



# Alec Bamford (MC)

By Dan Hill



Alec Joscelyne Bamford was born on 9th April 1895 in Shanghai, China, where his father was a Christian Missionary. He returned to England for education at Malvern College and Cambridge University.

In 1908 he took the post of Assistant Astronomer to the Ceylon Government at Columbo University and in 1913 was appointed Superintendent. During this time, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society.

He served in the Ceylon Planter Rifles from 1910.

At the start of the Great War his Regiment was mobilised for service abroad, but despite volunteering, Alec was put on the censor's draft, barring his from leaving with his Regiment. His colleague wrote to him 'Dear Bamford, very sorry to hear that H.E. has refused to let you go. I gather the reason is that you are such a damned learned scientific man that your impalement on a German bayonet would be an irreparable loss to the progress of mankind'.



Alec came off the 'Census Draft' of 3rd June 1915, allowing him to join the Motor Machine-gun Service in England in August 1915.

After joining the Motor Machine Gun Service in August 1915, he attended a machine-gun course at Bisley. His training was completed in February 1916 and he joined the 1st Armoured Motor Battery as a Second Lieutenant.

The armoured Batteries were mobile units, consisting of four Rolls Royce armoured cars mounted with Viickers heavy machine-guns, supporting trucks and twenty-four gunners on Triumph motor cycles. The establishment of an Armoured Motor Battery was 6 Officers and 113 Other Ranks.

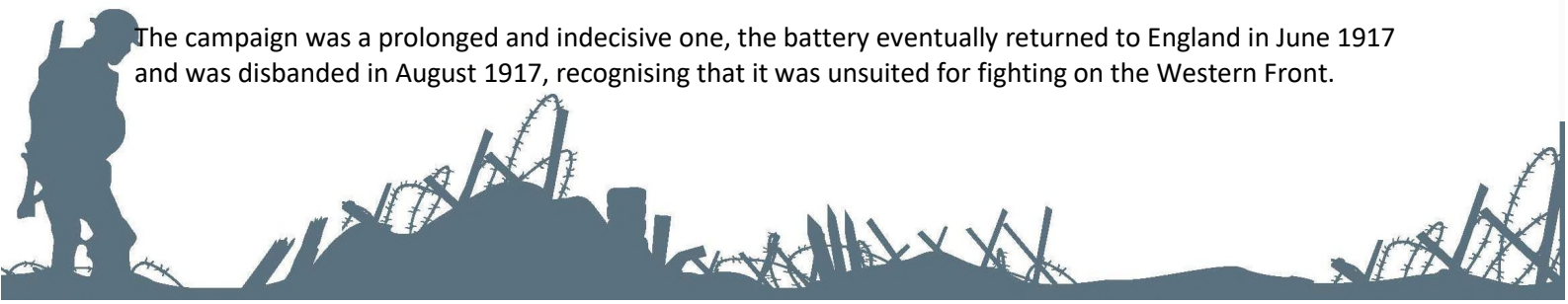
Units were employed in East Africa, Salonika and Mesopotamia. They were not suited to the rigours of service on the Western Front, however, their cousin, the tank would soon fill that role.

Alec sailed with his unit from Devonport to East Africa in February 1916.

The African campaign was a mobile campaign against the German and native forces defending German East Africa (Tanganika), lying north of Kenya and Rhodesia.

*Alec describes the campaign "During part of the 1914-18 world war I was at one time in East Africa as it was called then wither the battery that I was in was gone for the purpose of fighting the Germans. There were times when neither the British or Germans could do much against each other. The weather took a hand and both sides were busy fighting the country with malarial mosquitoes, jigger fleas or the tse-tse flies winning against both. We had little to fear from human enemies but were not successful in our fight against malarial mosquitoes, jigger fleas etc."*

The campaign was a prolonged and indecisive one, the battery eventually returned to England in June 1917 and was disbanded in August 1917, recognising that it was unsuited for fighting on the Western Front.



On 4th June 1917 Alec was awarded the Military Cross. Family lore says that it was due to an interaction with senior officer where his forthright manner and skill won him admiration and ultimately his decoration!

Alec was transferred to 7th Field Survey Company in the Royal Engineers in September 1917. In November 1918, he was posted to the Middle East to survey north-west Arabia. He was ordered 'to find the fixed points of Aleppo and any other points fixed in north Syria'.

These surveys would have been the basis upon which the Turkish Empire in the Middle East was divided between Great Britain and France in the immediate post-war years. Many of the problems in the Middle East today are a reflection of the colonial based division of territory at that time.

He was discharged on 4th September 1919 and returned to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) where he remained until 1931. On his return to England, he taught for several years before joining the Meteorological Office at the Air Ministry. Between 1942 and 1946 he was responsible for preparing special Maritime Meteorological sheets required by the admiralty.

In the Second World War, he served in the Home Guard between 1941 and 1944 with the rank of Major.

Alec Bamford lived for a number of years in Hillshott, Letchworth before retiring to the South Coast. He died in 1973 at the age of 77.

Alec's wartime possessions were discovered by his family at the start of the centenary of the Great War and his entire collection, including hundreds of original and undeveloped photographs, along with a huge collection of documents were on display at the Herts At War exhibition in Hitchin during 2018.

