

## Private Reginald Charles Bendall

The 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade took part in a subsidiary attack in the Somme Offensive, the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, 15<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1916, notable for the introduction of tanks. The attempt to advance deeply on the right and pivot on the left failed and the unfortunate 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade met with hostile machine gun fire and artillery; all but one officer and many men were killed. One of the men who lost their lives was Reginald. He was just 20 years old.

Reginald's father, Charles Wilfred Bendall, was born in Clifton, Barton Regis, Bristol on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1871.<sup>i</sup> At the age of twenty he was 'shoemaker's pattern cutting apprentice' and boarded with the Webber family in Clifton Wood Crescent in Barton Regis.<sup>ii</sup> A year later in 1892, Charles married Sarah Elizabeth (known as Lizzie) in the winter of 1892.<sup>iii</sup> By 1901 the family had moved to Yatton Street, Yatton, Somerset with their four children, including Reginald born in the autumn of 1896.<sup>iv</sup> Charles is recorded in the census for that year as a 'jeweller's traveller'.

Around 1904 the family moved again and settled in Birmingham.<sup>v</sup> The 1911 census records the family at 4 Princess Place, Middleton Road, Kings Heath and Charles as an agent selling sewing machines.<sup>vi</sup> Two more children had been born by then, Kathlene (b 1903) and George (b 1906).<sup>vii</sup> Reginald had left school and become an ironmonger's assistant.

When war broke out in August 1914, Reginald enlisted for three years with the colours as a Private, No 42700, in the 79<sup>th</sup> Sanitary Section of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) on 7<sup>th</sup> October.<sup>viii</sup> He was nineteen years and three months old, 5' 8" tall with a fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. At the time of his attestation he was a fruiterer and living at home with his parents and siblings at 85 Coldbath Road, Moseley, Birmingham.<sup>ix</sup>

A Sanitary Section of the Royal Army Medical Corps (consisting of a Lieutenant or Second-Lieutenant, 2 Sergeants, 2 Corporals, 20 Privates and 1 batman) was added to each Division in early 1915. Its job was to maintain as far as possible clean water supplies, cooking facilities and billets, de-lousing stations and similar facilities. The Sanitary Sections were withdrawn from Divisions and came under Corps or Army control from March 1917 onwards.<sup>x</sup>

On 1<sup>st</sup> June 1915, Reginald transferred to the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consorts Own) as a signaller, No S/11376. After a period of training, he embarked for France on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1915, and joined the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion Rifle Brigade in the field, five days later.<sup>xi</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade formed part of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 14<sup>th</sup> Light Division, XV Corps of the Fourth Army.<sup>xii</sup>

The first half of 1916 was spent in preparation for the 'Big Push' on 1<sup>ST</sup> July. As part of this training each man was required to carry with them, when in the field, their smoke helmet. Unfortunately, Reginald mislaid his and he was docked seven days pay on 19<sup>th</sup> March for 'losing by neglect one smoke helmet'.<sup>xiii</sup>

The 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade took part in a subsidiary attack in the Somme Offensive, the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, from 15<sup>th</sup> to 22nd September 1916, notable for the introduction of tanks. The attack was launched across a 12 km front from Rawlinson's Fourth Army salient on 15 September. Twelve divisions were employed, along with all forty-nine tanks the British army possessed.



**Figure 1: C15, a Mark 1 British WW1 tank at the battle of Flers-Courcelette on September 15th, 1916**

The war diary of the 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade (9 RB) is devoid of any information on events between the 11<sup>th</sup> September to 17<sup>th</sup> September. but the well kept diary of the 9th Battalion Kings Royal Rifle Corps (9 KRRC) who were to the rear of the 9 RB in the attack on Gird Trench and Bulls Road on the first day of the battle, 15<sup>th</sup> September, tells the story and fate of the 9 RB.

