

Robert Lewis Oates



Rank: Private

Killed in Action: 23rd July 1918

(France)

9th Bn. Tank Corps



Summary

Robert Lewis Oates family home was Hopton Fold, Upper Hopton where he was raised by his parents George and Martha Selina Oates. Robert worked as a domestic gardener for Mr George Ellis, Eastthorpe House, Mirfield. He was also a successful sportsman and footballer.

He was killed when his tank was hit by a shell (age 32).

Following the German Spring offensive, Paris was very seriously threatened by German troops just south of Amiens. The 9th Bn. Tank Corps were given the task of supporting the 3rd French Army at Moreuil and Sauvillers. Following initial success six tanks were put out of action in rapid succession by direct hits fired from a German battery situated to the south of St. Ribert Wood. The battle was successful but on the day 15 tanks were put out of action by direct hits. The Commanding officer of the First French Army, communicated to the officers and men of the 9th Battalion, Tank Corps, his congratulations on their support and bravery and bestowed on them the high honour of the Croix de Guerre.

Robert's sacrifice has been remembered at Soissons Memorial in France and he left behind his wife Betsy Ann and son Jack. His younger brother Ernest was also killed in action in August 1917 and his brother William Henry gassed and blinded but survived the war.

Another Upper Hopton lad is also remembered at the Soissons Memorial, he is Lionel Appleyard (2nd/5th Battalion Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment)) and he was killed on the same day as Robert.



Robert Lewis Oates

Family details

Date of Birth 10th March 1886

Date of Baptism 14th April 1886

Church Baptised Christ Church, Battyeford

Father George

Father's occupation Masons labourer (came to Mirfield to

help build St Paul's Church)

Mother Martha Selina (nee Nutton)

Siblings William Henry, Ernest, George Richard, Fred,

John Arthur, Martha Hannah, Emma Selina

Parents residence Hopton Fold, Upper Hopton

Soldiers residence

Soldiers Occupation Domestic gardener (for Mr George Ellis,

Eastthorpe House, Mirfield)

Married April to June 1911

Spouse Betsy Ann (nee Jessop)

(Betsy remarried G H Laycock in 1922)

Children Jack born 1912

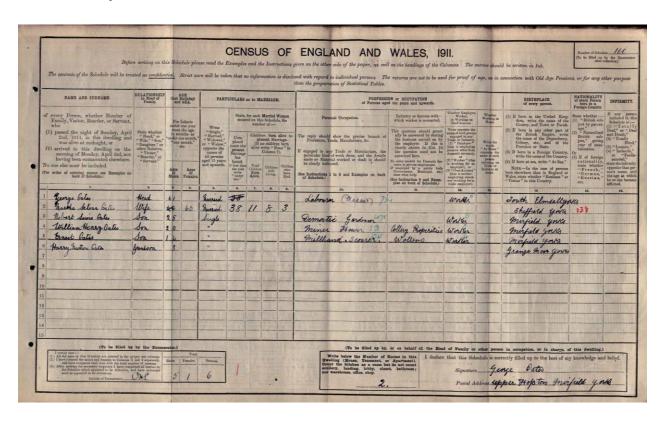
Burial / Memorial Soissons Memorial, France

Age at death 32



Robert Lewis Oates

Oates family 1911 Census



The certificate below shows the marriage of the sister of Robert Lewis Oates (Emma Selina) in 1909. With Robert & his wife to be, Betsy Ann as witnesses.

