

Sergeant Hubert George Latimer

Sergeant Hubert George Latimer lived in Moseley, Birmingham and was one of 19,240 British soldiers who were killed on the first day of the Somme.ⁱ He was the eldest son of John and Emily Latimer and just twenty-three years old when he died. His name does not appear on any memorial local to Moseley.

Hubert was born in Smethwick in late 1892. The family is recorded in the 1901 census living at 1a, Lime Grove, Moseley Road, Birmingham. By 1911, the census shows John and Emily now have six children, all boys, and are still living in Lime Grove. Hubert, by then, was eighteen years old and the youngest son, Frank, a mere six weeks old. We don't know much about the family except that Hubert had been a choirboy at St Agnes Church in Moseley for six years and that his father, John, started out as a coachman before joining the Birmingham Fire Brigade as a fireman. On leaving school Hubert became a warehouseman for a drapery firm, Bell & Nicholson Ltd of Cannon Street in Birmingham city centre.ⁱⁱ



Members of the 1/8 Royal Warwickshire Regiment marching through Birmingham in August 1914, Ref viii

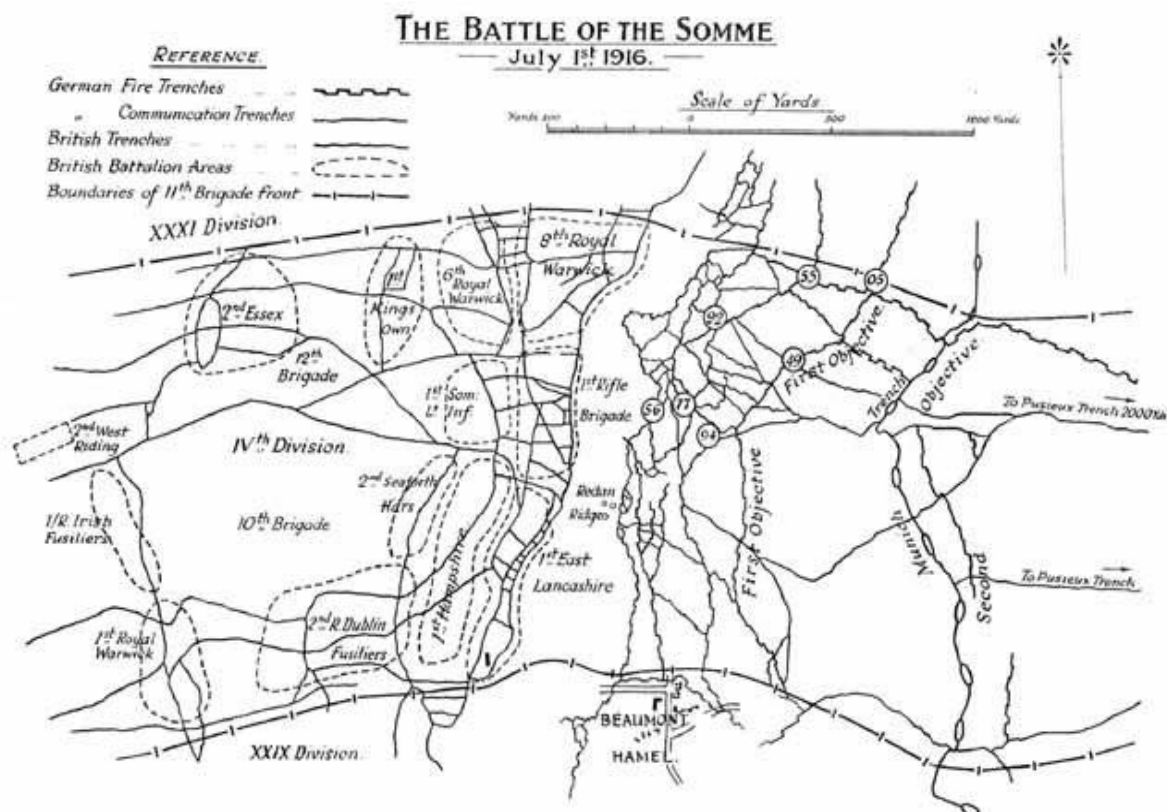
When war was declared, Herbert enlisted as a Territorial in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment (RWR). Private H G Latimer, Regimental No 1298, was attached to the 1/8 Battalion at the time he arrived in France on 23rd March 1915 to serve with the colours. The Battalion formed part of the 143rd Brigade in the 48th (South Midland) Division.

While serving in France, Hubert was promoted to lance-corporal and stayed in France until February 1916 when his Territorial Army engagement expired.ⁱⁱⁱ However, after a brief spell at home, he rejoined his Regiment at the Front and by the time of the Somme offensive he had been promoted to the rank of sergeant

On 1st July 1916, the Battle of the Somme commenced. The 1/8 RWR were in the first wave of attack, tasked to advance towards an area between Beaumont Hamel and Serre. After making some early progress, the attack was held up. Such was the configuration of the enemy's defences known as 'The quadrilateral', which had been relatively untouched by the preparatory artillery bombardment, that the task of taking the enemy's line was virtually impossible due to flanking machine gun fire. Despite repeated efforts, the attack failed and the 1/8 RWR took very heavy losses. It was

estimated afterwards that the 8th Battalion had taken 90% casualties. In all probability, it was here that Hubert was killed.

There were initial gains in this sector, notably by the 1/8 RWR, but a strong German counter attack forced a retirement by the British. As a result of this, a very large number of dead and wounded had to be left behind in the German lines with little hope of rescue.^{iv}



Map of the 1st day of the Battle of the Somme showing the position of the 1/8 Royal Warwickshire Regiment

During the action the 1/8 RWR suffered a total of 588 casualties. One hundred and seventy of the dead were never found, including the Battalion CO, Lieutenant Colonel Edgar Arthur Innes and Hubert. Their names are commemorated on the Thiepval memorial.^v

Two of Hubert's brothers also served in the Great War, John as a telegraphist and Arthur as an able seaman, in the RNVR. Both survived the war.^{vi}

There is a very vivid and moving account of this action that has been attributed to Private Sidney Williamson that takes one into the midst of the attack and its aftermath in a 'Brief History of the First World War' by Jon E Lewis.^{vii}



The Thiepval Memorial

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Endnotes

- i Brown, Malcolm. *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Western Front*. Pan MacMillan. London, (2001), p 114
- ii *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 1st August 1916
- iii See ii
- iv The Great War Forum
<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=174985>
- v Carter, Terry. *Birmingham Pals: 14th, 15th & 16th (Service) Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment*. Pen & Sword Books Ltd. Barnsley, 1997, p 229
- vi RNVR Other Ranks –Medal Rolls 1914- 1918
<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=gbm%2fadm171%2f037028>
- vii Lewis, Jon E. *A Brief History of the First World War*. Constable & Robinson Ltd. London, (2014). pp 221-2
- viii Brown, Malcolm. *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme*. Pan Books. London, (1997 2 ed) p 284. Illustration taken from the IWM Docs, S Williamson Collection.