

2ND LIEUTENANT PERCY JAMES HOLT

6th (Service) Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment

Died aged 22 on 6 September 1918

Buried with honour in *St. Sever Cemetery, Rouen, Officers; C 2 2*

Commemorated on Tewkesbury Grammar School Memorial and Congregational Chapel Memorial



St. Sever Cemetery, Rouen



2nd Lt. P.J. Holt



Bedfordshire Regiment

PERCY JAMES HOLT was born in 1896 in Cradley, Herefordshire, to Philip Holt, a Builder, and Eliza (formerly Hadley). The family was still living in Cradley in 1901 but Philip died suddenly in 1907. In 1911, Percy was lodging at 10 Church Street with his aunt Mary Ann Alder (formerly Holt), wife of grocer W.H. Alder, whilst he was attending Tewkesbury Grammar School (1910 to 1912). He then worked as a Draper's assistant at Rendale & Co. in Malvern.

Percy volunteered soon after the outbreak of war, enlisting at Hereford in the 1st Reserve Battalion, Herefordshire Territorials, on 7 September 1914. He was then posted to the 1st/1st Battalion, Herefordshire Regiment, and specialised as a Signaller. After initial training, he embarked for Gallipoli on 16 July 1915, landing at Suvla Bay on 9 August. Whilst his battalion was in reserve, Percy was admitted on 26 September 1915 to the 26th Casualty Clearing Station on Gallipoli with shrapnel in his right foot. He was awarded the '1914-15 Star' medal.

After evacuation from Gallipoli, Percy spent a year in Egypt with his battalion defending the Suez Canal. In April 1916 he was promoted to Corporal and in September to Sergeant. On 30 December 1916, whilst still in Egypt, he applied for a commission and returned to England for Officer Training. He was granted a temporary commission in September 1917 in the 6th Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment. On 20 April 1918 he joined the battalion in France as part of a large replacement Officer draft. The battalion was part of the 112th Infantry Brigade, 37th Division, until it was disbanded in August 1918; most of the men had already been transferred to

the 1st/1st Battalion, Herefordshire Regiment, a Territorial Force unit in the same Division.

In August 1918, the 37th Division was part of the Third Army in the Somme sector, in the forefront of the campaign known as '*The Last Hundred Days*' that saw the Allies inflict a series of crushing defeats on the German Army, culminating in the Armistice. On 27 August Percy wrote to his mother on German notepaper which he must have found when his battalion captured Achiet-le-Grand a few days previously. He remarks that he was very well, that he had '*been busy as you may have seen in the papers*' and how he expects to be unable to write very often after that note. Unfortunately, this was the last letter he wrote as he lost his life a week later.

On 4 September, during the *Second Battle of Bapaume*, the battalion assaulted German positions and suffered badly from machine-gun fire and gas. The next day was spent consolidating their new positions under fire, during the course of which Percy was wounded.

2nd Lt. Percy James Holt died at 4.50am on 6 September 1918, on board the 14th Ambulance Train bound for Rouen. Included in his personal effects were a German pistol, personal correspondence, and ten buttons from his Bedfordshire Regiment tunic, kept as souvenirs. He is buried in the *St. Sever Cemetery* in Rouen, his headstone showing his Regiment as the Bedfordshires although at the time of his death he was attached to the Herefordshire Regiment. He is commemorated on the Tewkesbury Grammar School Memorial, the Congregational Chapel Memorial, and in his local church, St. James the Great, Cradley, Herefordshire.