

# **Albert George Lane**

## **Rifleman R10737, 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps**

**Albert George Lane** was born in Amersham within the April to June registration quarter of 1891 and baptised on 19 July of the same year at St Mary's Amersham.

He was the son of Henry Lane, a bricklayer's labourer, and Charlotte (née Worley,) who had married in 1886. The family was recorded in the 1911 Census as living in a four-roomed house at The Alley, Amersham. This was a small group of houses within the Broadway (given as Number 4 on the CWGC website information) near St Mary's Church.

Albert was part of a family of eight or nine children, seven of whom were still living at home at the time of the 1911 Census. Emily Louisa aged 24, a general domestic, is assumed to be living away.<sup>1</sup> William Henry, the eldest son aged 22, was a shop assistant. Albert George had followed in his father's footsteps and become a bricklayer's labourer. Henry John<sup>2</sup> born in 1891, like his oldest sister, was no longer part of the household. Arthur Ernest aged 18 and Percy Edwin aged 16 were both unemployed. Elsie Evelyn aged 6 and Winifred Gladys aged 4 presumably attended school locally while Cyril Claud aged 1 remained at home.

Albert enlisted into the King's Royal Rifle Corps in Amersham and was attached to the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The 13th (Service) Battalion was formed at Winchester on 7 October 1914 as part of Kitchener's Third Army and attached as Army Troops to 21st Division. Albert George must have remained not far from home as the battalion trained initially at Halton Park Camp, Wendover, living under canvas, before moving on in November 1914 to winter billets in Amersham and Great Missenden. The battalion was originally clothed in emergency blue and was equipped with 400 Drill Purpose (DP) rifles and 600 wooden ones: this was later upgraded to one khaki service dress per man and 1000 DP rifles.

The Brigade moved to Windmill Hill on Salisbury Plain in April 1915 and was transferred to the 111th Brigade in the 37th Division. On 29 July an advance party of 108 men with all the animals and transport left camp, landing later at Le Havre. The battalion followed in two halves, leaving on 30 July aboard the SS *Servial*, which was escorted by two destroyers. The battalion numbered 998 men and 31 officers who sailed to Boulogne via Folkestone. They then marched to Ostrohove Rest Camp, reaching it at 0300 hours. The next day the battalion marched to the beach where they enjoyed bathing in the sea. In the afternoon they marched to Pont de Briques, and then set off for an unknown destination.

August was spent on further training in trench warfare and the battalion lost one man killed and one wounded, its first casualties, during this time. In September they relieved the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade at Hannescamps and were held in reserve at the catastrophic **battle of Loos** which took place in September. In October they moved to Berles and periods in trenches alternated with more training. November was marked by heavy downpours and mud and in December the period they spent in the trenches was shortened to three days.

Christmas Day was notable for a meal of tomato soup, roast goose and sausages with apple sauce followed by plum pudding and it was served by the officers who also provided free beer.

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<sup>1</sup> She was listed and then crossed out, but the details can still be read.

<sup>2</sup> Henry John appears only in the 1891 Census. The age given looks more like 2 weeks than 2 months. Unlike the other children in this family no entry of birth or baptism can be found for him, nor does he feature in the register of deaths. Albert George's imminent birth, registered in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 1891, casts further doubt on Henry John being a child of this family.

Moving early in 1916 to Bienvilliers, the troops found that their 3-day rotation in trenches had been changed to six days. This was made possible by the construction of dug-outs so that half of each company could be accommodated and have some respite while the other half manned the trench.

In February there was more wet weather to impede them but this time high gum boots were issued and used to wade through the mud. April saw a new surge of specialised training. Conditions in the trenches cannot have been good as inoculations against typhoid were administered on 17 April. It is to be hoped that the men had all recovered in time for the sports day scheduled for the 21<sup>st</sup>.

July 1916 saw the beginning of the long drawn-out **battle of the Somme**. When it began **Mametz Wood**, the largest stretch of forest in the area, being about a mile wide and a mile deep, had lain behind the German lines. The battle for it began on 7 July. After fierce bombardment Robert Graves commented in mid-July that 'not a single tree remained unbroken'.<sup>3</sup> By 1 August the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the KRRC was in what was left of the wood. Two days later they went forward to the front line, discovering that the trenches were shallow and contained many unburied dead. On the 4 August they endured heavy bombardment. The *War Diary*<sup>4</sup> for the 5<sup>th</sup> is laconic: "*Nothing to report. Artillery on both sides fairly active.*"

On 6 August, the day Albert George Lane died, there was still no mention of casualties. "*Relieved at 5am by 10 RF [10<sup>th</sup> battalion Royal Fusiliers] and moved to our old line in Mametz Wood. Enemy artillery very active from about midnight until 6am on Mametz Wood and on the valleys South and West.*" From the very scarce details given it seems probable that Rifleman Lane was killed by shelling during the course of the day. He was 25 years old.

Albert George Lane was awarded The 1914-15 Star, The Allied Victory Medal and The British War Medal, 1914-18.



Photograph by Chalmers Cursley

Albert George Lane is remembered with Honour  
Flatiron Copse Cemetery, Mametz, France.  
(grave reference V.D.3)

<sup>3</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, Penguin, 1986, p 175

<sup>4</sup> WO 95/2533/2, at the National Archives