

REUBEN HENRY BEECLIFF

Reuben Henry Beecliff was born in Bow, Middlesex, in March 1895. He was the only son of Alfred Richard Beecliff and Ann Jane Beecliff, née Simmonds. Ann Jane was born in Lambeth, Middlesex, on 9th January 1863. Alfred was born in Bow on 11th May 1862.

Alfred and Ann were married on 25th March 1883 in Bethnal Green and their eldest child, Violet Sophia Beecliff was born in Bow in 1887.

In 1891 they were living with 3 year old Violet at 22, Fern Terrace, Eve Road, Wanstead, Essex. Living with them were Ann's mother Elizabeth Simmonds, aged 53, who was employed as a Domestic Servant and Ann's sister, Sophia Simmonds, aged 22, who was a Boot Machinist. Alfred was employed as a Boot Laster - he made models of feet on which boots and shoes were made or repaired. Ann was also employed as a Boot machinist. Alfred's father, Richard Beecliff, was a Boot Manufacturer in Bethnal Green at this time so it is probable that they were all working for the family business.

In 1901, Alfred, Ann, Violet now aged 13 and Reuben aged 6 were living at 97, Roman Road, Bethnal Green, Bow. Alfred was now running his own business as a boot maker. His father Richard, aged 74 and widowed, was no longer in the

boot trade and he was employed as an Insurance Company Clerk.

In 1911, Alfred, Ann and their two children were living at 7, Chaucer Road, Wanstead, Essex. Alfred was employed as an Insurance Agent. It is possible he had been encouraged by his father to change career and work in the Insurance business. Reuben was 16 years old and was an office worker with an Architect and Surveyors. Tragedy struck in this year when Reuben's sister Violet died, aged just 23.

Reuben enlisted early on in the War and joined the 8th Battalion, The Buffs and East Kent Regiment. He was Private G/2230 Reuben Henry T Beecliff. Reuben arrived in France with his Battalion on 31st August /1st Sept 1915. After 2 days in Boulogne they marched to Étaples for Divisional Training, and were 'bussed' from there on September 21st to the concentration area for the Battle of Loos. They marched to Béthune on September 25th and were told to move to Vermelles for an attack that night. The attack was however postponed until the following morning.

The attack began at 10.30am on September 26th. The unit had only been in France for three weeks, so they had had no gradual introduction to trench warfare as was customary; furthermore they had marched hard to get to the start point, without rations. The Buffs attacked an objective at Hulluch, they had to cross a stretch of No Man's Land a mile wide. The men reached their objective despite coming under heavy

machine gun fire, only to find that all the barbed wire in front of them was still intact. The fight was conducted in front of the German wire. The Division to the right withdrew, leaving the flank open to machine gun fire. The Germans started shelling. The Buffs withstood this bombardment for 4 hours, taking casualties as they withdrew. That night they were relieved and went back to Noeux-Les-Mines. The casualties were staggering; only one officer was left alive to bring the survivors out. 24 officers and 610 other ranks were killed, wounded or missing. The Battalion was virtually non-existent within three weeks of landing in France.

Reuben then enlisted into Lord Kitchener's 'New Army.' The first time that these New Army volunteers were deployed was at the Battle of Loos in September 1915. The men showed no lack of courage or fighting spirit but in reality their training was an inadequate preparation for modern warfare on the Western Front. It was during this battle that the British used poison gas for the first time, releasing deadly chlorine gas from canisters. Much of the gas blew back towards the British line causing much confusion and numerous casualties.

The untried New Army Divisions that were sent forward in extended lines on the afternoon of the 26th September were rapidly cut down by German machine gun fire. The twelve attacking British Battalions suffered 8,000 casualties, including Reuben, out of 10,000 men, in just 4 hours.



HOODED BRITISH TERRITORIALS CHARGING THE GERMAN TRENCHES AT LOOS, SEPTEMBER 25TH, 1915.

One of the most awe-inspiring charges during the whole of the war was that made by the London Territorials on the German trenches between the "Tower Bridge" of Loos and the great double slag-heap opposite Grenay, known as the Double Crassier. The first line having been cleared, a number of forward houses were rushed, and finally Loos Cemetery was taken. Under cover of gas, the territorials, wearing their respirators, dashed forward with irresistible élan, and eventually emerged on to the front

German line. The eerie effect produced by their Inquisition-like hoods struck terror into the hearts of the enemy. Sweeping with comparative ease over the German first-line trench, they encountered greater resistance at the second road and Lens Road junction at Valley Cross-roads, but this, too, was overcome, the enemy retreating to his third line of defence through Loos. The masked figure on the right is wearing the regulation belt filled with bombs. On the left three German machine-guns are surrendering.

The Battle of Loos

Reuben was one of 60,000 British men who died at the Battle of Loos. Among the dead were Fergus Bowes-Lyon, brother to Elizabeth, who later became Queen Consort of George VI, and 'Queen Mother'. The Author and Poet, Rudyard Kipling's son John, and the poet Charles Sorley also lost their lives.

Reuben aged 20, was 'assumed to have been killed' in action on the 26th September 1915, but his body was never recovered. He is commemorated on the Loos Memorial on Panel 15 – 19. The Memorial lists the names of 20,000 officers and men who have no known grave.

Name.	Corps.	Rank	Regt. No.
BEECLIFF Reuben	Ro-Kent-R.	Pte	G/2230
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	60 6/2/102B2 2/3		D. Pres: 26-9-15.
BRITISH	do	do	
15 STAR	E/2/2B1	35	
Theatre of War first served in	01 France		
Date of entry therein	31-8-15.		K. 1380.

Reuben's Medal Record Card. He earned the War and Victory Medals with the 14/15 Star

Reuben is also commemorated on the Leyton Schools Memorial and in the Book of Remembrance, at Davies Lane School Leyton Library. He is also named on the War Memorial in Wanstead High Street as well as the Great War Memorial inside the Wanstead United Reformed Church Wanstead E11 2HD.

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Margaretha Pollitt Brown for Wanstead United Reformed Church.