

# James Tedstone

Gunner

79909

20<sup>th</sup> Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery



James Tedstone was born into a long established Kingtonian family. His father, Aaron Tedstone, was born in Kington in 1857. In 1889, Aaron married Sarah Boxall, a girl from Leominster. Sarah had given birth to a son, Sydney George Boxall (1888), prior to the wedding but it is unclear who the father was, Aaron or another man. Either way Sydney was later to adopt the Tedstone name and became an integral member of the Tedstone family. Sarah gave birth to a second son Alfred in 1891 and four years later, the focus of this biography, James Tedstone (1895). In 1891 the fledgling family were living at 14 Floodgates but by 1901 had moved to Bradnor and in 1911 were residing at The White House, Bradnor. Aaron held down various labouring jobs, from General Labourer and Masons Labourer to Builders Labourer in 1911. In that year's census Alfred, aged twenty, was a grocer's porter while sixteen-year-old James was a domestic gardener.

In terms of historical research James Tedstone is a rare find in so much as his military service records survive and are extensive. This is useful when endeavouring to understand his career and events leading up to his demise. James enlisted in Leominster on 29<sup>th</sup> February 1916. He joined the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) and became Gunner 79909 Tedstone. He proudly stated his age as 21 years and 11 months. He was immediately placed into army reserve but on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1916 was mobilized and joined No.2 Depot, RGA at Fort Brockhurst, Gosport. Later that month he was posted to 33 Company and on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1916 joined 190<sup>th</sup> Heavy Battery.

Heavy Batteries, or Siege Batteries, operated large calibre howitzers which fired high explosive shells in a high trajectory which produced plunging fire onto the enemy. Such

projectiles were used to eliminate opposing enemy artillery but also to lay down destructive fire on enemy strongpoints prior to an infantry advance. Munitions dumps, storage facilities, roads and railways, behind enemy lines, were all legitimate targets for these devastatingly destructive units. As can be seen in the adjacent picture, these were enormous pieces of artillery, which were moved around using horses and mules. On 14<sup>th</sup> September 1916, while at Aldershot, James passed his test



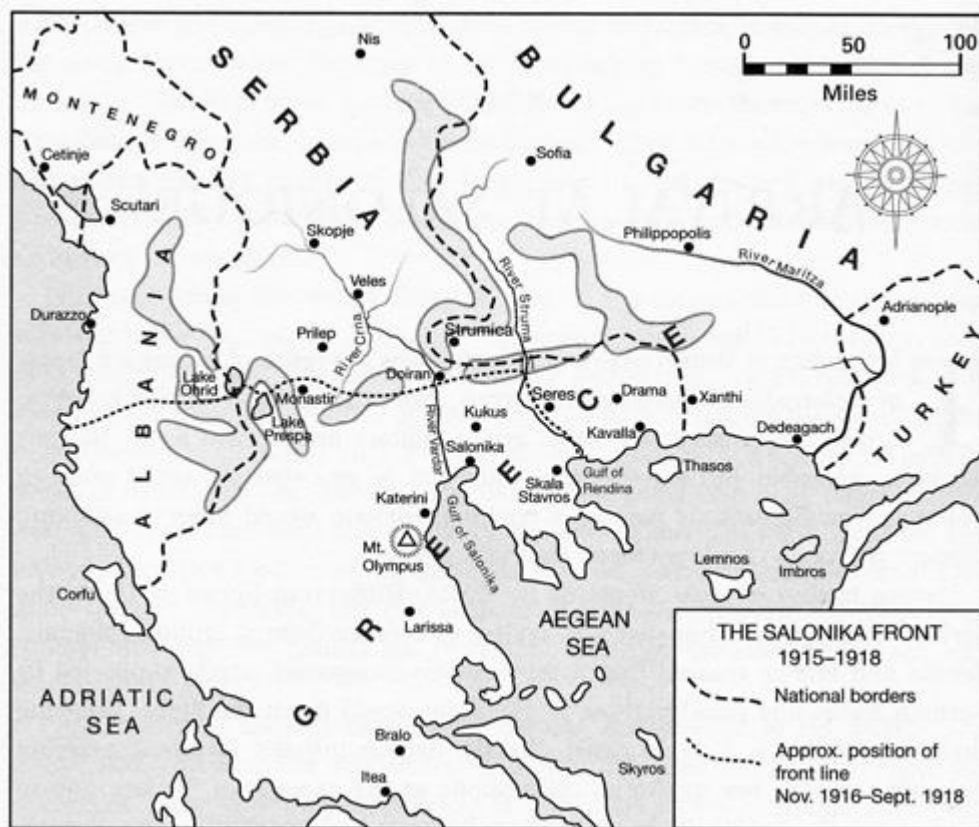
*9.2" Howitzer*



*Heavy Howitzer being landed at Salonika*

for 'cold shoeing'. The role of the cold shoer was to fit pre-made shoes to the beasts of burden. On 19<sup>th</sup> November 1916 the 190<sup>th</sup> Heavy Battery were mobilized and embarked aboard a ship bound for Salonika, a Greek port on the northern Aegean coast. On that same day James was officially appointed cold shoer for the 190<sup>th</sup> Heavy Battery. A fast passage of just two weeks saw them disembark on the 4<sup>th</sup> December 1916 in the Greek seaport of Salonika, modern day Thessaloniki. Men, horses, mules, artillery and munitions, were all transported to Salonika, which became a beachhead for allied forces.