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Robert Lewis Oates

Robert Lewis Oates with his wife Betsy Ann and son Jack





Robert Lewis Oates





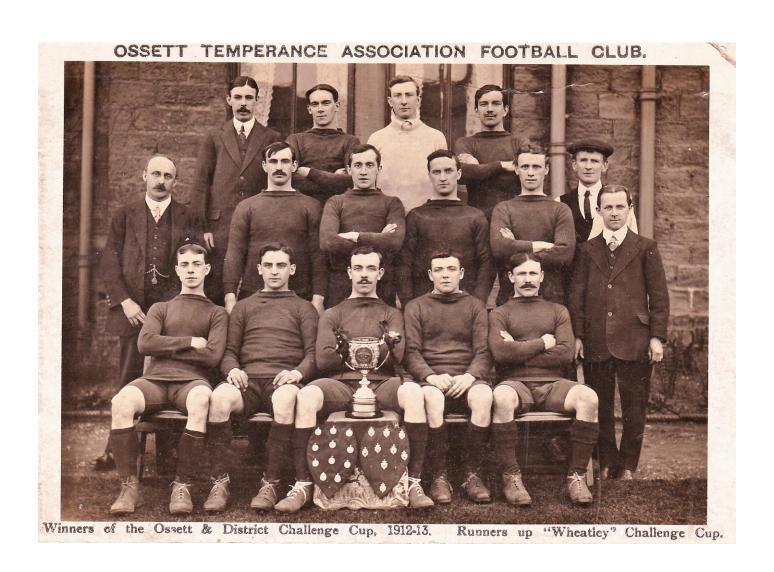
The photo on the left shows Robert's mother and father Martha Selina and George with the dog "Tiny". When George and Martha moved to Upper Hopton the farmer allowed them to make a dwelling in the barn opposite Hopton Hall.

The photo on the right shows Robert's sister Emma Selina (Sissy) with her husband Fred Mitchell and their children.



Robert Lewis Oates

Robert is in the middle row and first player from the right





Robert Lewis Oates

Robert lived in Hopton Fold shown in the photo.



Robert's father George was a mason's labourer (he came to Mirfield to help build St Paul's Church). Mother - Martha Selina (nee Nutton)







Robert married Betsy Ann (nee Jessop) in the early part of 1911. (Betsy remarried G. H. Laycock in 1922)

His son Jack was born in 1912 and went on to serve as a sergeant in the army in the second world war.







Robert Lewis Oates

Military Details

Attestation / Enlistment 28th October 1916

Deployment 16th April 1917

Rank Private

Medals British War Medal

Victory Medal

Regiment number 92261 Tank Corp (formerly 37889 York &

Lancaster Regiment (HB) TBn M/c gun corps)

Regiment 9th Bn. Tank Corps

Regimental Badge



Killed in Action 23rd July 1918 (France & Flanders)

Cemetery or Memorial Soissons Memorial, France

Age at death 32



Robert Lewis Oates





Robert Lewis Oates



Robert is in the front row third from the right (notice his two comrades from the previous picture on the back row).

Tank Corps (overview)

Tanks were used for the first time in action on the battlefield of the Somme on 15 September 1916. 36 Mark 1 tanks of C and D Companies arrived on the start line for the renewal of the Somme offensive: this action was later designated as the Battle of Flers-Courcelette. When the German army attacked in March 1918, British tanks were little used as a defensive weapon, but played an important part in the extraordinary counter-attack at Villers-Bretonneux on 24-25 April.

On 4 July 1918 at Le Hamel and in front of Amiens on 8 August 1918, tanks played a central role in the crushing success of the Allied attack. The Tank Corps was a temporarily spent force. It was not until the assaults on the Hindenburg Line in late September 1918 that a large enough force had been assembled again. From 21 August 1918 to the Armistice on 11 November 1918, some 2,400 men and officers of the Tank Corps became casualties.



Robert Lewis Oates

Robert's regiment - the 9th Battalion Tank Corps

(It was at the battle of Moreuil when Robert was killed in action)

9th Battalion of the Tank Corps was initially known as "I" Bn. It was formed in late 1916 and comprised the 25th, 26th and 27th Tank companies

The battalion was re-designated 9th Battalion in January 1918 and then participated in the following actions:

Moreuil July 1918

Amiens August 1918
Bapaume August 1918
2nd Battle of Arras August 1918
Battle Cambrai-St Quentin September/October 1918

The Battle of Moreuil

Following the German Spring offensive, Paris was very seriously threatened by German troops just south of Amiens. It became clear that the enemy needed to be driven from their position on the bank of the River Avre from where they could launch fresh attacks.

