

Stanley Robert Cox

Corporal STK/1295, 10th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers



(Photograph from the Bucks Examiner, 8 December 1916)

Stanley Robert Cox's birth was registered between January and March 1894 in Amersham. Stanley was the second child of Robert and Matilda Cox. They married in 1890 and had three other children, William George (born in 1891), Ellen Maud (1896) and Annie Elizabeth (1900). William George was also killed in the First World War. At the time of the 1901 Census the family lived at Norwoods Yard in Amersham but by the time of the 1911 Census they had moved to 12 Broadway, Amersham. The house had 5 living rooms. In 1911, at the age of 17, Stanley was working as a printer's apprentice, articled to a Mr King of Amersham. Stanley's father, Robert, worked at the local brewery, Weller's.

Stanley was unmarried. He later lived in Walworth and had worked for two years with a printer in London. He had just completed his improver's term when war broke out. Along with other printers, he enlisted in the 10th (Service) Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers¹ in London.

Recruiting for this battalion began on 21 August 1914 at the offices of Messrs Govett at 6 Throgmorton Street, in the heart of the City of London. The Royal Fusiliers were also known as the City of London Regiment and this battalion acquired the unofficial title of 'The Stockbrokers', adding the prefix STK to their service number. On the 25 August 400 men enlisted, taking the number of volunteers up to 1300. If they acquired their number as they attested it seems likely that Stanley joined on that day (pp 20-21). He would complete almost two years' service, of which nine months would be spent in France and achieve the rank of Corporal. He was killed on 18 November 1916 aged 22 years. Tragically his elder brother, William George, was injured on the same day.

On 29 August the new battalion was addressed by Lord Roberts in Temple Gardens and, preceded by the band of the Grenadier Guards, marched, still in civilian clothes, to Tower Ditch, where they were sworn in. From then on, the founding members of the battalion called themselves "the Ditchers".

On 3 September they moved into tents at Colchester and training began. Reveille at 5.30 would be

¹ For a detailed account see David Carter, *The Stockbrokers' Battalion in the Great War, a History of the 10th (Service) Battalion Royal Fusiliers*, Pen & Sword, 2014. Page references are to this edition.

followed by coffee and biscuits at 6 and an hour of physical exercise from 6.30 to 7.30. After breakfast at 8 they would drill from 9 to 12. Having had dinner at 12.30, they would parade at 2 for another two hours' drill. Tea at 4.30 was usually followed by some free time. Webbing was issued later that month and they discovered how practical it was: "When it is all fixed together, by slipping two braces over our shoulders we can, in the space of two seconds load ourselves with belt, bayonet, trenching tool, haversack, water bottle, 150 cartridges and overcoat, etc, etc, and the whole lot can as quickly be taken off" (p 30).

Training soon extended to include skirmishing and rearguard actions, plus trench-digging in November and a 56-mile route march in December. With so many volunteers available, the unfit could be weeded out and tall upstanding Cox found himself in a unit in which no fewer than 13 of the officers were over six feet in height.

In October they moved into 4 blocks previously used as married quarters and learnt such survival skills as making bread and stew in mess tins. In February 1915 they moved to Andover and took part in field days and increasingly complex manoeuvres, joining the 111th Brigade in March. One of the battalion's diarists notes that they were inspected by Sir Archibald Murray and pronounced "the finest battalion in Kitchener's Army" (p 62).

Windmill Hill, Ludgershall, was their next destination in April and it was back to tents and hard, monotonous training. Saluting and bayonet drill occupied much of their time and they also learnt to advance in extended order and how to cover another battalion's retreat. The Lewis gun and transport sections also stepped up their training, but life under canvas was uncomfortable and morale seems to have suffered. However, at the end of June they were inspected by the King and in July their spirits rose as they felt they must be at last going abroad (p 80).

On 31 July 1915 they crossed from Folkestone to Boulogne as part of the 111th Brigade of the 37th Division in the 3rd Army. After being given a short taste of trench life in a quiet sector near Armentières, they were moved to Foncquevillers and began rotating in and out of the front line, spending 6 days holding the line, 6 days in reserve and 12 days "rest", during which period many fatigues were performed. Winston Churchill was one of their visitors during this time (p 116).

Once the **Battle of the Somme** had begun, the battalion was ordered to reinforce the 34th Brigade near Albert and moved up through La Boisselle towards Pozières. The battalion diary for 8 July 1916 recorded: "The trenches in and about the village were full of German and British dead and the scene was one of devastation. Heavy shellfire was encountered during passage through the village from the direction of Contalmaison and Ovillers. On return journey down Sausage Valley large parties were met with who were engaged burying the dead which lay about in large numbers" (p.149).

