

PRIVATE ALFRED JOSEPH FLETCHER

36794, 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 23 on 29 September 1918

Buried with honour in *Bellicourt British Cemetery, St. Quentin, France*; V C 10

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross, in the Abbey and in the Methodist Church



Bellicourt British Cemetery, St. Quentin



Private A. J. Fletcher



Gloucestershire Regiment

ALFRED JOSEPH FLETCHER was born in Tewkesbury on 23 April 1895, the eldest son but second youngest child of John Fletcher, a Stableman/Groom, and Mary Ann (formerly Booth). In 1901 the family, including seven children, was living in Barton Street; by 1911 John was working as a Labourer and they were living in the High Street, Tewkesbury. Educated at the Council Schools, Alfred became a Blacksmith with Milner's, who held him in 'high esteem'; subsequently, he worked for Thomas Walker, a fairground ride manufacturer. He worshipped at the Congregational Church in Barton Street and is commemorated on its memorial.

Alfred probably volunteered in late summer or autumn of 1914 as 'one of the few remaining Territorials'; he appears to have served in home service battalions of the regiment for up to two years. Based on his service number, he would have been sent overseas to the 1st Gloucesters sometime in 1916. The battalion was one of the two pre-war regular battalions and was part of the 1st Division of the original British Expeditionary Force (BEF), which landed at Le Havre on 13 August 1914. Its ranks had been seriously depleted through constant fighting over two years and was in need of constant replenishment from soldiers on home service.

At some stage, probably during the Spring Offensive of March 1918 when gas was used very effectively, Alfred was gassed and returned home for treatment at Mitton Red Cross Hospital for a period of five weeks. Whilst there, he was entertained by a choir which contained his niece; his smile and wave were her 'last memory of him'. She did recall that, on his return to duty in

the summer of 1918, he acted as a dispatch rider but was wounded by a sniper, dying of his wounds on 27 September 1918.

This account conflicts with a newspaper report that he was 'killed by a shell'. Nor is the family's version of events supported by the War Diary. In the days before Alfred was killed, officially on 29 September 1918, the situation was reported as quiet with the battalion mainly in reserve; no casualties were incurred during the previous week. However, late on 28 September, the battalion moved north in readiness for an attack in conjunction with the South Wales Borderers. This was part of the bigger offensive known as the *Battle of the St. Quentin Canal* (29 September-2 October 1918), an attempt by the British to breach the supposedly impregnable *Hindenburg Line*. The attack by the 1st Gloucesters on 29 September was successful, as was the overall battle; the War Diary comments at the end of the day that 'By dark both second and third objectives had been gained. Casualties were 8 Other Ranks killed and 47 wounded'.

Private Alfred Joseph Fletcher was reported as killed in action on 29 September 1918, most likely one of the eight casualties referred to in the War Diary that day. He is buried in *Bellicourt British Cemetery*, created after the battle and after the Armistice when graves were brought in from the surrounding battlefields and smaller cemeteries.

Alfred had served with **Pte. G. H. Jones** [†] and **Pte. W. T. Hawker** [†], both killed in action in August 1917. His father died in 1924 before Alfred's name was officially recorded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.