

Gilbert Allen Henry Anscombe Army Attestation 3

At that time he is presumably living with his mother and step-father at 7 Ezra Mansions in Old Courthouse Street, Calcutta as he gives his mother as his next of kin. Presumably he has been working for some time in Calcutta as a shellac manufacturer. Shellac is a natural substance made from a resin secreted by the female lac bug which feeds on the barks of trees. At the time it had a wide range of uses including manufacturing 78 rpm records and as a liquid for French polishing.

The papers he signed say that he is committing to enlist "As a special volunteer for service overseas, for one year or less, if war is over sooner, but liable to a further period of 12 months if war continues." As it turned out he was in the war for two and a half years and it cost him his life.

Until he was killed in action on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1917 there is no further record of where Gilbert went during the intervening period. However, given the fact that he signed up with an infantry battalion in the Indian Army we can make an educated guess as to his army service.

His medal roll has B.E.F. 1914 as the campaign he fought in to be awarded the '15 Star'. B.E.F. stands for the British Expeditionary Force and was the six-division British Army sent to the Western Front during the First World War. So this indicates that Gilbert participated in the First World War in Europe.

Campaign:— B.E.F. 1914		(A) Where decoration was earned	
		(B) Present situation	
Name	Corps	Rank	Reg. No.
(A) ANSCOMB	2nd Battalion Frontier Rifles	Serjeant	8623
(B) G.A.H.	Indian Army	Dead	

  

Action taken		
MEDAL	ROLL	PAGE
VICTORY	30/10/14	143
BRITISH	do	do
15 STAR	do	do

*Issued by Govt of India 10/1/15*  
*Issued to recipient by Govt of India 2/1/16*

Disembarkation Date: 10.8.14

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In the First World War the Indian Army was divided into seven expeditionary forces. Of these only Expeditionary Force A was attached to the BEF. They were sent to Europe at the very start of the war and landed in Marseilles on 30 September 1914, only six weeks after the declaration of war. They then moved to the Ypres Salient and took part in the Battle of La Bassée in October 1914. However, their efforts in Europe were not a great success. They were hampered by a lack of familiarity with new equipment, only being issued Lee–Enfield rifles on their arrival in France and they had almost no artillery, relying on support from their neighbouring corps when in the front line. They were not accustomed to the continental weather and were poorly equipped to resist the cold, leading to low morale. The infantry divisions were finally withdrawn to Mesopotamia in October 1915, when they were replaced by the new British divisions of Kitchener's Army. It's reasonable to assume that Gilbert was in one of the infantry divisions because originally he joined the Calcutta Volunteer Rifles, an infantry regiment.

From Gilbert's entry in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission we know that he was attached to the 36<sup>th</sup> Sikhs. This ties in with the suggestion that he left Europe and transferred to Mesopotamia (Iraq) in October 1915 as the 36<sup>th</sup> Sikhs were in Mesopotamia in early 1916. Unfortunately their war diary is only available from 1<sup>st</sup> March 1916 but it gives us a lot of detail from that time until Gilbert's death.

Mesopotamia had for centuries been part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire which was now allied to Germany. The British Army were in Mesopotamia to protect what they considered to be 'their' oil resources, in particular the refinery at Abadan and the pipelines feeding it.

Name and Rank

SECOND LIEUTENANT  
G A H ANSCOMBE

Regiment & Unit/Ship

Indian Army Reserve of Officers

Date of Death

Died 01 February 1917

Buried or commemorated at

AMARA WAR CEMETERY  
XXI. K. 10.  
Iraq

Secondary Unit,  
Regiment

attd. 36th Sikhs

Country of Service

Indian

In 1914 they had successfully achieved this and pushed inland to occupy Basra and then Qurna at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In 1915 they had the aim to capture the capital Baghdad but failed in that aim and were driven back to Kut al Amara in December 1915. The Turks pursued the retreating force, surrounded the garrison at Kut and cut it off.

On 1<sup>st</sup> March 1916 the 36<sup>th</sup> Sikhs were stationed in Basra and received orders to embark on a journey up the river Tigris the next day. They were part of a much larger force being sent to relieve the siege of Kut. They arrived in the vicinity of Kut a few days later and were peripherally involved in attempts to relieve the Turkish siege. However, none of these were successful and eventually on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1916 Major General Townshend surrendered his force of 13,300 men to the Turks.