The 10th Royal Fusiliers had to attack on 15 July over 1300 yards of open ground sloping gently upwards towards Pozières. Rockets failed to fire on schedule because they were too damp and confusion ensued. A delay of only a few minutes allowed the German machine-gunners to return to their guns, with devastating consequences. The remnants of the battalion had to fall back in darkness between 11.30 and 2am and bivouack in the open, wherever they could. This was a very costly action. All four company commanders were killed or wounded and all the company sergeant majors and most of the sergeants were casualties, removing key experienced personnel.

Further casualties were sustained in August when the battalion was sent to relieve the Royal Scots at **High Wood**. New drafts arrived and further training took place between July and September 1916 and the 10th Royal Fusiliers rejoined the 111th Brigade on 17 September, and relieved the 13th Kings Royal Rifle Corps in trenches near Calonne.

The **Battle of Ancre Heights** from 13 to 18 November 1916 was the final major British attack in the **Battle of the Somme**. The Ancre Heights had been attacked previously on 1 July in a failed offensive. The slopes on either side of the River Ancre were attacked once again in foggy, wintry

conditions, with Beaumont Hamel finally falling into British hands.² Fighting was intense and casualties heavy. The objective was to gain the ground from Beaumont Hamel to Serre. Some progress was made, but Serre remained beyond reach. The weather deteriorated from bad to atrocious and was one of the reasons why the fighting came to a halt. The offensive finished on 18 November before the Germans retreated to the Hindenberg Line.

On 17 October the battalion had begun a march of 54 miles, taking it from Calonne to Puchevillers, about 15 miles west of Albert. Not a single man fell out and they were proud that all the men and horses arrived in good condition. More training followed.

On 13 November the battalion was again ready to attack, moving into position near Englebelmer. The previous day Beaumont Hamel had been captured and an abortive attempt made to take the Redan Ridge, but the troops had not only the wire defences of the Quadrilateral to contend with, but also deep mud.



A desolate view of the Ancre Valley in November 1916. The valley, normally marshy, had flooded during the winter rains and the landscape had been blasted by shellfire. (Photograph from a pamphlet issued by a museum in the Somme Battlefield area)

The battalion, entering the battle on 14 November, captured an isolated redoubt, taking 270 Germans prisoner and freeing 60 British captives. Having also seized three machine-gun posts, they spent the rest of the day collecting wounded and clearing the battlefield. At dawn on 16 November they attacked an area known as The Triangle, where the Frankfurt and Munich trenches intersected Leave Avenue. Under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire one party reached the objective, but could not hold it. They were then ordered to occupy Muck Trench and to establish four strong-points along it. The trench was occupied, but the four machine-gun posts cost several lives before they were ready and during the night a shell landed on the left post, killing an officer and nearly all his men.

"At 6:10am on the 18th the battalion carried out the order to attack the Triangle. All the parties, with the exception of that led by Second Lieutenant Barker, achieved their objectives. Barker's party was opposed strongly and was unable to enter Leave Avenue. The right flank of 32nd Division also failed to achieve its objectives and so the 10RF parties had to withdraw" (p 181). They were relieved the following day, but by then Corporal Stanley Robert Cox had been killed. His body was never identified.

² The British Army in the Great War 1914-18, www.1914-1918.net "The Long, Long Trail"

It was noted that less than a third of the 57 officers and men killed or fatally wounded between 13 November and 3 December had the STK prefix, showing just how much the ranks of the original Ditchers had been depleted in the 27 months of the battalion's existence.

The 8 December 1916 edition of *The Bucks Examiner* reported that Stanley was well known by many of the residents of Amersham and would be remembered as 'a promising young fellow of fine stature'.

The Captain of his company wrote to his parents:

"During the recent successful operations the battalion has been in action and success has not been without sacrifice. I deeply regret to have to inform you that your son, Corpl. S. R. Cox, was killed in action on November 18th. Please accept my most sincere sympathy in the great loss you have sustained, a sympathy in which all who knew him wish to join. I am happy to say that he suffered no pain, as the piece of shell which struck him killed him instantly. Your loss is also the Army's for Corpl. Cox was indeed a good soldier, absolutely fearless, straightforward, and reliable, and in every way one of the best men I had under my command." The Chaplain also wrote expressing sympathy and remarked that the Battalion had fought splendidly with the rest of the Brigade having captured a village, taking more than a thousand prisoners whilst their own casualties were not heavy.

Stanley was awarded the Allied Victory Medal and British War Medal, 1914-1918.

Corporal Stanley Robert Cox is remembered with Honour on the
Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, Somme (Pier and Face 16A)
and on the Roll of Honour of the 10th Royal Fusiliers
in St Michael's Church, Cornhill, in the City of London

For details about the Memorial and engravings, see the chapter on Memorials to the Missing.

Cpl Stanley Robert Cox was the brother of Rifleman William George Cox.