This task was assigned to three French Divisions: 152nd Infantry Division, 3rd Infantry Division and 15 Infantry Division. During the planning of this action and impressed by the success of the tanks at the Battle of Hamel earlier that month, the French asked the British for the loan of the tanks and men, their own being engaged on the Marne. The 9th Battalion Tank Corps were entrusted to support the 3rd Infantry Division, 'La Grenadiere', at the centre of the attack.

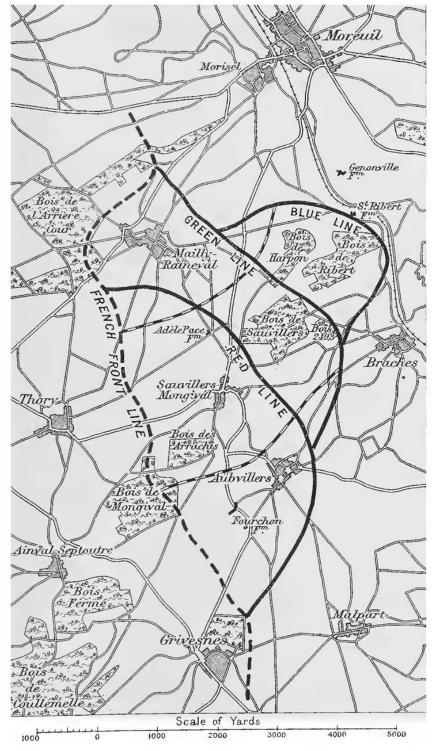
The first wave of tanks set out at 5.30am on the morning of the 23rd July and by that evening, all objectives had been achieved.

Far fewer casualties were incurred by the tank supported 3rd French Infantry Division, compared to the unsupported infantry.



Robert Lewis Oates

Detailed plan of the battle area showing Moreuil, Sauvillers and St. Ribert Wood where Robert probably killed.





As a unit the 9th Battalion Tank Corps was rewarded with the Croix de Guerre avec Palmes as a regimental decoration, worn by all ranks as a red and green lanyard.

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Robert Lewis Oates

The preparation & Tactics

The attack was to be preceded by one hour's intensive bombardment, including heavy counter-battery fire. The creeping barrage was to consist of high explosive and smoke shells and was to move at the rate of 200 meters in six minutes up to the first objective, after this at the rate of 200 meters in eight minutes.

Tanks were to attack in sections of three, two in front and one in immediate support, the infantry advancing in small assaulting groups close behind the tanks.

Directly the orders were issued preparations were set afoot. On July 18, Lieutenant-Colonel H. K. Woods, commanding the 9th Battalion, and his reconnaissance officers visited General de Bourgon,[1] the Commander of the 3rd French Division, who explained to them the scheme; on the next day these officers reconnoitred the ground over which the battalion would have to operate, and tactical training was carried out with the French at the 5th Tank Brigade Driving School at Vaux-en-Amienois. On the 20th and 21st training continued, and further examination of the ground was made, and on the 22nd details of the attack were finally settled. In spite of the continuous exertion of the last few days all ranks were in the greatest heart to show the 3rd French Division what the British Tank Corps could do.

Meanwhile headquarters were selected, communications arranged for, supplies dumped, and reorganization and rallying-points worked out and fixed.

The move of the 9th Battalion is particularly interesting on account of its rapidity. On July 17 it was in the Bus-les-Artois area; on the 18th it moved 16,000 yards across country and entrained under sealed orders at Rosel, detraining at Conty. On the night of the 19th-20th it moved 4,000 yards from Conty to Bois-de-Quemetot; on 20th- 21st, 9,000 yards to Bois-de-Rampont; on 21st-22nd, 7,000 yards to Bois-de-Hure and Bois-du-Fay; and on 22nd-23rd 4,500 yards from these woods into action with thirty-five machines out of the original forty-two fit to fight.

