

SAPPER ALFRED EDWARD REYNOLDS

95212, 130th Field Company, Royal Engineers

Died aged 20 on 10 April 1918

Remembered with honour at *Ploegsteert Memorial, near Ypres*; Panel 1

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



Ploegsteert Memorial, near Ypres



1914-15 Star Medal



Royal Engineers

ALFRED EDWARD REYNOLDS was born in Malvern in 1897 to Edward Thomas Reynolds, a Carpenter/Wheelwright, and Rosina (formerly Scrivens), a Laundress. He was one of six children; the eldest, a daughter, died at the age of 12. The family moved to Tewkesbury in 1907 and lived at 9 Jeynes Row, Oldbury Road. Alfred was educated at Trinity School and also attended the Wesleyan (Methodist) Sunday School. In 1911 aged 13 he was first apprenticed to William Harris, Painter and Decorator, as a Painters Labourer, and then to William Fisher.

Alfred volunteered in 1915, enlisting in Tewkesbury. He was posted to the 130th Field Company, Royal Engineers, part of the 25th Division, in May 1915. The division was established in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's New Army and crossed to France between 25 and 30 September 1915. Alfred went to France on 28 September as part of the divisional move, entitling him to the '1914-1915 Star' medal.

February 1918 found the division near Bapaume in the Somme sector, as rumours of an impending attack by the enemy grew. This area had been targeted by the Germans as part of *Operation Michael*, the first phase of the campaign known as the German Spring Offensive, lasting from 21 March to 18 July 1918. It was in effect the German Army's last throw of the dice: they realized that their only remaining chance of winning outright victory in the war was to defeat the Allies while they had a temporary advantage in numbers afforded by the Russian surrender in late 1917 and before the overwhelming resources of the United States could be deployed. Within the overall campaign there were four German

offensives codenamed *Michael*, *Georgette*, *Gneisenau* and *Blücher-Yorck*. Although the Spring Offensive achieved considerable tactical success in many of its phases, it failed to achieve its strategic objectives.

The 25th Division was involved in the first two battles of *Operation Michael* but was then relieved and moved over the border to Belgium, to the Ploegsteert sector, south of Ypres. As the division was soon to discover, this was the area that had been selected by the Germans to launch *Operation Georgette*, the next phase of their Spring Offensive (and known to the British as the *Battles of the Lys* (7-29 April 1918)), the objective of which was to capture Ypres.

Sapper Alfred Edward Reynolds was killed on 10 April 1918, the opening day of the *Battle of Messines 1918* (10-11 April 1918), the second phase of the *Georgette* offensive. The Official History of the 25th Division records that: '*The enemy attack broke through the British line ... and advanced along the Ypres road, endangering the garrison holding Ploegsteert Wood. Ordered to counter attack, the Royal Engineers and other elements of the Division became involved in heavy fighting ... and there were many remarkable acts as some units managed to extricate themselves and withdraw.*' Alfred was undoubtedly one of the Sappers who fought as infantry, losing their lives in the desperate defensive fight. His body was not identified or recovered and he is commemorated on the *Ploegsteert Memorial* in the Berks Cemetery Extension, south of Ypres, Belgium.

Alfred's death was reported in the *Tewkesbury Record*.