The capture of Baghdad remained the main objective but first the Allies needed to recapture Kut el Amara and the 36<sup>th</sup> Sikhs played a significant, but devastating, part in that. The following extracts from their war diary detail the events before and after the action when Gilbert Allen Henry was killed.

Date	Time	Action
		BO = British Officer, IO = Indian Officer, IOR = Indian Other Rank A map defining the main features described here is shown after the diary
28/1	13:30	Orders received that 37 Brigade were to relieve 36 Brigade tonight ( <i>The 36<sup>th</sup> Sikhs were part of 37 Brigade</i> )
	15:10	Regt marched from camp by platoons at 200 yds distance via HARVEY ROAD to EMPEROR'S TRENCH where it waited till dark before moving up to relieve 36 Brigade
	23:30	Relief completed. The Regt relieved the 1/4 <sup>th</sup> Hants and dispositions were as follows; Nos 1 & 2 companies in front line, No 4 company in 2 <sup>nd</sup> line and No 3 company in 3 <sup>rd</sup> line. The front line was in MATTHEWS TRENCH. There was heavy sniping during relief.
29/1/	02:00	Two picquets (strength of each 1BO & 50 rifles) were sent to P13G and P16. This was carried out under heavy sniping and picquets were dug in by dawn at P16 and 200 x W of P13G. Remainder of day was spent improving trenches and communication trenches. Strength of regiment in trenches today: BOs 12 IOS 16 IOR 717
	18:00	Artillery bombardment of enemy's position took place
	18:15	Under cover of bombardment a picquet of 1BO & 50 men doubled out from communication trench due S of 1 <sup>st</sup> N in GUNNING and bombed enemy out of advanced

		<p>position at P13G and established a picquet there. During the operation there was very heavy fire from the Turkish trenches which showed they suspected an attack on their front line. Our front line now consisted of 3 picquets – one at P16, one at P13G and one half way between these points.</p> <p>Our casualties today were IOs wounded 1, IOR killed 3, IOR wounded 54</p> <p>These were mostly caused by Turkish snipers who were very hard to locate and very fine shots.</p>
30/1	17:30	<p>Orders received to make GUNNING TRENCH our front line. Nos 1 and 2 Coys occupied GUNNING TRENCH and spent the night in improving the existing cover. No 3 Coy moved up to MATTHEWS TRENCH as 2<sup>nd</sup> line and No 4 Coy remained in previous position – 3<sup>rd</sup> line</p>
	17:45 - 17:52	<p>During bombardment of enemy's trenches.</p> <p>The enemy snipers were very active all day.</p> <p>Major R W Macdonald DSO rejoined Rgt from sick leave as 2<sup>nd</sup> in command.</p> <p>Our casualties today were:- IOR killed 1, IOR wounded 3</p>
31/1		<p>The day was spent improving trenches and making preparations for the assault next day, about which verbal orders had been received. Our front line was now P16 to P13K with the 45<sup>th</sup> Sikhs to our right.</p> <p>Casualties today were:- IOR killed 3, IOR missing 2, IOR wounded 17</p>
1/2	08:00	<p>Operation orders received at 8 am for the Regiment to assault in conjunction with the 45<sup>th</sup> Sikhs, the enemy's trenches. The Regiment's objective was to capture the enemy's trenches on a front of 200 yards. Our left flank to rest on N27/A.</p> <p>At 12 noon an intense bombardment of the enemy's position started, &amp; at 12/10 pm the first wave of the attack commenced its advance followed in succession by three other waves at 50 yards distance. The Regiment was practically decimated going across "NOMAN'S LANDS" by an artillery &amp; machine gun barrage directed from the enemy's right flank. The first Turkish trench was occupied &amp; its defenders driven out with bombs &amp; the bayonet. The second Turkish trench was then entered by the remnants of the Regiment, but owing to paucity of men it was found impracticable to hold it &amp; the consolidation of the first Turkish line was begin. The Turks now made a strong counter attack under cover of machine gun fire from the direction of N/28 &amp; between N/28 &amp; N/26A, making the position held by the Regiment quite untenable who were gradually driven back to their original position.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Casualties during 1<sup>st</sup>:- BOs killed 4 BOs died of w 1 BOs missing behind killed 1 BOS wounded 3 IOs killed 3 IOs wounded 11 R&amp;F killed 71 R&amp;F missing 54 R&amp;F wounded 388</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Strength of regiment in attack:- BOs 10 IOs 15 R&amp;F 618</p>
	15:00	<p>The Regiment now totalled 3 BOs, one of whom was wounded, one IO &amp; 85 men, &amp; the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Devons were now sent up as reinforcements</p>
	17:00	<p>Orders received to move back into the support trenches, where men from the DUMP &amp; 1<sup>st</sup> Line Transport joined them making a total of 2BOs, 1IO and 117 R&amp;F. The night was spent in bringing in wounded.</p>



