

Alfred Evan George

Lance Corporal

8847

1st Battalion, Welsh Regiment

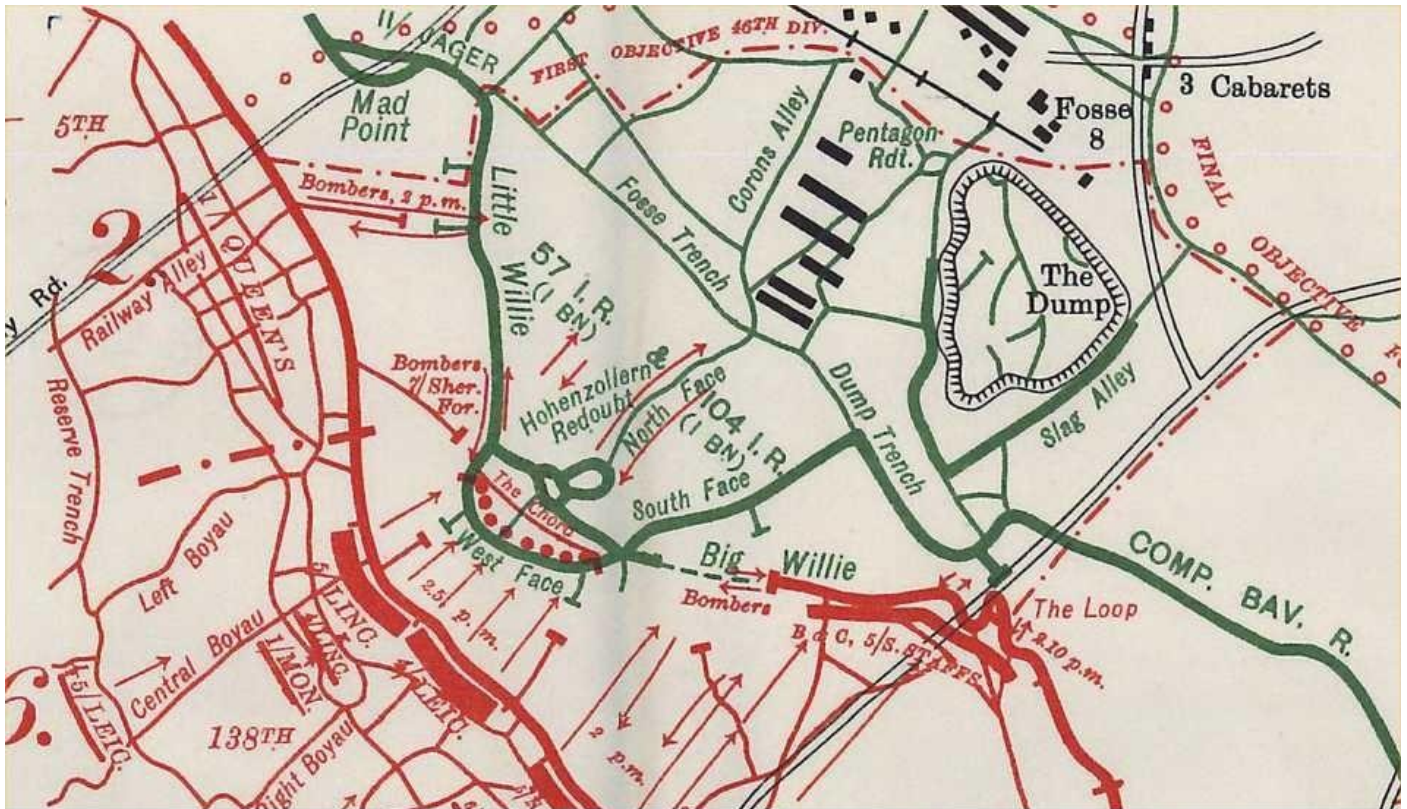


Alfred Evan George was born in the early part of 1885 in Kington. His father Richard came from Llanbister and for many years was employed as a farm labourer. In 1875 Richard married Elizabeth Dakins, a girl from Llanbardarn, not far from Painscastle. By 1911 Richard had changed work and was employed as a limestone quarryman at one of the Dolyhir quarries. In between bringing up a large family of eleven children Elizabeth was a charwomen and more latterly in 1911 a Nurse Domestic. The family seems to have been separated most of the time since in all the relevant census returns Richard and Elizabeth are rarely recorded living under the same roof. But the bulk of the family live at Floodgates and more latterly at 17 Crooked Well, Kington.

At a relatively young age Alfred moved away from Kington, almost certainly in the search for work, and in the 1901 census, aged 16, is lodging at 5 Brynson Street, Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil. As was the case with many Kington men they moved south and settled in or around Dowlais, many found work in the mines but in Alfred's case he found work as an Ostler (stableman) in a steel works. He enlisted in Merthyr into the 2nd Battalion the Welsh Regiment, service number 8847 as Private Alfred George. When researching Alfred's service number it indicates that he joined the army some time towards the end of 1905 at the age of 20. Sadly, as is common, very few of his service records survive but we are able to glean that he first entered France on the 10th November 1914. At some point after 1914, and the reason for this statement will become clearer later, Alfred transferred into the 1st Battalion the Welsh Regiment but kept his original service number of 8847.