The attack

The country over which the action was to be fought was undulating, and with the exception of large woods, there were few tank obstacles. Prior to the operations the weather had been fine, but on the day of the attack heavy rain fell and visibility was poor, a south wind of moderate strength was blowing.

The preliminary bombardment began at 4.80 a.m., and, an hour later, the tanks having been moved up to their starting-points without incident, the attack was launched. The tanks advanced ahead of the infantry, Arrachis wood was cleared and Sauvillers village attacked, the tanks occupying this village some fifteen minutes before the infantry arrived. At Adelpare farm and Les-Trois-Bouqueteaux the enemy's resistance, as far as the tanks were concerned, was light, and the German machine-gun posts were speedily overrun. From



Robert Lewis Oates

Sauvillers village, at zero plus two hours, the tanks advanced on to Sauvillers wood, which, being too thick to enter, had to be skirted, broadsides being fired into the foliage. Whilst this was proceeding other tanks moved forward towards the Bois-de-St.-Ribert, but as the infantry patrols did not appear they turned back to regain touch with the French infantry. About 9.30 a.m., whilst cruising round, six tanks were put out of action in rapid succession by direct hits fired from a battery situated to the south of St. Ribert wood. At 9.15 a.m. an attack on Harpon wood was hastily improvised between the O.C. B Company, 9th Battalion, and the commander of one of the battalions of the 51st Regiment. This attack was eminently successful; the French infantry, following the tanks, established posts in Flarpon wood. After this action the tanks rallied.

In this attack the tank casualties were heavy in personnel: 11 officers and men were killed and 43 wounded, and 15 tanks were put out of action by direct hits. (the German tactics had changed, as they utilised heavy guns and field batteries for direct firing at the tanks "over open sights").

The losses in the French Divisions were: 3rd—26 officers and 680 men; 15th—15 officers and 500 men; 152nd—20 officers and 650 men. It should be noted that though the 3rd, with which tanks co-operated, had to attack the largest system of defences, its casualties approximately equalled those of each of the other divisions.

The number of prisoners captured was 1,858, also 5 guns, 45 trench mortars, and 275 machine guns.

After the attack, when the tanks had returned to their positions of assembly, General Debeney, commanding the First French Army, paid the 9th Battalion the great honour of personally inspecting it on July 25, and of expressing his extreme satisfaction at the way in which the Battalion had fought.

This collaboration by the French and British units was lauded as a phenomenal success and in Special Order No. 248, General Bourgon, Commander of the 3rd French Infantry Division, praised:

"The 9th Battalion of British Tanks...gave the Division the finest example of bravery, energy, of comradeship in action and of War Training carried to the highest degree of perfection. Their assistance enabled the Infantry to gain a brilliant victory, in which they themselves largely shared. La Grenadiere hereby addresses to its British comrades the touching expression of its gratitude and admiration."



Robert Lewis Oates

As a unit the 9th Battalion Tank Corps was rewarded with the Croix de Guerre avec Palmes as a regimental decoration, worn by all ranks as a red and green lanyard and additionally, General Bourgon, bestowed the honour of wearing the badge of his Division. La Grenadiere badge bears the motto, 'Qui s'y frotte, s'y brule" (touch me, and you burn), proudly worn by all serving in the 9th Battalion and again by 9th Royal Tank Regiment and ever since this day the men of this unit have worn it on their left arm.

From: Mag Gen H. RUGGLES BRISE, Military Secretary to C-in-C.

"The Commander-in-Chief (Gen Haig) desires that the following telegram received from General Debeney, Commanding First French Army, should be communicated to Lieut. Colonel Woods and the officers and men of the 9th Battalion, Tank Corps, whom he congratulates on the high honour given them:- "I am happy to convey to you the following telegram which I have just received from the General Commanding the French Armies in response to my request. The collective mention in the Orders of the Army of the 9th Battalion of British Tanks is approved in the following terms:- ' "In the fighting of July 23, under the skilled and capable command of Lieut.-Colonel Woods, have given the most effective assistance to a French Division, and by their courage, energy, cohesion, and, military training have won the enthusiastic admiration of their French comrades. The recommendations for the Legion of Honour and Military Medals are forwarded to the Minister, and strongly recommended." '

The Commander-in-Chief has sent the following reply to General Debeney:- "I have received your telegram of August 12 with the greatest pleasure, and have communicated to the 9th Battalion of Tanks the high honour for which they have been recommended.

and: GENERAL ORDER No. 248. 3rd (French) Division STAFF, H.Q, July 24, 1918.

"The 9th Battalion of British Tanks fought yesterday with the 3rd French Division known as "La Grenadiere". Commanded by an experienced and skilful leader, Lieut.-Colonel Woods, the tanks again enriched their harvest of laurels, which this new arm has not ceased to gather since its first appearance in August 1916. They have given the division the finest example of bravery, energy, of comradeship in action, and of war training carried to the highest degree of perfection. Their assistance enabled the infantry to gain a brilliant victory, which they themselves largely shared. If sacrifices to be deplored were the price of this success, the officers and men who fell gave an example of how a British soldier can die for his King and Country. "La Grenadiere" hereby addresses to its British comrades the touching expression of its gratitude and admiration.



Robert Lewis Oates

Le General Cdt. la 3e Division d'Infanterie, NAYAL DE BOURGON. August 12, 1918."

The citation for the CO was as follows:

"WOODS Lieut.-Col. WOODS, HUGH KENNEDY. 9th Battn. Awarded Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur. A su faire de son Bataillon tie Tanks tiii Corps d'élite dont l'ésprit guerrier, le sentiment de solidarité, la perfection de l'instruction militaire, ont soulévé l'adrniration unanime dans l'aide puissante qu'il a prêtée sans compter ft la 3e Division Française au combat du 23 juillet, Has succeeded in bringing the Tanks Battalion under his command to be a first-rate unit. Its martial spirit, high feelings of comradeship, and the perfect degree of its military instruction raised unanimous admiration by the powerful and unlimited support given to the 3rd French Division in the action of the 23rd July 1918."

The Croix de Guerre

Based on extracts of an Article written by Graham Wilson Medal Collector and Military Historian



The *Croix de guerre* was established in 1915, backdated to 1914, as a visible means of recognizing the various levels of citations in orders that had been a feature of the French armed forces for generations. Individuals who were cited at various command levels were awarded the cross itself, accompanied by an emblem to be affixed to the ribbon to signify the level of citation, the emblems being unique to each level. The command levels and the insignia used consisted of:

Mention in Brigade or Regimental Orders - bronze star (etoile bronze)
Mention in Divisional Orders - silver star (etoile argent)
Mention in Corps Orders - gold (silver gilt) star (etoile vermeil)
Mention in Army Orders - bronze palm (palme)

Besides individuals, the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* could be awarded to formations, units, ships and communities and during the war 449 awards were made to units. While the vast majority of these units were of course French, a number of awards of the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* were made to non-French units, including twelve (12) awards to units of the British Army.

These units were:

56th Infantry Brigade (9th Battalion the Cheshire Regiment; 8th Battalion the North Staffordshire Regiment; **1/4th Battalion the King's Shropshire Light Infantry**) of the 19th



Robert Lewis Oates

(Western) Division – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with silver star for the Battle of Bligny, 6 June 1918.

5th Field Battery Royal Field Artillery – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with bronze palm for actions at Pontavert (Aisne), 27 May 1918.

2nd Battalion the Devonshire Regiment – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with bronze palm for actions at Bois des Buttes, (Aisne) 27th May 1918.

1st/4th Battalion the King's Shropshire Light Infantry – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with bronze palm for the capture and defence of Bligny Hill, 6 June 1918.

8th Battalion the West Yorkshire Regiment – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with bronze palm for actions at Bois de Petit'Champ and Bligny, 20-30 July 1918.

