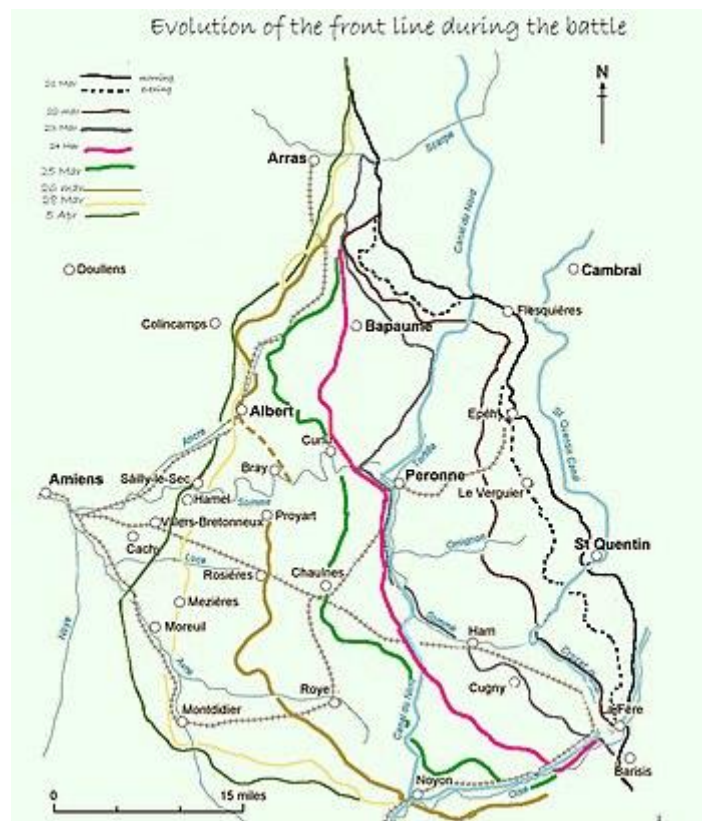


## William Silas Woodhams – 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Fusiliers

Initially I assumed that William recuperated at Abbey Manor and was then discharged from the army but his Medal Roll record indicates that this is quite wrong. Because on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1918 he is back in active service with the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion the Royal Fusiliers.

In the time that William had been away the Germans had launched a massive offensive, known as Operation Michael, in the Somme area and recaptured a significant amount of ground.



When he was with the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion at the beginning of the year William was based near Flesquières to the south west of Cambrai. When he joined the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion they were just south of Arras.

William's life for the next 9 months can be followed in great detail in the war diaries of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion which can be obtained from <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/h/C4554500>.

WAR DIARY				Army Form C. 2118.
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.				
(Erase heading not required.)				
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
ADINFER	14.7.18		Batt <sup>n</sup> holding line	
B <sup>n</sup>	15.7.18		Ditto	
B <sup>n</sup>	16.7.18		Ditto	
B <sup>n</sup>	17.7.18		Ditto Inter-company relief	Operation Orders No 57
B <sup>n</sup>	18.7.18		Ditto	
B <sup>n</sup>	19.7.18		Ditto	
B <sup>n</sup>	20.7.18		Ditto	
VI. OF ADINFER-MONKTON	21.7.18		Batt <sup>n</sup> relieved in line by 2 <sup>nd</sup> H.L.I. and moved back to Brigade Reserve positions.	B <sup>n</sup> No 60
B <sup>n</sup>	22.7.18		Baths and rest.	
B <sup>n</sup>	23.7.18		B <sup>n</sup> and training	B <sup>n</sup> Orders No 58
B <sup>n</sup>	24.7.18		Training	
ADINFER	25.7.18		Batt <sup>n</sup> relieved 52 <sup>nd</sup> Light Inf <sup>y</sup> in Right sub-sector, 5 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade sector.	Opn. Orders No 61
B <sup>n</sup>			B <sup>n</sup> H.Q. in BILLY BANK, N.E. of ADINFER WOOD	
B <sup>n</sup>	26.7.18		Batt <sup>n</sup> holding line	
B <sup>n</sup>	27.7.18		Ditto	
B <sup>n</sup>	28.7.18		B <sup>n</sup> H.Q. 1 Coy Staff and 3 Platoons of 1 <sup>st</sup> B <sup>n</sup> of 319 <sup>th</sup> A <sup>n</sup> United States Forces absorbed.	