Our story now rapidly moves on to the Battle of Loos which was fought between the 25th September and 15th October 1915. This proved to be the largest offensive on the Western Front in 1915. It was the battle where the British first used poison gas and

was to be the first massed engagement of Britain's New Army. The offensive was part of an attempt by the French to break through the German defences in Artois and Champagne and to restore a 'war of movement'. Opposing sides were bogged down in trench warfare and despite improved methods, more ammunition and better equipment the Franco-British attacks were contained by the German armies, except for very small local losses of territory. The struggle to reinstate a 'war of movement', ultimately failed.



Plan dated 13th October 1915, showing Hohenzollern Redoubt, Little Willie and Big Willie

For their part in the battle the 1st Welsh Regiment were engaged around the town of Auchy-lez-la-Bassee. The town lies about three miles north of Loos and in 1926 its name was changed to Auchy-les-Mines. The enemy had established heavy defences around the town and one particular strongpoint, the Hohenzollern Redoubt, which lay to the south west of the town, became a primary objective for the British. The redoubt was supplied by two key trenches, Little Willie to the north and Big Willie to the south. The redoubt and supporting trenches were a formidable fortification and created a huge headache for the British. Probing assaults took place, the objective being to occupy the enemy trenches and cut off supply routes to the redoubt. In the thick of those probing assaults were 1st battalion the Welsh Regiment.

We turn now to the War Diary of the 1st Battalion and find that toward the end of September 1915 the battalion was constantly in and out of the front line in the Hohenzollern area. On the 30th of September they had been relieved and sent back to Lancaster Trench at Vermelles, a rest area of comparative safety. Extracts from the diary reveal explicitly what happened next. The following day, the 1st of October, they received orders to proceed to the front again, to relieve the 6th Welsh Battalion and take up position opposite Little Willie in a British trench, rather hopefully named, 'The Old British Line'. The battalion were ordered to attack Little Willie at 8pm that evening and were given explicit instructions "to take Little Willie at the point of the bayonet regardless of all costs". The two opposing armies were no more than 300 yards apart, the plan was to silently creep across 'no man's land' and to surprise the enemy. At 8pm sharp the men emerged from their trench and quietly approached Little Willie. They got to within 100 yards before being discovered at which point the enemy strafed them ferociously with machine guns on both flanks and the trench in front of them opened up with rapid fire. The diary records that *'within 20 seconds 250 men and officers were on the floor'*. The remainder made the trench and started bayonetting the enemy and forcing them to retreat. Once the trench had been gained it was consolidated ready for the inevitable German counter offensive. However, the men found themselves isolated with little or no support from the rear. The whole night and following morning was spent defending their new position, under heavy German fire and bombing. By 10am on the 2nd the British were nearly out of munitions whereas the Germans seemed to have a never ending supply. At 2.30pm the Germans made a huge third attempt to regain Little Willie. This assault appears to have been unsuccessful since later that day the 1st Welsh were relieved by the 6th Welsh and returned back to their original trench, The Old British Line, where they regrouped. On the 3rd of October the 1st Welsh were relieved from the front line and returned to Vermelles. Casualties in the attack were considered very severe with 370 NCO's and Other Ranks and 15 Officers killed, injured or missing. Alfred was one of those killed in action on the **2nd October 1915**. The 6th Welsh held Little Willie for another 24 hours and were then forced to retreat. On the 13th of October a massive allied offensive was made, called the Battle of Hohenzollern, the objective being to seize the redoubt and areas beyond. This too ended in failure and by the end of 1915 nothing more than stalemate had been achieved.



Hohenzollern Redoubt 1915



Loos Memorial Cemetery

It appears Alfred's body was never recovered since his death is commemorated on Loos Memorial, situated outside the village of Loos-en-Gohelle, panels 77 and 78. This memorial is dedicated to those who have no known grave, with Alfred being just one of over 20000 men commemorated. By the time of his death, aged 30, Alfred had risen to the rank of Lance Corporal. From his time in the 2nd Welsh Regiment Alfred was awarded the 1914 Star

and with the 1st Welsh Regiment the British and Victory Medals. However, in 1923 the army received an application for Albert's medals, which had not been claimed by his family, to be disposed of. It appears they did not want to be reminded of their loss. However, they did ensure his name was read out at the Kington Peace Service held on the 6th July 1919 at St. Mary's church and that his name was included on Kington memorial.

The family continued to live in Kington with Elizabeth George, Albert's mother, passing away on the 15th February 1932, aged 77. Her funeral took place just three days later, when she was laid to rest in Kington Cemetery. Richard survived Elizabeth by five years and died on the 6th February 1937 and is also buried in Kington Cemetery.

