

John Redding

Private 14616, 8th (Service) Battalion (Pioneers)
Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry



Photograph courtesy: Judy May (Redding)

John Redding was born in 1892 in Amersham. He was the eldest child of Albert and Sarah Redding. The 1901 Census shows the family living in the High Street, Amersham. Albert was a chairmaker and auxiliary rural postman. Their children were John (9), James (5) and George (1).¹

The attendance record of St Mary's School in Amersham shows John as a pupil in 1906 and the family attended the Baptist Church in Amersham.

In 1911 John aged 19 was living with his grandparents, John and Sarah Redding, at Broadway, Amersham. His grandfather, aged 72, was a labourer while his grandmother, at the age of 70, had a General Shop in their home.

John was unmarried and working as a carter for the Gas Company. For many years, the site between the Broadway and now St. Mary's Court was occupied by the gas works. The Amersham Gas Light and Coke Company first used the site in 1855. Ugly gas holders dominated the sky line until early 1994 when they were finally demolished and replaced by less noticeable offices. (Note that the Sarsen stones, pre-historic stones used as route markers, can still be seen outside the gates).

¹ I am indebted to Bob Reid, who has posted a family tree on Ancestry, for helpful information about John Redding and his father Albert John.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regt. No.
42 REDDING John	OXF+Bucks L.I. 8/	Pte	14616
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	4/106 816	3150	
BRITISH	-th-	-th-	
15 STAR	L/4 B 325		Died
Theatre of War first served in	11 France		
Date of entry therein	18.9.15		

Image courtesy: Ancestry UK

John joined the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (OBLI) at an Amersham recruiting meeting and his name is listed on the Roll of Honour printed in the Bucks Examiner of 2 October 1914, and 27 November 1914 and the Bucks Herald of 3 October 1914. The list of names was furnished by Mr H B Lee of Maplefield, Amersham Common. John joined the 8th (Service) Battalion (Pioneers) formed in Oxford in October 1914 as part of K3 [Kitchener's Third Army]. He served in France from 18 September 1915 and was later sent to Salonika .

Some idea of John Redding's service can be gained by looking at the history of the 26th Division of the Third Army as a whole.

The 26th Division

This Division was established in September 1914 as part of Army Order 388 authorising Kitchener's Third New Army, K3. The units began to assemble in the Salisbury Plain area from September 1914. Khaki uniform and equipment were not made available until February-April 1915 and in the meantime everything was improvised.

Embarkation for France began in September 1915 and the concentration of units at Guignemicourt (west of Amiens) was completed before the end of the month. However, the Division was not destined to remain on the Western Front, because in November 1915 it moved to Salonika where it then remained.

On 2 November, the Division concentrated at Flesselles and moved to Salonika via embarkation at Marseilles. On 26 December 1915, units began to move from Lembet to Happy Valley Camp and all units were in place there by 8 February 1916. The 26th Division remained in the Salonika theatre for the rest of the war,

During the first four months of 1916 the British Salonika Force had enough spadework to last it for the rest of its life. Large amounts of barbed wire were used and a bastion about eight miles north of the city of Salonika was created connecting with the Vardar marshes to the west, and the lake defences of Langaza and Beshik to the east, and so to the Gulf of Orfano and the Aegean Sea. This area was known as the 'Birdcage' on account of the quantity of wire used. The Bulgarians and Austrians also fortified the heights of the hills surrounding Salonika during the same time which had dire consequences later on. The original two Brigades eventually were reinforced by larger units until 22nd, 26th, 27th and 28th Divisions were there. If the Bulgarians had descended from their Doiran and Struma heights it would have been very difficult to 'push us into the sea', for the force was deployed to fortify an advanced defensive line.

The Salonika Force dug-in until the summer of 1916, by which time the international force had been reinforced and joined by Serbian, Russian and Italian units. The Bulgarian attempt at invasion of Greece in July was repulsed near Lake Doiran. At the beginning of Oct 1916, the British in co-operation with her allies on other parts of the front, began operations on the River Struma towards Seres. The campaign was successful with the capture of the Rupel.

John did not live long enough to see the successful conclusion of this campaign for he died on 8 July 1916 following an operation for appendicitis. A letter appeared in the Bucks Examiner of 11 August 1916 under the heading 'Death after Operation'.

News has reached England of the death of an Amersham soldier Pt J Redding who was with the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry Salonika Forces. The young soldier died after an operation for appendicitis. He was the nephew of Mr B Grove Gladstone Road Chesham. Mrs Redding has had a number of letters from officers, chaplain etc and one letter states:

Dear Mrs Redding

I deeply regret that the occasion has arisen for the sending this note but I feel as Quarter-Master-Sergt of the company in which your son John was, that the least I can do is to express my sincerest sympathies with you in your great loss & a loss which I am certain no heart can estimate or understand but a mother's. We were more than surprised when the news reached us, for it seemed such a sudden call. We saw him as recently as Tuesday last when we had to move and he left us to go into hospital. Jack, as he was known amongst us, was most popular with the Company, largely owing, I think, to his having been blessed with such a cheerful disposition, and he will be greatly missed by us all.