## William Silas Woodhams – 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Fusiliers

As the previous extract shows, for the first couple of months things were very quiet and activity consisted of spending several days on the front line near Adinfer followed by several days at the Brigade Reserve position. All of this changed on 23<sup>rd</sup> August when the Battalion was ordered to advance as part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade and by the 25<sup>th</sup> they had succeeded in capturing the village of Behagnies.

WAR DIARY OR INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY. (Erase heading not required.)				Army Form C. 2118.
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	1918 Aug.			
S.E. of AYETTE	22nd.		2nd Division ordered to attack from the ARRAS - ACHIEF - LE - GRAND Railway Line on morning of 23rd AUGUST, 5th Brigade objectives being the capture of BEHAGNIES and SAPIGNIES. To the H.L.I. was allotted the capture of BEHAGNIES, the 24th R.F. echeloned on their right to carry on the tide of advance and seize SAPIGNIES and the ground to the East of it. 52nd L.I. in Bde. Reserve. 5th Bde. concentrated S.E. of AYTEE early on 23rd.	O.Os 72 5th Bde. G.S. 740/182 Order No. 3186/319
"	23rd.		At 12-30 A.M. the Battalion moved to rendezvous arriving there at 3-30 A.M.. At 9-30 A.M. the Battalion moved forward in Artillery formation to the Railway Embankment - ARRAS - ACHIEF - LE - GRAND Railway. The attack, with Tanks, started at 11 A.M. under cover of a barrage. Heavy enemy artillery fire was encountered at once and crossing the ARRAS - ACHIEF - LE - GRAND Railway small arm enfilade fire was brought to bear on the Batin. from isolated posts S. of the advance. GOMIECOURT was passed on our right and the advance continued by the Battalion swinging to the right and pressing forward in face of exceedingly heavy fire from machine guns and guns of all calibres up to 8". The uninterrupted M.G. fire from the left flank - EAST - was especially telling from the high ground left unaccounted for between the advance of the 5th. & 5th. Brigades. The barrage was traversed though not without heavy casualties and the advance pushed on in a determined manner the drill-like precision, steady bearing and unfaltering pace of the troops under the prolonged ordeal, being wholly admirable. The enemy commenced hurriedly to move his guns, but one reports of the leading Coys. pushed forward a Lewis Gun team which was quickly in action, the enemy gunners from being shot down and 8 Field Guns captured. The two leading Companies, with those of the H.L.I., Coys & had reached the ridge West of BEHAGNIES and this position was consolidated and held. Headquarters Flank was established in a bank N.W. of BEHAGNIES, where a Field Gun, Limber and 8 horses were captured Coys - 7 with much valuable booty and documents. The enemy withdrew his troops to BEHAGNIES and patrols of the Battalion were pushed out to ascertain the enemy's dispositions. A further advance proved out of the question without further artillery preparation, in view of the absolutely open valley to be crossed, the intense machine gun fire, and the presence of enemy positions on the flanks. Remainder of the day was spent in consolidating the positions won.	Wire PB 24 5th Bde. V.B. 308/31 "BM 569/50 Wire PB 38 G.I. 167 B.M. 562 568, 565 RM09 Situation
N. of BEHAGNIES	24th.		Coys. reorganized and preparations made for continuing the attack. Two Coys of 2nd Ox. & Bucks placed under command of Comdg. Officer 24th R.F.	G.I. 14 B.M. 45/47 P.B. 48
"	25th.		At 1-30 A.M. orders received for the Battalion, in conjunction with the H.L.I., to take BEHAGNIES. Two Coys were allotted to the assault proper, 1 Coy to Support as Mop-up, and to form a defensive right flank, and 1 Coy in Reserve. At 5-30 A.M. the attack commenced under cover of a <del>accurate</del> barrage and was a complete surprise for the enemy and success for us. Many nests of Machine Guns were overcome and the teams killed or made prisoners. The village was held in strength by the enemy with many machine guns, officially estimated at 110, but the Battalion followed so closely to the barrage that the resistance was in most cases overcome before the enemy had time to man his defences. Many of the enemy were discovered asleep in their dugouts and surrendered without a struggle, and those attempting to escape were shot down. The leading Coys pushed forward to their objective, the ridge some 300 E. of BEHAGNIES, where work of consolidation and preparation for any counter attack was thoroughly organized. The Support Coy, whose task was to mop up the village, quickly accounted for all enemy stragglers and did their work most effectively before swinging round to guard the southern approaches to the village, By 5 A.M. BEHAGNIES was to be completely in our hands, with the Battalion in strong positions, of its own choosing, E. of the village and prepared for any eventualities. 200 prisoners alone were taken in the operation, this total almost approximating the entire casualties sustained by the Battalion in the two days fighting. Altogether it was a proud day for the Battalion, the operation in its conception thoroughly outwitting the enemy. The Officers and N.C.O.s leading their men in a manner beyond all praise, and the men, many of whom were young untried soldiers in their first fight, going forward in full confidence that they could beat the enemy and when they had so thoroughly beaten him, proud and elated to have seen him so thoroughly out-maneuvred and outfought. Work on consolidation proceeded apace and by 9 A.M. the 52nd Division was in line with B.H.Q. and at 9-30 A.M. advanced through our forward positions. BEHAGNIES was heavily shelled all day and at 5 P.M. an intense barrage was put down on the village and Bn. H.Q. heralding the commencement of a counter-attack. This was developing from FAYREUIL WOOD, and artillery was quickly brought to bear on the troops assembling with great effect so that the attack delivered was readily beaten back by the troops on the Bn. Right. At 9 P.M. the situation had become normal and permitted of arrangements being pushed forward for the withdrawal of the Battalion from the front line. By 11-30 P.M. the Battalion marched back to Reserve positions to the right of COURCELLES, on the COURCELLES - ACHIEF - LE-PEIT ROAD.	5th Bde. Order No. 320 P.B. 48 B.M. 576 Situation Rep. Coys from m Coys & Flank Coys = 9 Appendices
COURCELLES.	26th. 31st.)		Reorganization, refitting and rest, Coy. Parades and fatigue work.	

