

EVERARD HENRY SHEPHERD

Private 16699



Everard¹ Henry Shepherd was born on 7 May 1894 in Newton Ferrers, the sixth child² of Samuel (a labourer) and Eliza Shepherd. They lived at 9, Fore Street, now Riverside Road East, not far from Samuel's brother John³ and his family. He was baptised at Holy Cross Church on 24 June 1894, and attended school from 24 May 1897 to 31 May 1907 (Roll No. 363).

He enlisted at Plymouth into the 2nd Battalion, The Devonshire Regiment. The battalion formed part of 23rd Brigade in 8th Division, a division of regular army units which had been rushed to the Western Front early in the war and had remained there ever since. On 20 April 1918, 2 Devon's were employed strengthening defensive positions in the town of Villers-Bretonneux. Two days later they occupied trenches, as a counter-attack battalion, in an area to the west of the town. On 24 April, a tremendous German bombardment opened up, first with gas which was followed by shrapnel and high explosives. After two hours, the fire was switched from the front trenches to the reserve and support positions. At 7.30am, 12 German tanks were seen advancing on the battalion position, with three threatening the battalion HQ. Although 2 Devon's had dealt effectively with the enemy infantry, tackling tanks was another matter. Chaos ensued in the battalion line, until British tanks appeared and saved the day. This was the first tank versus tank battle in history.

During fierce fighting on 24 and 25 April the battalion lost 4 officers and 142 men killed. One of those who fell in this action was Private Everard Shepherd. He is remembered with honour in Adelaide Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux (Plot II.P.18).



¹ Some Army records show his first name as Everett.

² Everard's younger brother Harold died of wounds a week before him. The 1901 Census shows Harold as older than Everard, but this appears to be an error.

³ John and Leah Shepherd's son William Henry was killed at the Battle of Coronel on 1 November 1914.