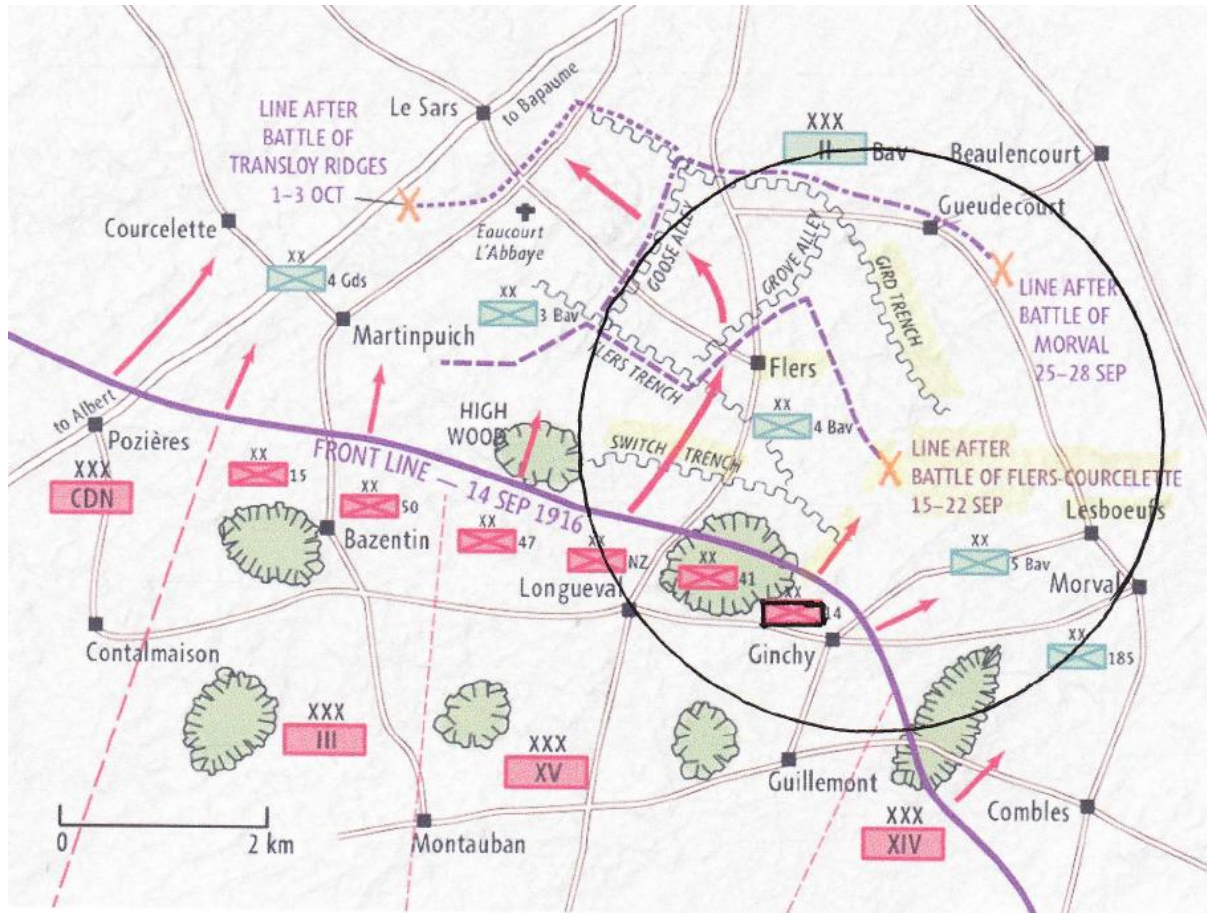


Figure 2: Map showing the position of the 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade (red rectangle outlined in black) on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1916 and the position of Switch and Gird Trenches, Flers and Lesboeufs

Extracts relating to the 9 RB on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1916 observed by the 9 KRRC:

6.20 am. 9 RB moved from Montauban Alley to York Alley.

8 am. The 9 RB appeared to be bearing away too far to their right

8.15 am. The 9 RB passed through Switch Trench without stopping. Machine gun fire from Lesboeufs area passing over their heads (Lesboeufs being the village to their right on Bulls Road being attacked by the Guards division)

8.30 am - 8.45 am. The 9 RB still bearing off to their right.

9 am. Two German field guns firing towards Flers (the village to their left) from a position on Sunken Road. The 9 RB had stopped advancing and had formed a line more or less parallel with Gird Trench.

About 9.30 am. Capt Merewether, commanding 9 RB, was in communication with the KRRC to tell them that he intended to attack Gird Trench at the appointed time, according to the programme. As his battalion were very weak the 9 KRRC would advance in close support of the 9 RB.

9.30 am. The 9 KRRC was organised in two lines behind the 9 RB ready to advance behind them. Battalion HQ established from where a good view of the front could be obtained.

9.30 am – 11.20 am. Our (artillery) guns did not appear to be shelling Gird Trench (meaning the German machine guns and snipers in the trench were not impeded at all). Although no friendly shelling on Gird Trench the 9 RB tried to advance on this trench but as soon as they got on the rising ground in front of them a hostile machine gun prevented them advancing. All their remaining officers (approx 16 including Capt. Merewether) were killed bar one junior officer and 315 other ranks, and their attack failed.

The total number left of the 9 KRRC and the small number of 9 RB were about 350.

In their orders was this:

*The word "retire" will NOT be used under any circumstances.*

*All ranks are to be warned that men returning from the firing line with so called "shell-shock" or slight scratches will be tried by court martial and severely dealt with.<sup>xiv</sup>*

Reginald is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial. His name is also on the WW1 memorial at St Mary's Church, Moseley, Birmingham.

His father applied for and received his three war medals.



There were some successes in this action. The British gained about 2,500 yards in general and captured High Wood. As a result they were able to move forward about 3,500 yards in the centre, beyond Flers and Courcellette.

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**Moseley Society History Group**

## Endnotes

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- i 1939 Register
- ii 1891 census
- iii England & Wales marriages 1837-2008, 1892, Barton Regis, 4/4, 6A, 326
- iv England & Wales births, 2006, Barton Regis, 3/4, 6A, 65
- v The 1911 census records Kathlene Bendall born in Birmingham
- vi The original image makes 'Princess Place' difficult to transcribe, but looking at the original census for the neighbours living at No 1 and No 2 provides clarity of the spelling
- vii England & Wales births 1837-2006, Kings Norton, 1903, 3/4, 6C, 454  
England & Wales births 1837-2006, Kings Norton, 1906, 4/4, 6C, 379
- viii British Army Service Records 1914-1920
- ix a) Soldiers who died in the Great War 1914-1919  
b) British Army Service Records 1914-1920
- x Sanitary Section RAMC  
<http://www.1914-1918.net/fieldambulances.htm>
- xi See ix (b)
- xii Order of the Battle of the Somme  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/order\\_of\\_battle\\_for\\_the\\_Somme#Battle\\_of\\_Flers-Corcelette:-15.e2.80.9322\\_September](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/order_of_battle_for_the_Somme#Battle_of_Flers-Corcelette:-15.e2.80.9322_September)
- xiii National Archives, War diary 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade, Ref WO 95/1901  
See ix (b)
- xiv Invision zone  
<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/179798-what-happened-to-the-9th-btn-rb/>

## illustrations

Figure 1 Surviving British WW1 tanks

<http://tank-photographs.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/ww1-british-mark-1-male-tank-bovington.html>

Figure 2 Map of the Battle of Flers-Corselette

<https://www.arrse.co.uk/community/threads/today-in-british-history.230988/page-120>