### War Diary of 24th Battalion Royal Fusiliers 22nd - 31st August 1918

During the first part of September the Battalion were in the rear of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade's advance across the area towards the Canal du Nord which was heavily fortified and occupied by the Germans. They eventually reached Hermies on 10<sup>th</sup> September. Over the next 3 days the battalion were in close support of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Highland Light Infantry with the objective of crossing the Canal du Nord. This was achieved and the battalion were largely involved in clearing the enemy trenches and capturing prisoners.

Following a brief rest period the battalion were then involved in more action to the east of Rumilly (south of Cambrai) on 1<sup>st</sup> October. This involved attacking and overcoming a German garrison based on many dugouts in two quarries. This was completed successfully and a new front line established

to the east of the Cambrai railway. After several days rest to the rear of the front line the battalion moved eastwards again and were billeted in the village of Rumilly between 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October.

The advance eastwards then began to gather pace and the battalion were ordered back into attack on 23<sup>rd</sup> October when they captured the village of Vertain. A section of the war diary reads *“That night, after a hard day, the Battn had the novel experience of being billeted in houses in the village of Vertain which they had so finely won in the morning.”*

The battalion continued marching east and nearly every day they were billeted in a different village. The Germans finally surrendered on 11<sup>th</sup> November. Interestingly the war diary for that day reads, *“Specialist Coy training – advance guard”* and for the following day *“Battn cleaning roads in area”*.