The Salonika campaign had started in October 1915. British and French troops were sent to Salonika to assist Serbian forces who had come under intense pressure from combined German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian



forces. However, the intervention came too late and Serbian forces were defeated. Efforts to repel axis forces had some success in late 1915 but a harsh winter ensured that by 1916 the Anglo-French forces had been forced back to their bridgehead at Salonika. The Salonika initiative appeared to be a lost cause and British authorities were all for pulling out. However, a combined allied contingent consisting Serbian, French, Russian and Italian forces, urged them to stay, convinced the Macedonian front was not a lost cause. During 1916 more troops poured into the area, James's unit being one of many. In the spring of 1917, the set piece Battle of Doiran saw British forces pitted against Bulgarian units, but with little success. Trench warfare and stalemate ensued, until September 1918, when British and Serbian forces again advanced on Doiran. This time Bulgarian forces were sent into retreat, which ultimately led to their surrender on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1918.

The sights, sounds and smells of Salonika would have bombarded the senses of the volunteers, very different to that they had left in Britain. Throughout the conflict conditions for the men were exceedingly poor. Winters in the region were exceedingly harsh, making organised fighting impractical, very little occurred during the winter months. Rations and diet were limited and bland, consisting primarily of hard tack and bully-beef. As a consequence, the health of the men declined and when the summer months brought plagues of mosquitoes and the inevitable malaria, the men were unable to resist. While the campaign resulted in 20,000 men killed or wounded, hundreds of thousands more suffered and died from disease. As if the conditions were not bad enough, such was the shortage of fighting men, allied with the impracticability of transporting them back to Britain, no leave was granted. Conditions, diet and the lack

of respite meant morale suffered terribly. The men came to wonder what was the point and purpose of their mission, they feared they had become a forgotten army.

In October 1917 James was transferred to 20 Heavy Battery where he continued to endure all the hardships Salonika presented. He remained with this Battery until the end of the fighting in 1918. James would have been looking forward to returning to his homeland however, a telegram received by the Tedstone family dated 21<sup>st</sup> January 1919 reveals a terrible turn of events. The message reads;

*Regret to inform you, Officer Commanding 63<sup>rd</sup> General Hospital Salonika reports 13<sup>th</sup> Jan, your son 79909 Gunner J Tedstone, 20 Heavy Bty, RGA, Dangerously ill Broncho Pneumonia.*

James's whole existence lay in the balance. On 29<sup>th</sup> January 1919 he was diagnosed with Cerebro Spinal Meningitis and it was this disease which took his life on the **19<sup>th</sup> February 1919**. His parents were informed of this tragic outcome by means of a second devastating telegram, a transcript of which is included below.

**"A" FORM**  
**MESSAGES AND SIGNALS.** Army Form C, 2121  
(In pairs of 100.)

No. of Message.....

|   |           |          |        |                             |               |
|---|-----------|----------|--------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| From.....                                 | Code..... | in Words | Charge | This message is on file of: | Recd. at..... |
| Office of Origin and Service Instructions |           |          |        | Sent                        | Date.....     |
|   |           |          |        | At.....                     | From.....     |
|   |           |          |        | To.....                     | To.....       |
|   |           |          |        | By.....                     | By.....       |

TO: *M<sup>r</sup> A Tedstone  
The Chevres Bradnor  
Kingston*

|                        |                 |                     |                        |
|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Sender's Number.       | Day of Month.   | In reply to Number. | AAA                    |
| <i>B5566</i>           | <i>Regret</i>   | <i>to</i>           | <i>inform</i>          |
| <i>join</i>            | <i>Officer</i>  | <i>in charge</i>    | <i>3/20</i>            |
| <i>Salonica</i>        | <i>Salonica</i> | <i>reports</i>      | <i>21<sup>st</sup></i> |
| <i>Feb</i>             | <i>your</i>     | <i>son</i>          | <i>79909</i>           |
| <i>Gunner</i>          | <i>Tedstone</i> | <i>J</i>            | <i>20</i>              |
| <i>Heavy</i>           | <i>Battery</i>  | <i>RGA</i>          | <i>died</i>            |
| <i>19<sup>th</sup></i> | <i>Feb</i>      | <i>Cinetra</i>      | <i>spinal</i>          |
| <i>Kingston</i>        |                 |                     |                        |

From *Artillery Records*

Place

Time

The above may be forwarded as no correction (Z)

Censor. Signature of Addressee or person authorized to telegraph in his name

\* This line should be erased if not required.

