

RIFLEMAN ALFRED LEONARD BROOKES

R/33936, 2nd Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps

Died aged 21 on 10 July 1917

Remembered with honour on the *Nieuport Memorial, Belgium*

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross, in the Abbey
and in the Congregational Church (now in the Methodist Church)



Nieuport Memorial, Belgium



King's Royal Rifle Corps

ALFRED LEONARD BROOKES was born in Tewkesbury in 1897 to Alfred, a printer, and Lucy Maria (formerly Collins). Both came from Tewkesbury and, in 1911, were living in East Street with Alfred Leonard and his younger sister, Olive May. In March 1914 Alfred Leonard was working for the Gloucester Co-operative Society and featured in a Court case when the Society was prosecuted, and convicted, for making him start work earlier than the permitted time for a boy his age. Other than that, little is known about Alfred's childhood, although he was possibly a member of the Congregational Church, where his death was commemorated. During the next two years, the family moved to Fisher Road, Coventry, which may be the reason why the obituary in the local newspapers was so brief. In August 1916 Alfred married Winifred E. Hale, daughter of Jesse Hale, a cooper, of Jeynes Buildings. They were married by licence at the Anglican Church of St. Paul, Foleshill; a son, Alfred L., was born on 12 January 1917.

Alfred was conscripted into the Gloucestershire Regiment and was assigned to the 16th (Training Reserve) Battalion for basic training. The battalion was formed on 1 September 1916 as part of an Army reorganisation to cope with the influx of recruits arising from the introduction of conscription. After completing his training, probably in early 1917, Alfred was posted to the 2nd Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps, a pre-war regular battalion which came under the command of 1st Division. The division was part of the original British Expeditionary Force that landed in France in August 1914 and

was involved in most of the major battles on the Western Front.

In early 1917 the division was warned to prepare for a summer operation along the Belgian coast (*Operation Hush*). This would be an amphibious landing near Nieuport which would take place in conjunction with an offensive to break out from the constraints of the Ypres Salient. The division moved near to Dunkirk to train for the landing whose objective was to recapture the Belgian Channel ports. However, the Germans had also become aware of the preparations and launched a pre-emptive attack along the Belgian coast on 10 July 1917 (*Operation Strandfest*). The battalion was then positioned north of the Yser River, along with the 1st Northamptonshires; both battalions were isolated during the German assault, when all but one of the river bridges were demolished, and their defences were overwhelmed. The Battalion War Diary recorded: '*Intense enemy shelling on all areas all day. Enemy attacked at 7.10 p.m., when about 70% of the Battalion became casualties*'. *Operation Hush* was subsequently cancelled when the initial stages of the attempt to break out from the Ypres Salient failed to progress as expected.

Rifleman Alfred Leonard Brookes was one of those casualties. At first he was posted missing but his death was confirmed on 4 August. His casualty record indicates that he died of his wounds on 10 July 1917, although his body was never recovered; he is commemorated instead on the *Nieuport Memorial* in Belgium. His widow was awarded a War Gratuity of £4 in November 1919.