2/2	08:00	Regiment marched to former camp near S/13, day spent in rest.
3/2		37 <sup>th</sup> Brigade consisting of 1/4 <sup>th</sup> Devons & 1/2 <sup>nd</sup> Gurkhas again assaulted enemy's position with complete success.
4/2		Party proceeded to search for dead, 2 BOs & 3 IOs found & buried also large number of men
5/2		Party proceeded again to search for dead, 1 BO found & buried
6/2		Party proceeded again to search for dead
7/2	14:30	Major General Sir Raleigh Egerton KCB commdg 14 <sup>th</sup> Division inspected the Regiment
8/2		Searching for dead continued 1 BO found and buried. Party of 75 men detailed to collect salvage from the battle-field. Guard of one Indian Officer and 33 men selected for guard for G.O.C. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Corps



**36th Sikhs Position 30 Jan 1917**



**36th Sikhs Position 28 Jan - 8 Feb 1917**

Kut el Amara was finally retaken on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1917 and Baghdad on 10<sup>th</sup> March.

Presumably Gilbert's body was one of those found after the assault and buried locally at the time. His final resting place though is the British Army Cemetery 120 miles away at Amarah.

The War Diary of the 36<sup>th</sup> Sikhs is available to download at <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/867c4c30cf6f47a79d038c57fd5e5f94>. Besides the diary itself it contains a number of copies of reports and the speech made by Major General Sir Raleigh Egerton on 7<sup>th</sup> February a copy of which is on the following page.



Copy of address made by the Army Commander, on the Feb'y:1917 to Major MACDONALD, Major ANDERSON, and all ranks of the 36th and 45th Sikhs, forwarded to C.C. 36th and 45th Sikhs by A.M.S, G.H.Q., I.R.F.D., under his No.M.S.19/H71 dated 21st February, 1917.

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Major MACDONALD, Major ANDERSON, and all ranks of the 36th and 45th Sikhs.

It is a matter of very real regret to me that I have not been able to see these Two fine Regiments before this. Under ordinary circumstances, I should have gone down to see you immediately after the recent action in which you gained such honorable distinction. But as you will understand things ~~xxxxxxxx~~ have been somewhat busy lately and I have found that it was not possible for me to spare the time from my other duties to enable me to do so. Consequently I have come here today to express to you my admiration at the magnificent fighting qualities, which you displayed on February 1st. On that date you not only took with splendid dash the first Line Turkish trenches, but you pushed on and captured the 2nd and 3rd Lines also. These you held on to for a considerable time beating off repeated counter attacks, and it was not until the evening when a very weighty counter attack was pushed in by the enemy, that you were compelled to give ground, not, however, without inflicting very severe losses on the Turks. The deeds accomplished by you on that day are such that any regiment may be proud of, and they bear testimony to the heroism and well known fighting spirit of the Sikh Soldier.

I regret very sincerely the heavy casualties suffered by both Regiments on that occasion, but you have at least this consolation in mourning your comrades, that you inflicted far heavier losses upon the enemy. And your stubborn courage and magnificent behaviour paved the way for successful capture of these trenches by another Brigade. Indeed, it is not too much to say that this fine beginning on your part was the means of bringing about the culminating blow which fell on the 15th., when over 2,000 prisoners surrendered to our forces.

You are now going down to obtain a well earned rest and I want you to clearly understand that you are going there in order to enable you to reform and refill your ranks, and to have a much needed rest. We shall all look forward to your rejoining us in a very short time at the front, for both these regiments are of a stamp such as we can ill-spare when serious fighting is in progress.

I thank you all for your magnificent services.

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**Address by Major General Sir Raleigh Egerton to 36th & 45th Sikhs**