It seems strange that after nearly ten months of strenuous active service, he should have been taken from us like this, for although we have had no fighting, we have had a great deal of hard work, to say nothing of the treacherous climate which we have experienced out here. When one thinks of all the sorrowing parents, wives and sisters in the homeland, it seems more than the human heart can realise, and one appears to look in vain for a ray of light and hope amidst the darkness, and yet I think there is one, and I feel I cannot close without commending you to God of all comfort Who alone understands our hearts and can satisfy their needs and longing.

Believe me, most sincerely yours,

Frank Dawes

John was posthumously awarded The Allied Victory Medal, The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The 1914-15 Star.

John Redding is remembered with Honour and is buried at
Salonika (Lembet Road) Military Cemetery, (grave ref. 210)

He is also commemorated on the Memorial at the Baptist Church, subsequently the King's Church Amersham, which is now part of the King's Arms Hotel.



Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry
(picture from Wikipedia)

ADDENDUM

The following is a transcript of an article appearing in the Buckinghamshire Examiner of 14 January 1916. The material comprises extracts from letters, purportedly forwarded to the newspaper by a Mr E Redding, which he received from his son, A J Redding, describing some of the operations on the famous Gallipoli Peninsula.

There would appear to be some confusion in that A J Redding served in France and it was, in fact, his son J Redding who served, briefly in France, but late in 1915 was transferred to Salonika and it is to that part of the world that the letters apparently refer. In addition, A J Redding's father's name was John, who we believe had died in 1914, so 'Mr E Redding', the source of the letters, also remains something of a mystery.

However, the well-written letters, give a first-hand account of conditions in that theatre of war and the article is reproduced here in its entirety:

The Bucks Examiner, Jan 14th, 1916, p 2

OUR SOLDIERS.

Deeds of Daring that Thrill the Blood

Tough Times.

Mr E Redding, Kennel Cottage, Amersham, forwards letters received from his son, AJ Redding, who describe some of the operations upon the famous Gallipoli Peninsula.

In a letter written during October the writer says: 'Since writing you last I have changed my lodgings and am now under canvas in a most salubrious spot, the sort of domicile you read about in the Bible, where there are asses, pitchers of water, barley bread, and that sort of thing. Apart from this, the chief characteristics of the spot are wind and dust, and stony and rocky ground. Our menu is not altogether à la carte. We have bread and biscuits, the biscuits not of the fancy luncheon kind but more like those served out to the canine breed. This is for breakfast. There is stew for midday and bread and jam for tea, with an occasional 'tailor' in the way of bully beef. We get a wash twice a week, and have to go half a mile for the water and we have to wash in our own mess-tins; nothing else being available. Oh! Things glorious abroad! I don't think? This is a very cold place, and it is difficult to keep warm at night, although by sleeping in our clothes and putting on a blanket somehow. There are sixteen of us in a small tent in addition to kitbags, wet equipment and rifles so that our quarters are rather restricted.

Owing to the difficulties of shaving I have decided to cultivate a beard, and perhaps the face will improve my classical features.

In a further letter the writer says: 'Flies and snails are a great nuisance and the wind is blowing so strong and cruel. This is essentially an outdoor life, and our feather beds don't need much. Most of our work is of course done at night and that is the time when the shells and snails are busy. We are having a series of concerts at the rest camp, in which I am taking a glorious part.

Again: 'The flies are simply terrible. I am writing this letter under difficulties and am simply smothered with the horrible things. We all received 40 [10 shillings] pay the other day, which of course caused much rejoicing. Our enthusiasm was, however, damped when we came to spend it as there are no 'Whitebreads' or 'Harrod's' outlets. Figs and condensed milk are cheap. I don't think they are about the only delicacies I have sampled since leaving England. We are dished out tobacco or fags once a week and they are acceptable when not mouldy!

In another letter the writer enters into details as to the hardships he has to bear, here the censor has freely used the blue pencil. En passant, Redding says, 'Well, this is a climate! When it is not blowing gale and knocking the sand up something terrible, pouring with rain, or the cold is enough to freeze you, you have been washed out three times this week by terrible understorms, which flooded the dunes and simply

holes in the ground, with no covering. Blankets, everything got soaked, and in addition it was awfully cold. I have not had a wash for over a fortnight and it is about a month since I had my clothes off, so you can guess how things get like.

Another letter; I am pleased to say I have come out only after seven days more in the trenches. I have had an awful time, as we have bitterly cold winds with rain or snow, and of course enough mud and slush to almost drown one. The worst of it is that you cannot make out, but are practically in the same place and position all the time. I had only about two hours sleep during the whole seven days, and I never stopped shivering. Your feet get so cold and frozen that you cannot get them on the ground.

In the last letter of the batch sent to us the writer says: 'I think you would have a great shock if you saw us all now: all as thin as herrings, grimy, unshaven, covered with livestock, and absolutely horrible persons to look at.' The shells are beginning to buzz somewhat. No one would land on this dug, as it might disturb the furniture!

Evidently the writer had had a bad time, but there is the note of hope through all the letters.