(Order No. 1625 Wt. W8253/ P 511 272 H. & K., Ltd. (K. 2634))



*Regret to inform you Officer in charge 3<sup>rd</sup> Echelon Salonika reports 21<sup>st</sup> Feb, your son 79909 Gunner Tedstone J. 20 Heavy Battery RGA, died 19<sup>th</sup> Feb, Cerebro Spinal Meningitis.*



Aaron and Sarah had said goodbye to their son in mid-1916, they never saw him again. He was buried at Mikra British Cemetery, Kalamaria, Salonika in Greece, plot 1275. Salonika saw the establishment of many military hospitals during the conflict and their associated cemeteries. The cemetery at Mikra was opened in April 1917 and remained in use until 1920. Today Mikra contains 1,810 Commonwealth burials from World War One.

With the passing of time we can only imagine the devastation the Tedstone family must have endured. James had survived the torment of war, only to succumb to disease at the final hurdle. James's service records show that the family

anguish did not end with his death. Enquiries as to living relatives were made to the family in June 1919. By reply Sarah requested all his effects be passed to the family in Kington. The Imperial War Graves Commission complied with Sarah's request in the September. A sorry, but poignant, collection of personal effects which included, his wallet, some photo's, a clasp knife, cap badge, cigarette and tobacco cases, his belt, bible and prayer book, and finally, a key. Aaron applied for a war pension and was awarded 5/'' per week, while James was posthumously awarded the British War and Victory medals for his sacrifice. A Peace Service held at St Mary's Church, Kington on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1919 heard James's name read out, along with sixty other fallen comrades.

With the loss of James things would never be the same but the family continued to live in Kington. In the 1939 Register Aaron, Sarah and Alfred are to be found living and farming at Newton, opposite Floodgates. Aaron is a pensioner and registered blind, while Sarah completes home duties. Alfred was still unmarried and is recorded as a

farmer. Shortly after, in 1940, Aaron died aged 83 while Sarah's fate is unclear. It is possible she died in 1942 Bromsgrove but why she might have been there is unknown. Alfred also served during the war and his experience reveals a new government initiative implemented in 1915. At the outbreak of war hundreds of thousands of young patriotic men volunteered to serve their country. However, by early spring 1915 those numbers started to dwindle and it became evident the developing war of attrition needed more men. The government were reluctant to enact compulsory conscription and opted for a halfway house solution. The National Registration Act 1915, sought to stimulate recruitment but also to discover how many men between 15 and 65 were engaged in each particular trade. All men in that age range, who had not already enlisted, were required to register. The results showed nearly 5 million men of military age, 18-40, were eligible for military service. However, 1.6 million of those were in protected employment, vital to the war effort. Lord Derby was appointed Director General Recruiting in October 1915 and swiftly set about improving the recruitment situation. His initiative, often known as the Derby Scheme, was in fact called the Group Scheme. Men between 18 and 40 were informed they could continue to attest with immediate effect or alternatively, with an obligation to serve at a future date. The last day of voluntary enlistment was 15th December 1915, after that date the Group Scheme was enacted. Those who took this option were issued with an armlet to show they had enlisted and would in due course be called up. They were also allocated a group number, dependent upon their year of birth, and sent home to continue their employment until such time as they were called up.



*'Group Scheme' Armlet*

Married men were segregated from single men, who were the first to be called up. Alfred, by dint of his birth date, was placed in Group 7 which was activated on 8th Feb 1916. The Kington Times records this event with a farewell bash being arranged for him at the Royal Oak on 16th Feb 1916, the same day he officially joined 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion Kings Shropshire Light Infantry. Despite men of military age being encouraged to enlist the scheme was not a great success with many men avoiding registration. As a response to this unacceptable situation the 1916 Military Service Act was passed and from 2nd March 1916, conscription became the inevitable route to enlistment. Alfred served in France with the KSLI from July 1916. In April 1917 he received a gunshot wound to his right buttock which was to cause him pain and discomfort for the rest of his life. After spending five months in hospitals and having shrapnel and bone shards removed from his buttock, he was transferred to 282 Railway Company, Royal Engineers as Pioneer, 201901 Tedstone. In June 1918 he was again posted to France and remained there until September 1919. Upon demobilisation Alfred was awarded a disability pension as a

result of injuries sustained in 1917 and farmed in Kington for the rest of his life. Alfred passing away in 1973 at the age of 83.

The story of James Tedstone reveals the international nature of World War One. It also reveals the cruel nature of war where James survived the fighting only to lose his life to disease, in a place very far from the safety of his home in Kington. James's sacrifice will not be forgotten.



Biography researched and produced by

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