

# William OATEN

Private 240552, 1st/5th Battalion, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry

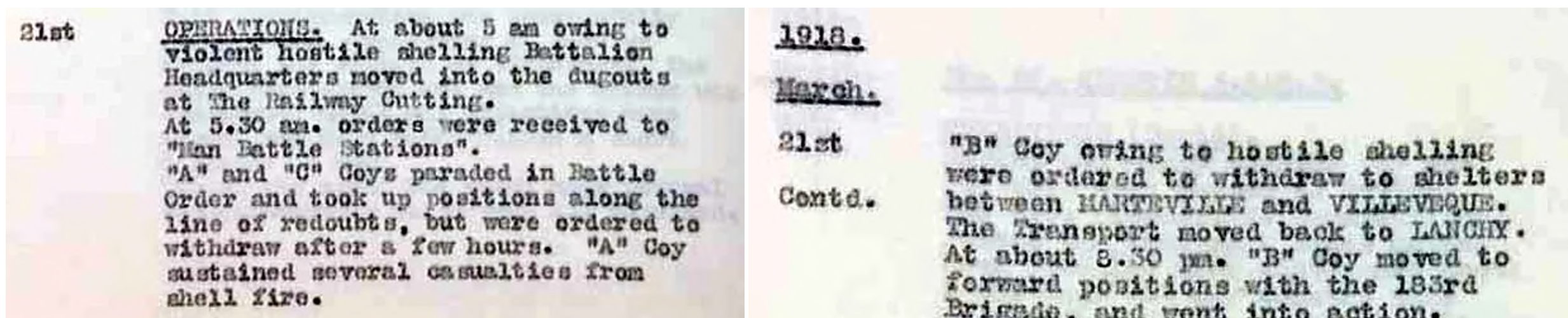
Died March 21st 1918, aged 21

Commemorated on Pozieres Memorial, Pozieres, France

William Oaten was born in 1896 to Robert and Rose Lavinia Oaten in Port Isaac. He was a younger cousin to Thomas Oaten. In the 1901 census, Robert (46) was a general labourer living with Rose (47) and their four children; Robert (15), Roseanna (12), Minnie (9) and William was the youngest at 4 years old. In 1911, William's brother Robert was recorded as a mariner in the coasting trade on a sailing vessel, and his sister Minnie was a dressmaker. Roseanna was not with the family and had probably married.

William was in the 1st/5th Battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, whose barracks are in Bodmin. This battalion was part of the Devon and Cornwall Brigade in Wessex Division. It underwent many changes and was stationed in the UK between the outbreak of war and spring 1916, as Territorial units were not permitted to fight overseas. In April 1916 it moved to Tidworth Camp on Salisbury Plain and was converted to a Pioneer Battalion (ie. does engineering or construction duties) under orders of 61st (2nd South Midland) Division. They quickly moved to France, arriving at Le Havre on May 22nd 1916 to be concentrated about 45 miles south east of Calais between Arques and Bethune. In July 1916 they fought in the Attack on Fromelles, where they suffered heavy casualties. In 1917 the 61st fought in the Operations on the Ancre in March, where it captured Chaulnes and Bapaume, the Battle of Langemark in August, and at the end of November was involved in heavy fighting as the Germans counter attacked near Cambrai.

In 1918 the 61st was holding the line south west of St Quentin, near Ham, when the Germans launched their spring offensive, known as Operation Michael, on March 21st. This commenced at 04.40 with the largest German bombardment of the war. Over 3½ million shells were launched at British positions around St Quentin in just five hours.



1st/5th Battalion War Diary for March 21st 1918

William Oaten was killed in action that day, possibly one of the 'A' company casualties recorded in the war diary that day. Also around St Quentin that day, with the 36th Battalion, Machine Gun Corps (Infantry), was *Ralph Lark*, another Port Isaac lad who was killed.

Private William Oaten has no known grave and is commemorated on Pozieres Memorial. The Pozieres Memorial encloses the Pozieres British Cemetery and contains the names of 14,657 casualties who have no known grave and died on the Somme between March 21st and August 7th 1918.



Private William Oaten on the Pozieres Memorial

## Sources

Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry: <http://www.1914-1918.net/dcli.htm>

Battle of St Quentin: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Michael#Battle\\_of\\_St\\_Quentin.2C\\_21.E2.80.9323\\_March](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Michael#Battle_of_St_Quentin.2C_21.E2.80.9323_March)

1st/5th Battalion War Diary: With thanks to the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry archives at Bodmin

DCLI Recruiting Poster: With thanks to the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry Museum at Bodmin

**WANTED, CORNISHMEN!!**

WHAT WE WANT FOR THE  
**Duke of Cornwall's Lt. Infantry**  
are **CORNISHMEN.**

At present a very small percentage of the Regiment are  
**Cornishmen,**  
still of that small percentage the following posts have been held by  
**Cornishmen**  
during the last few years, in the  
**Cornish Regiment.**

**Quartermaster—**  
Pay 9/- per diem, with house and allowances and pension.

**3 Serjeant-Majors—**  
Pay 8/- per diem, with house and allowances and pension.

**Colour-Serjeants—**  
Three out of eight in the Battalion, 4/- per diem, with quarters and pensions.

The Officers' Mess-Serjeant and several of the best paid billets in the Regiment are held by  
**CORNISHMEN to day.**

**A Cornishman**  
Who enlists into the Regiment is made doubly welcome, and, from the fact that he is a  
**CORNISHMAN,**  
has every inducement to be promoted.

It is the hope and ambition of all the Officers of the Regiment that the Regiment should be for  
**CORNISHMEN,**  
as it once was many years ago, in the days of the Siege of Lucknow, where the **Cornish miner showed his worth.**

If parents, who wanted a really good and comfortable career for their sons, would communicate privately with the Officer Commanding the Depot at Bodmin, he would be delighted to give them all information about life in the  
**Cornish Regiment.**

T. R. STOKOE, Major,  
Cdg. Depot, Bodmin, Cornwall.

**GOD SAVE THE KING.**

Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry Recruiting Poster 1914

In Memory of  
Private  
**William Oaten**

240552, 1st/5th Bn., Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry who died on 21 March 1918 Age 21

Son of Robert and Lavinia Oaten, of Port Isaac, Cornwall.

Remembered with Honour  
Pozieres Memorial

Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission