

Rfn W.G.Fritter – King’s Royal Rifle Corps

William George Fritter was born in Holdfast Lane in Haslemere in 1895, the son of James and Fanny Fritter. At the time of the 1911 census the family was living at The Lodge, Tartar Hill, Cobham. James was a farm labourer and William was a garden boy. When William enlisted, his family were living in Reading, but they moved to Milton Court Farm, Westcott shortly after.

William enlisted at Guildford on 9th February 1915 and initially joined the 6th Bn. The King’s Royal Rifle Corps which formed at Winchester on 21st August 1914 and became a unit of 42nd Brigade in the 14th (Light) Division. After training at Aldershot and Petworth, the Division, comprising the 41st, 42nd and 43rd Brigades, landed at Boulogne on 20th May 1915 and by July had taken up positions at Hooze, about 4 km east of Ypres in Belgium. William embarked from Folkestone on 15th July 1915 having been transferred to the 9th Battalion.

On 19th July at Hooze a large mine was exploded under the German lines and 4th Bn. The Middlesex Regiment occupied the resulting crater. British artillery quelled German attempts to recover the crater, but retaliation came on 30th July. At 3.15 am with dramatic suddenness, a British position known as ‘The Stables’ blew up and jets of flame shot across from the German trenches. This was the first time that liquid fire flamethrowers were used by the Germans against the British. The 14th (Light) Division had just taken over that part of the line and a deluge of fire of all kinds fell on the 41st Brigade and the support positions behind them. The Germans achieved complete surprise. After intensive hand to hand fighting nearly all the positions held by the Brigade were lost.

Despite the German success the 42nd Brigade on the left had not been attacked and they were ordered with the remnants of the 41st Brigade to mount a counterattack. A feeble 45 minute bombardment preceded this and the 41st Brigade attack failed. However the 9th Battalion, King’s Royal Rifle fared better and recovered some of the lost lines. The 43rd Brigade relieved the badly-hit 41st during the late afternoon and evening. During the night, another flamethrower attack was repulsed, but further British efforts came to nothing against heavy German shellfire. A surprise attack

by the 6th Division on 9th August eventually regained all the ground that had been lost.

William Fritter was killed in action in the afternoon of 30th July, while almost certainly taking part in his Battalion's successful action to recover some of the lines which had been lost during the first flamethrower attack. He had served just 15 days on the Western Front before he was killed. His body was never found and his name is recorded on panel 51 and 53 of the Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres which commemorates 54,406 members of the Commonwealth forces who lost their lives in the Ypres salient and who have no known grave. 'Hooge 1915' is an accredited battle honour of the King's Royal Rifle Corps.