas because mustard gas wasn’t used until after his death. The Germans weren’t the first to use gas, but they used it in 1915 in battle of Ypres.

Chlorine Gas: Chlorine gas burns the throat of its victim, making them ill if asphyxiation lasts getting enough oxygen. It mixes with the moisture in its victim’s eyes and lungs and causes yellow mucus to come pouring out of your nose and mouth. Eventually, the build up of mucus in the lungs causes them to swell.

Phosgene Gas: Phosgene gas was sometimes combined with chlorine gas. It can take up to 40% to 40% to take effect on its victim but when it does they cough a lot, have burning eyes and lungs, watery eyes, blurred vision, difficulty breathing, sneezing, and vomiting. It can cause some symptoms to fibrillate or burn third in the lungs, coughing up white or pink liquid or low blood pressure.

Mustard Gas: Mustard gas wasn’t used until 1917 and by the end of the war, had killed 1 million soldiers. You cannot see mustard gas but it does have an odd smell if the ground is cold enough. It can settle there and stay for up to a few weeks. When it was first used, it could get through their gas masks, meaning they had to improve them, so it’s inside you you can’t see it but it can. Can cause skin burns, red spots that turn to blistering swelling in your nose and throat as your mucus is blocked, irritation, burning or blisters in the eyes, rashes or bloody noses, swelling tongue, shortness of breath, abdominal pain, diarrhea, fever, nausea, vomiting and loss of voice.
WHEN RESEARCHING, I MOSTLY USED THE INTERNET AND TEXTBOOKS. WITH TEXTBOOKS THEY ARE OFTEN VERY USEFUL FOR GENERAL INFORMATION, I COULD LEARN A LOT ABOUT TRENCH LIFE FROM THEM, BECAUSE THEY ARE USED IN SCHOOLS SO THEY HAVE TO BE USEFUL. THEY ARE OFTEN FAIRLY RELIABLE BECAUSE THEY ARE USED IN TEACHING, THEY ARE USUALLY WRITTEN BY EXPERTS WHO KNOW ABOUT THE SUBJECT. THE INTERNET HOWEVER DOES HAVE SOME WEBSITES THAT ARE QUITE UNTRUSTWORTHY AND COULD BE WRITTEN BY ANYBODY, SO THE INFORMATION COULD BE FALSE. FOR THE PROJECT I MOSTLY USED WEBSITES I KNEW AND COULD TRUST.

I FOUND THIS PICTURE (SEE BELOW) IN THE DUMBARTONWORKERS WEBSITE, WHICH TOLD ME A LOT ABOUT GAS. I THINK IT IS QUITE USEFUL, BECAUSE IT SHOWS ME WHAT UNIFORM SOLDIERS WORE, WHAT GAS MASKS WERE USED, WEAPONS AND A LITTLE IDEA OF THE CONDITIONS. IT IS RELIABLE BECAUSE IT WAS A PICTURE TAKEN AT THE TIME AND IT'S MEANT TO INFORM PEOPLE OF THE CONDITIONS IN WWI.
RESEARCH:

THE ROYAL SUSSEX REGIMENT:
This website was useful because it told me about the uniform and background of the 9th battalion. It was very reliable because it was set up to keep the memory of this regiment alive and to inform us about them. Some of the writers even had ancestors that fought for them.

HOW STUFF WORKS:
Howstuffworks gave me all the information about gas and its effects. It was very good, and I had to edit out some information because there was so much. It was reliable because the whole website is about explaining science like this.

ANCESTRY:
This gave me lots of background information about Ernest. It was useful because it was just what I was looking for, but not so reliable because there were bits of Ernest, Blandford, so I had to do a lot of working things out, but it is meant to inform.

SUSSEX ROLL OF HONOUR:
This is where I found out who Ernest was, it gave me brief information.

THE LONG, LONG TRAIL:
The Long, Long Trail gave me information about life in the trenches and the training involved. It was useful because there was plenty of information, and reliable because the website is all about researching soldiers and it is very factual.

BATTLEFIELDS:
This website told me about the battles and casualties of the 9th battalion; it was useful as the information told me a lot, but may not be as reliable as the other sites because it wasn’t made by experts who study the time period properly.