

Lest We Forget - Alban J B Hudson



Lieut. A. J. B. Hudson,
M.C., Killed.
(See Casualty Columns.)

Born in June 1893, Alban was the only child of the Rev. Charles H B Hudson and his wife, Caroline, and lived for most of his early years in Oxford, where his father was a Church of England minister.

During his childhood, Alban would have been a regular visitor to Wick as his grandparents owned Upper Wick House (now Wyke Manor) and further down the village, he also had other members of the Hudson family who were living in the big mansion, Wick House.

Alban was educated at Summerfield Preparatory school in Oxford, before going off to Eaton and then, following in his father's footsteps, being a student at Magdalen College.

He was only 20 years of age when war was declared in August 1914 and, having been commissioned in the Office Training Corps when he was at Oxford, he was soon a Lieutenant with the 11th Battalion, The Worcestershire Regiment, a service battalion and part of Kitchener's Army.

After training in France during the Autumn of 1915 and also seeing some action in the trenches of the Western Front, the orders came that the 11th Battalion were to quickly get down to the port of Marseilles as they were required to sail across the Mediterranean and support the Salonika Front. (This theatre of war was intended to support Serbia against the advances of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria.). At some time during this period, Alban was invalided out of the army.

Back home in England in the early part of 1916, it is thought Alban fell in love and became engaged to a girl but it was not to be happy ending – apparently his parents did not approve of this relationship and it was broken off. It might be because of this, that Albion re-enlisted and went back to the war.

Alban re-joined the Worcesters in May 1916 but this time was with the 3rd Battalion. Within weeks of him being back, Alban was in the thick of the fighting in France. The war diaries now available give an account of how on the night of 1st June 1916, Lt. AJB Hudson led a company of around 80 men under cover of darkness on a raid through the frontline wire and into the enemy trenches. The task was to capture some prisoners for intelligence purposes and also ascertain the strength of the German fortifications in preparation for a major Allied

offensive that was to come within the week. The raid was a great success and Alban was awarded the Military Cross "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during a raid upon enemy trenches. He kept in touch with the various parties and maintained direction throughout with great coolness and skill, thus ensuring the success of the raid."



Military Cross

A few days later, the battalion was preparing for the Battle of Messines, which was to be a massive assault on the enemy lines.

Late in the evening of 6th June the troops were marched up to the front line, with Alban in charge of B company. (All other of the battalion Companies were led by captains, so it is assumed that his leadership skills are well respected.) The men are rested, provided with tea and await the orders to attack.

The author of the war diary, one of the officers, then relates that at 03.10 hrs on 7th June, it was "... Zero hour. Under cover of the greatest weight of artillery every employed in battle, the battalion left it's assembled position and moved forward." One can only imagine how they all felt; huddled down in the trenches, in dark with a huge barrage of artillery firing over the top of their heads, waiting for the order to go over the top. Next followed a further shock; unbeknown to the rank and file troops, mines had been placed under enemy positions only 600 yards away and at zero hour over 80 were detonated. As quoted "Momentarily, this had a bad effect on the men ..." but then they were out of the trenches going forward towards the enemy.

Sometime during this attack, Alban was killed along with many of his men. (During the confusion, it is believed that some of the British troops ran so quickly towards the enemy lines that they were killed by their own artillery.) Alban was 23 years old.

His Commanding Officer, Colonel R Whalley wrote to his parents ..." it is with the deepest sorrow and sympathy that I have to inform you (if you have not already received the news) that your son was killed whilst in command of his company during the action of Thursday last. He was shot through the head shortly after the attack commenced. One of the officers of the Battalion, 2nd Lieut Parry, was with him when he fell. So far, I have not heard if his body has been recovered (we are still in action and I have not been able to make enquiries) but there is no doubt it will be done as we are well in front of the spot where he fell. When I do hear I will let us know where it has been laid to rest. It is a great blow to me as I had the

most confidence in him as a company commander. And his charming personality endeared him to all. Only on Tuesday last I recommended him for the Military Cross for his part in a most gallant raiding enterprise undertaken by his company. Words I know are of no use at such a time but I trust you will in the future find consolation in the thought that his life, cut off in the height of its promise, has left nothing but fond memories behind. If there is anything I can do, please do not hesitate to let me know. I would do much in the memory of one, who, while he was with us, always did his best for me and for the battalion."

Alban's body was indeed recovered and eventually laid to rest in a military grave in Lone Tree Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen in Belgium. This is a very small military cemetery, containing the graves of 79 soldiers.

The impact that Alban's loss had on his parents was enormous. An article by Alex Brown in the Spring 2014 edition of Wick News details how, in his honour, his parents commissioned the building of a chapel in Wyck Manor and eventually, many years later, the building of the Hudson Memorial Bungalows by the Trust set up in his name and still active today.

Besides being remembered on our War Memorial in the Church grounds, the centenary of Alban's death in June 2017 saw the unveiling of the plaque in School Lane, shown below.

