

**From Norton to Menin Gate - A Soldier's War**  
**(5802) 36471 Private Arthur Alfred Sherwood**  
**Hertfordshire Regiment**



Menin Gate Memorial -Ypres

SEARING A. E.  
SEARLE E.  
SHAYLER P. G.  
SHEPHERD I. H.  
SHERWOOD A. A.  
SHIELD J.  
SHONE E.  
SIMPSON W.  
SKINNER W.

Panel 45

## **Introduction**

In order to discover details of Arthur Alfred's life and Army service during World War I it has been necessary to refer to many sources as unfortunately the only Service Record available is his Medal Card. A major discovery was that another Letchworth man joined the Hertfordshire Regiment at a similar time to Arthur Alfred and their Service Numbers are very close. Both died whilst serving with 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Royal Berkshire Regiment. Therefore it is reasonable assumption that the pattern of their military service was similar.

## **Early Life**

Arthur Alfred Sherwood the son of Elisa Sherwood was born in Hitchin on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1889. The 1891 census shows that Arthur, aged 2 years, was living with his grandmother, Ann Sherwood, a widow, in Norton village. As a child he will have attended the village school and when a young man he worked at Letchworth Hall Hotel.

## **1915 Enlistment**

Arthur is shown in The Hertfordshire Regiment's Roll as having enlisted in the Regiment on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1915 at Hertford with the Service number 5802. He will have joined one of the Hertfordshire Regiment's Training Battalions either at Newmarket, Halton Park or Thetford. Immediately following training his movements are unknown.

## **1916 To France**

By late August or early September 1916, he will have taken the main route in use at this time of sailing from Folkestone to Boulogne. The vessels were paddle steamers, usually crowded, which sailed as soon as it was dark, not showing any lights and smoking was banned so as to avoid being spotted by a German submarine. Following an early morning arrival in Boulogne, Arthur will then have moved to the Territorial Base Depot at Rouen.

## **6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment**

This Unit was a Service Battalion and had been in France since 25<sup>th</sup> July 1915 operating in the Somme area taking part in many major battles. In mid-July 1916, this Battalion had been involved in the attack on Deville Wood, and again in September in the Battle of Guillemont, and suffered heavy casualties in both. It was in need of reinforcements and on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1916, the Battalion, whilst in training at Guestraville (probably Ostreville) on the Somme, received a draft of 399 men from the Territorial Base Depot. The draft consisted entirely of Other Ranks from the Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Regiments and Arthur will have been a member of this draft.

## **Settling In**

According to the 6<sup>th</sup> Berkshire's War Diary, in the three days following Arthur's arrival at Guestraville, the Battalion was ordered to new locations. On day one it marched about 7 miles to new quarters at Sericourt. On day two a further 8 miles to Grouchies (probably Grouches-Luchuel) and finally on day three, 11 miles to Le Avillers (probably Leavillers). The War Diary recorded that many of the newly arrived draft suffered badly during these marches.

At this location, the Battalion underwent a period of training which in the final two days culminated in practice attacks on a reproduction of Thiepval.

### **The Somme-First Action**

On 26<sup>th</sup> September 1916 the Battalion moved to Atelux (probably Achuex) and was in reserve for the attack that took Thiepval, but the Battalion was not called upon.

The following day Schwaben Redoubt was attacked and taken by the Suffolk Regiment with the Berkshires in support. Arthur will have seen his first action here when the 6<sup>th</sup> Berkshire was moved, for a week, to the frontline trenches to ward off counter attacks. During this action, the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion lost 201 men, one of those being Pte Malkin from Letchworth.

After being relieved, the battalion moved back to Acheux for clean-up and training but by mid-October they are back in trenches at Courcellette. Soon after they were withdrawn from the front to Albert. The remainder of the month being spent on meandering route marches from Albert to Le Titre near Abbeville.

### **Out of the Line**

The whole of December 1916 saw the Battalion at Le Titre engaged in company training, route marches and church parades but on 29<sup>th</sup> they moved to Drucat. where they followed a similar training pattern for the first weeks of January 1917. Then a five day route march took them to Gezencourt. Here they were engaged on fatigues until late January.

### **More Action**

Following their return to the front line, the Battalion moved into the trenches to relieve the 7<sup>th</sup> Bedfords at Grandcourt where their duties included night patrols in No Man's Land until relieved in early February.

The Battalion then provided working parties for the Royal Engineers until the middle of the month when they were in the front line for the attack at Regina Trench. They achieved their objectives by gaining ground from the enemy and took many prisoners. The Battalion however had 194 casualties.

Early March was spent salvaging useful material from the area they had previously captured, but on the 10<sup>th</sup> March they relieved the 10<sup>th</sup> Essex and 8<sup>th</sup> Norfolks for 3 days, providing cover for the Sussex Pioneers who were reconstructing trenches. This was followed by a week in the rear, cleaning up and training.

### **Flanders**

The Battalion commenced its move north from the Somme area on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1917 by route march, bus and train arriving at Lambres near Hazebrouck, four days later. The remainder of the month was spent settling in.

The first weeks of April was a quiet time for the Battalion, being held in reserve, resting in billets and training. However on 19<sup>th</sup> April they marched to Bethune and were billeted in an Orphanage.

The 21<sup>st</sup> saw another move to Noex Les Mines, followed a week later with a move to Valhoun. Two days later the Battalion entrained at Arras to Beaurains where on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1917 it transferred to VII Corps of the III Army.

### **Return to Action**

The Battalion moved forward on 2<sup>nd</sup> May into old German trenches between Neuville Viaasse and Wancourt in close support for the next day's planned attack. As the attack moved forward so did the Battalion and came under heavy bombardment from German artillery with the loss of 50 casualties. The attack failed and Battalion withdrew to reserve trenches behind the old British line where they remained for four days before being relieved. This pattern of time spent in trenches, often under heavy bombardment, and being withdrawn for rest continued for the next two weeks resulting in the loss of a further 50 casualties.

Finally on 23<sup>rd</sup> May they were in reserve and the men were able to have a bath. The remainder of the month was spent in the Support Brigade Area Camp at St Martin with the occasional working party duties at night. This pattern of deployment continued throughout June 1917 and into the first few days of July.

July 3<sup>rd</sup> saw the Battalion entrain at Mondicourt arriving next morning at Cassel from where they marched to Steenvoorde. Here they transferred to II Corp, V Army and spent the next three weeks training. During this time a draft of 207 personnel arrived.

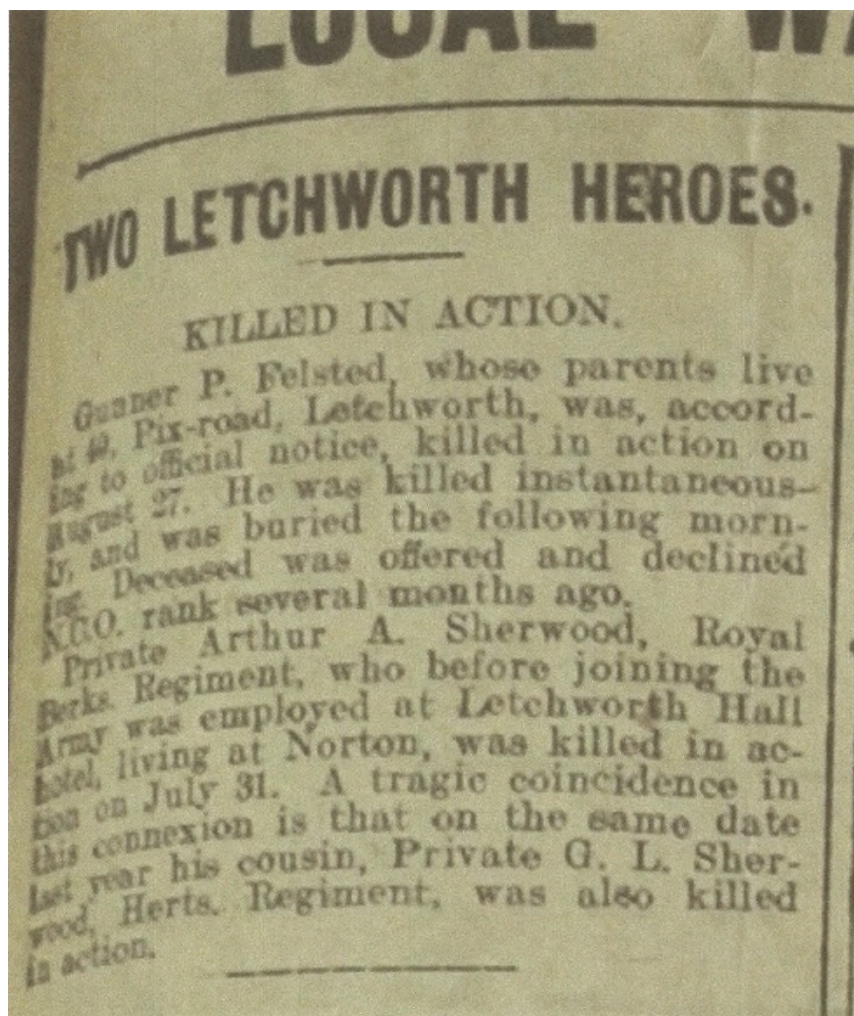
### **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Ypres**

During 28/29 July the Battalion marched to Canal Rest Camp at Ouderdom where they began equipping for action. On the evening of 30<sup>th</sup> July 1917, they marched to a forward area at Zillebeke in preparation for the commencement of the battle.

The following day at 3-05am the Battalion was reported as being in position in the assembly area ready to move off at 7-15am. At 8-30am they passed through Sanctuary Wood and came under heavy machine gun fire and an artillery barrage as they moved into captured trenches. The advance continued still under heavy fire to the Ypres-Menin road then to Jargon Switch/Surbiton Villas crossroads which was captured at about 9-50am.

The rest of the day was spent consolidating the ground gained. This work was difficult due to hostile machine gun fire and aeroplanes bombing the troops.

At 8-30pm orders were given for the Battalion to be relieved. This commenced at midnight with the Battalion withdrawing to Dickebusch. Casualties among the other ranks for the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1917 were 35 killed and 27 missing. Arthur was one of those missing as he has no known grave. His name is engraved on Panel 45 of the Menin Gate Memorial.



Herts Express 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1917