6th Battalion the Black Watch – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with bronze palm for actions at Chambrecy, 20-30 July 1918.

9th Battalion Tank Corps – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with bronze palm for actions at Sauvillers/Moreuil, 23 July 1918.

12th Battalion the Cheshire Regiment – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with bronze palm for actions at Doiran (Salonika), 18 September 1918.

7th Battalion the South Wales Borderers – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with bronze palm for actions at Doiran (Salonika), 18 September 1918.

12th Battalion the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with bronze palm for actions at Doiran (Salonika), 19 September 1918.

24th Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with gold star for actions at St.Amand, 22-25 October 1918.

668th Company, Royal Army Service Corps – awarded the *Croix de guerre 1914-1918* with bronze star for excellent service during the Siege of Monastir (Salonika), November 1916.



Robert Lewis Oates

The Bligny Cockade



The cockade made of the ribbon of the Croix de Guerre was an accompaniment to the medal as was meant to be worn by the men whose unit was awarded the medal.

Following the presentation ceremony of the medal, from that point on, all ranks of the battalion wore the cockade of *Croix de guerre* ribbon on their Service Dress caps and a small flash of the ribbon on their shoulders.



Robert Lewis Oates

The Mark V Tank

The mark V tank entered British service in the closing stages of WW1, first seeing action at the battle of Hamel in July 1918 before playing a vital role in the battle of Amiens and the Hundreds Days offensive that led to the Armistice in November 1918.

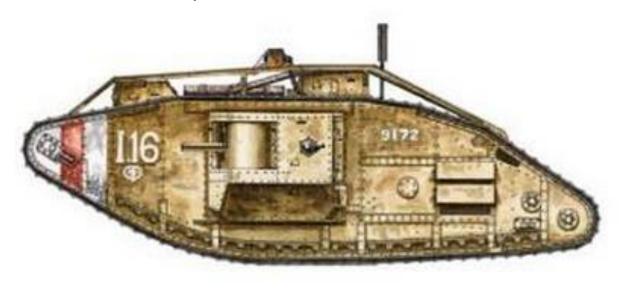
The new engine and transmission for the Mark V meant that it could be driven by one man as opposed to the four required for the previous tanks.

The Mark V tank is shown in the markings of the 9th Battalion Tank Corps during their battle of Moreuil on the 23 July 1918, which was only the second time that Mark V tanks were used in action.

Tank Statistics:

- Crew 8
- Weight 26 tonnes
- Length 8m, width 4m
- Max speed 4.6mph
- Armaments: two 6 pounder 57mm calibre guns, four machine guns

The Mark V Male Tank 9th Battalion, Tank Corps





Robert Lewis Oates

Military Record - Formal confirmation into the Machine Gun Corps.

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Signature of Office who calls for the Attestation Station 91.7	Name Albandary Corps, Regiment The above-named man, which is required in consequence of having ansferred to (HB) TBn Machine Gun Corps, Name Albandary Corps, Regiment Rank Gun Corps,



Robert Lewis Oates

In Memory of

Private

Robert Lewis Oates

92261, 9th Bn., Tank Corps who died on 23 July 1918 Age 32

Husband of Betsy Ann Laycock (formerly Oates), of 12, Nettleton Avenue, Mirfield, Yorks.

Remembered with Honour Soissons Memorial

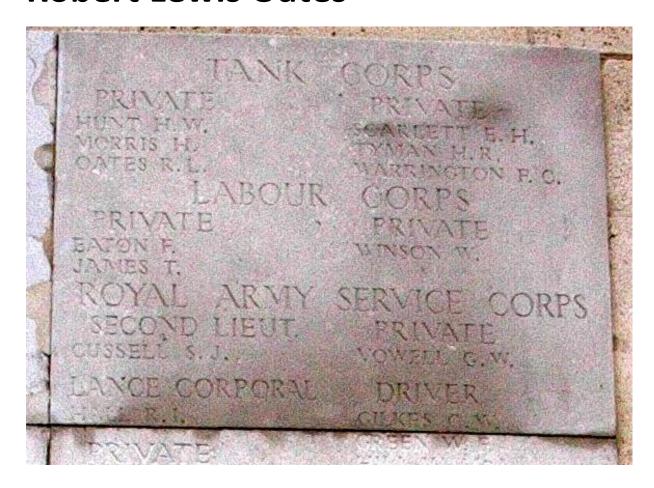




Commemorated in perpetuity by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Robert Lewis Oates



