

## PRIVATE ALBERT EDWARD SIRCOMBE

10021, 2nd Regiment, South African Infantry

Died aged 33 on 29 September 1917

Buried with honour at *Brookwood Military Cemetery, Surrey*; VII F 9

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross



*Brookwood Military Cemetery, Surrey*



*South African Infantry*

**ALBERT EDWARD SIRCOMBE** was born in Tewkesbury in 1884, the son of Richard Henry Sircombe and Mary Ann (formerly Harris). Richard and Mary were both from Tewkesbury; they had eleven children and lived at various times in Walls Court and Comptons Alley. Richard worked as a postman; he died in 1915, his wife in 1920. On 30 May 1896 the *Tewkesbury Register* reported that Albert Sircombe was one of three boys charged with 'sleeping out' in a railway truck on the Avon Bridge. For this 'crime', he was sentenced to 5 years in Hardwick Reform School. Unfortunately there are no inmate records of that institution but his brother, Thomas Augustus, aged 10, was sentenced to 4 years at Bristol Industrial School for the same offence and, in his records, it states that '*an elder brother committed to Hardwicke Reformatory*'.

In 1901 an Albert Sercombe (sic) was a farm labourer of the correct age in Kingsteignton, Devon. This ties in with the fact that Albert enlisted in the Royal Navy as a Stoker at the nearby base of Devonport, Plymouth, on 11 August 1902, signing up for a period of 12 years.

Albert served on nine ships including *HMS Pelorus*, which sailed to the Amazon. His final posting was to *HMS Crescent*, an elderly 1st class cruiser. His naval service record indicates that he spent just one week there before he was discharged on 8 January 1907 in Simonstown, the main British naval base in South Africa; at the time he had completed less than half the period of his compulsory service. His service record is not clear as to why he was discharged.

There is no evidence that Albert returned to

the UK after 1907 and it seems that he enlisted in the South African Infantry after the outbreak of war, interestingly under his mother's maiden name (as A. M. Harris): a mysterious move.

South Africa raised a Brigade of four infantry regiments (a regiment being equivalent to a British battalion) for the Western Front: the 2nd Regiment in which Albert served was from Natal and the Orange Free State. The Brigade was sent initially to England at the end of 1915; it then went to Egypt for a few months before being finally moved to France in April 1916 where the Brigade came under the command of the 9th (Scottish) Division. Albert probably joined the Brigade sometime in late 1916 or early 1917.

**Private Albert Edward Sircombe** died on 29 September 1917 from battle wounds almost certainly received during the *Third Battle of Ypres*, sometimes referred to as *Passchendaele*. It comprised a series of set-piece battles and Albert was probably wounded during the third phase, the *Battle of the Menin Road Ridge*, in which the South African Brigade captured Bremen Redoubt and Waterend House in the Zonnebeke valley; the battle was a particularly successful action.

When he was wounded Albert would have been evacuated, probably via a hospital ship. He died in King George Hospital, Lambeth, of a 'gunshot wound to cervical spine' and was buried in *Brookwood Military Cemetery* in Surrey. This is the largest Commonwealth war cemetery in the UK, specially created in 1917 for the burial of Commonwealth and American soldiers who died in London.