



Baptism entry in Petworth Church Records

George Frederick Summersell was born in early 1897 and christened in St Mary's Church, Petworth on April 3rd of the same year. His parents, John and Elizabeth were married in the small Saxon church of St Olave in Chichester. By this time John had been in the 107th Regiment of Foot for ten years. In 1881 this unit officially became the Royal Sussex Regiment. Colour Sergeant J Summersell was discharged in 1906. He became a School Attendance Officer in Petworth and by 1911 the family, parents and ten children were living in Upperton.

At the age of 14 in 1911 George was a Baker's Assistant. The excitement of this work was perhaps nothing compared with that portrayed by the army recruiting officers during 1914. No doubt George also had the full support of his ex-army father and at the age of 17 years 11 months, in late November 1914, he enlisted in D Company (Petworth area recruits) 4th Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment and became Private G F Summersell 4/2985. This was a territorial training battalion and when trained Private Summersell was posted to the Senior 1/4th Battalion of this Regiment.

On July 17th 1915 the Battalion left Devonport on 'HMT Ulysses' bound for Sulva Bay on the Gallipoli peninsula. The 1/4th Battalion entered WW1 on the evening of August 8th. In total there were some 63,000 British troops intent on taking the Bay. However, the determination of the enemy had been underestimated and in a frantic attack on August 10th the Turks regained Sulva Bay. The campaign was deemed a disaster and by December Gallipoli was being evacuated at a cost of over 200,000 casualties. Private Summersell and the 4th Battalion sailed for Alexandria in Egypt on December 13th. Between the end of March and early December 1917 the Battalion took part in the Battles of Gaza (Second and Third) and the capture of Jerusalem.





General Allenby entering Jerusalem on foot out of respect for the Holy City - December 11th 1917

On June 16th 1918 the Battalion left Egypt and was transported to Etaples in Northern France and then on to Proven. After a month of training in Picardy, the Battalion received orders to move up to the front line and advance to a destination recorded as 'approximately the Courdoux-Sevenay Road, artillery support being called for as required'. At 4.10 am on July 29th the advance was going well with few casualties, but then several enemy machine guns, sheltered in 'Bois de Beugneux', were encountered. The first attempt to take the wood is recorded in the Battalion War Diary:

July 29, 6.00am

It was found impossible to obtain artillery support owing to the lack of communication and the line was withdrawn to the road and reorganised. The wood was then successfully rushed with bayonet, a number of enemy being killed and several machine guns captured.

However, German field artillery was then directed on to the wood causing the British troops to withdraw.

Casualties during this action were: killed 45, wounded 129, missing 24.

On August 1st the battalion again attacked Bois de Beugneux:

The enemy retired in disorder leaving many machine guns in our hands. A number were killed with the bayonet and prisoners taken. The Beugneux-Courdoux Road was crossed and the objective occupied....Orders were received to advance the line 600 yards.

Casualties during this action were: killed 10, wounded 28, missing 3.

We know that Private Summersell died of his wounds on August 3rd 1918. Therefore it is most likely that he was wounded on the 29th when there were so many casualties, but it may have been in the action of August 1st. It is tragic that so many young lives were lost fighting for a small wood in Picardy.

Private Summersell was most probably taken to the 63rd Casualty Clearing Station (main field hospital) at Senlis some considerable distance from where he was wounded. He lies with many of his comrades in the French National Cemetery, Senlis, Northern France.