Soissons Memorial

The Soissons Memorial is a World War I memorial located in the town of Soissons, in the Aisne département of France. The memorial lists 3,887 names of British soldiers with no known grave who were killed in the area from May to August 1918 during the Spring Offensive. The battles fought by those commemorated here include the Third Battle of the Aisne and the Second Battle of the Marne. When the French Armies held and drove back the enemy from the Aisne and the Marne between May and July 1918 the 8th, 15th, 19th, 21st, 25th, 34th, 50th, 51st and 62nd divisions of the British Armies served in the line with them and shared the common sacrifice. Here are recorded the names of 3,987 officers and men of those divisions to whom the fortune of war denied the known and honoured burial given to their comrades in death.



Robert Lewis Oates

Soissons Memorial - cont'd

All the six names listed on the memorial above (including Robert Lewis) under the heading "TANK CORPS" lost their lives on the same day 23rd July 1918:

Henry Walter Hunt - age 29 - Bedminster, Bristol - 91385

Harry Morris - age 25 - Leyland, Lancashire - 91948

Robert Lewis Oates - age 32 - Married and son - Upper Hopton, Mirfield, West Yorks.- 92261

Edward Harold Scarlett - Stoken Church - Married and son - 91240 **Henry Richardson Tyman** - age 30 - Married and daughter - Stanley, Durham - 91933

Frederick Charles Warrington - age 30 - Bradford, West Yorks. - 78978

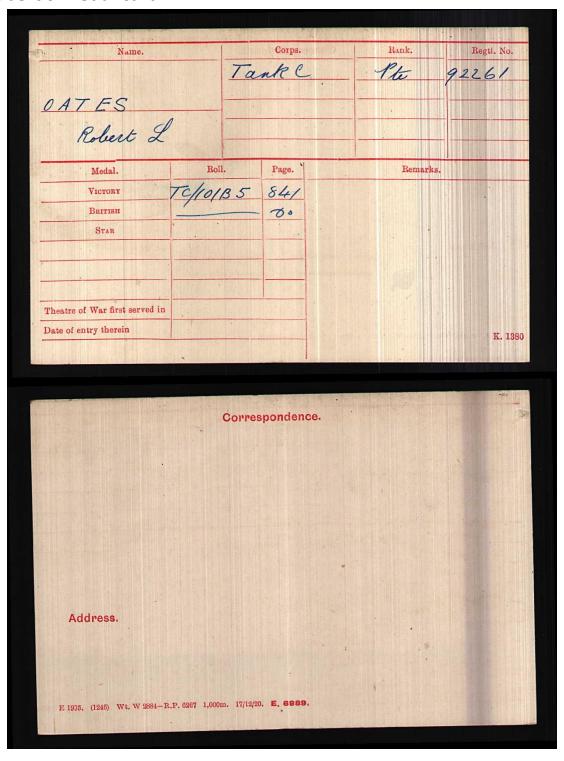


This is a photograph of Robert's mother Martha Selina in 1920 leaving for France to visit the war graves.



Robert Lewis Oates

Robert's Medal card





Robert Lewis Oates

Robert's Medals

British War Medal



Victory Medal



The Mark V Male Tank - 9th Battalion, Tank Corps The Mark V tank was used by Robert's battalion at the Battle of Moreuil.



Tank crews wore this type of medieval looking leather and chain mail masks to protect them from flying metal splinters inside the tank.



Robert Lewis Oates

Dewsbury reporter 10th August 1918

TANK MAN KILLED, BROTHER BLINDED.