However, the content of the daily orders does change significantly. Here are some examples:

15<sup>th</sup> November – *“Q.M. will arrange for clean clothing to be distributed before moving – Every man will carry one set of clean underclothing in his pack.”*

*“COY COMMANDERS will see that all men’s boots are well greased before the main march starts on 17<sup>th</sup>.”*

The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion were designated as part of the occupying army. Presumably the main march means the march into Germany to the British occupation zone. They obviously marched with a band because part of the standing orders for this period was that *“BAND will march in rear of leading COY.”*

16<sup>th</sup> November – *“SPECIAL BATTALION ORDER Regimental Barbers are paid by COYS – ALL Men are forbidden to give any payment or gratuity for haircutting, and barbers are forbidden to receive same.”*

24<sup>th</sup> November – *“The Café Central, 6 Place du Sud, CHARLEROI is placed out of bounds to all troops.”*

*“MEN ARE REMINDED that they must be smartly turned out in walking out dress when leaving billets PROPER DRESS – Belt or Bandolier.”*

27<sup>th</sup> November – *“CLEANING BILLETS Cpl.Rawlings will detail 5 Sanitary Men to remain behind and clean up Battalion Billets. Cpl.Rawlings and these 5 men will proceed to LE ROUX by 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Lorry. Q.M. will see that lorry does not proceed without these men.”*

Most days the men marched from one billet to the next, into and across Belgium. The distance covered each day varied sometimes as little as 8 km, sometimes as much as 35 km. Every week or so they had a rest day or two, very often on a Sunday when there was a Church Parade. Eventually they crossed the then German border at Malmedy on 9<sup>th</sup> December and reached their winter quarters at Dormagen on 22<sup>nd</sup> December in time for Christmas. Dormagen is on the Rhine between Dusseldorf and Cologne.

The battalion remained at Dormagen throughout January, February and March. The diary just records activities such as route marches, training and internal economy (cleaning and tidying). On 18<sup>th</sup> March those who had volunteered to remain as part of the Army of Occupation moved to join the 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion at Ehreshoven.

William obviously did not volunteer to stay on and on 29<sup>th</sup> March the remainder of the battalion marched south to new billets in Fuhlingen, near Cologne. Then on 31<sup>st</sup> March he was presumably one of the 42 other ranks who were demobilised. There is no record of how or when they returned to England but William was not finally ‘dispersed’ at Crystal Palace until 5<sup>th</sup> June 1919 when he was given 28 days paid leave and finally returned home to 15 Mead Place.



Interestingly this document gives his rank as Private. I can only imagine this was at his request because more than two and a half years previously he had qualified to be a Sergeant. From my limited experience of him he was a very humble man and I can understand that he was not comfortable with responsibility and managing other people.

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# William Silas Woodhams – 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Fusiliers

Army Form Z. 21.

**CERTIFICATE of\*** Discharge  
Transfer to Reserve  
Disembodiment  
Demobilization **on Demobilization.**

1918  
304532

N.B.—Any person finding this Certificate is requested to forward it in an unstamped envelope to the Secretary, War Office, London S.W. 1.

WARNING.—If this Certificate is lost a duplicate cannot be issued. You should therefore on no account part with it or forward it by post when applying for a replacement.

Regtl. No. 41449 Rank 2nd Sergeant

Names in full WOODHAM'S William Silas

Unit and Regiment or Corps 24th Royal Fusiliers

from which 24th Royal Fusiliers

\*Discharged 20th February 1918

Transferred to Reserve

Enlisted on the 1918

For Royal Fusiliers

(Here state Regiment or Corps to which first appointed)

Also served in Training Reserve Battalion

Only Regiments or Corps in which the Soldier served since August 4th, 1914 are to be stated. If inapplicable, this space is to be ruled through in ink and initialed.

†Medals and Decorations awarded during present engagement Nil

\*Has not served Overseas on Active Service.

Place of Rejoining in case of emergency Crystal Palace Medical Category A.I.

Specialist Military qualifications Nil Year of birth 1893

He is Discharged  
Transferred to Army Reserve  
Disembodied  
Demobilized on 2nd July 1919

in consequence of Demobilization

Signature and Rank W. S. Woodhams

Officer in Charge of Records W. S. Woodhams (Place) London

\*Strike out whichever is inapplicable. †The word "Nil" to be inserted when necessary.

(20996). Wt. W 8211—P.P. 2322. 3,000m. 1/19. D & S. (B 1256.)

William Silas Woodhams Army Demobilization