Very painful facts are bound up with the death in action of Gunner Robert (" Bob") Lewis Oates, of the Tank Corps, formerly gardener to Mr. George Ellis, Eastthorpe House, Mirfield. Although official information has not yet been



(killed).

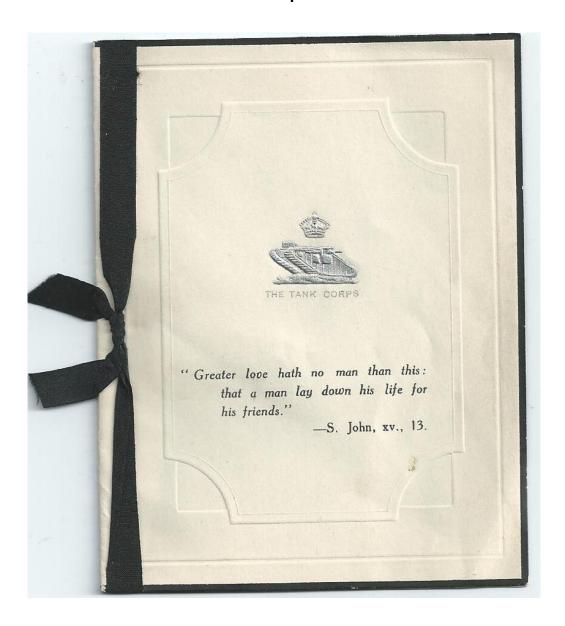
received the news is given in a letter from the deceased's commanding officer, and is confirmed in a sympathetic letter from a chaplain who Gunner Oates was killed on July 23rd. "Poor Oates was a splendid man," writes the former, "always ready and smart at any duty which called him. He went as a runner into action in a tank, as I hoped he would be safer and less exposed. Unfortunately. Pte. P. L. Oates, Mirfield tank was hit by a shell and several inside were

killed or injured, but not before we had gained our objectives, and in conjunction with the French taken 1:800 prisoners, three villages and many guns. Personally, I feel his loss very much indeed, for such a man cannot be replaced." Unhappily on the day that followed the receipt of these sad tidings, Mr. and Mrs. Oates, of Upper Hopton, the parents of the deceased soldier (who was 32 years of age) received information that another son, William Henry Oates (26), had been gassed and blinded, and was then an inmate of an Australian hospital in France. He, also, was in the Tank Corps, and was an old Mirfield "Terrier," who was in training at the outbreak of war. His elder brother enlisted on October 28th, 1916, and had been fourteen months in France. Both brothers were formerly choristers at Upper Hopton Church.



Robert Lewis Oates

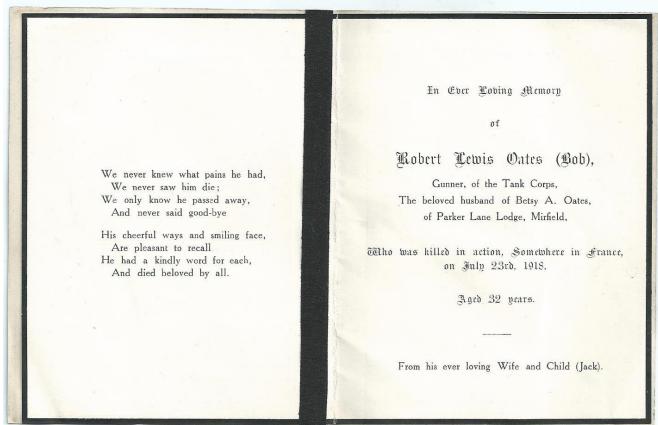
Dedication to Robert from the Tank Corp





Robert Lewis Oates







Robert Lewis Oates



Betsy Ann & Jack

The photo below shows Robert's son Jack on the right (the little boy above and in the photograph at the start of this dedication), he was an army sergeant in the second world war. On the left is his cousin Harry Nutton Oates who was a corporal in the RAF. Both met whilst on duty in Cairo Egypt in 1945.