

## Private Frank Percy Brealey Orpin - 1st Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment, No. 33169

---



Percy Orpin (as he was more usually known) was born on 15 September 1894 at Tollgate Cottages on the Lavendon parish border near Snelson. Percy was the only child of Frank and Elizabeth Orpin. His father was first a Groom and later a Coachman at Snelson. By 1911 Frank senior had become a Gamekeeper, probably following the death of his own father, Daniel, who had also been a Gamekeeper at Snelson until his death in 1903.

Percy's mother was Elizabeth Nicholls a widow when she and Frank married in 1893. Elizabeth was 10 years older than Frank and came from Grendon originally; she was a domestic cook working in Upper Wimpole Street in London shortly before her marriage, but had probably first met Frank when she was working as a cook at Snelson in the 1880s for the then owner, Robert Battams, the estate farmer.

Percy of course grew up at Snelson and by 1911 when he was age 16 he was working as a Baker's Assistant. He was still in that trade when he initially enlisted in the Army Service Corps at Bedford on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1914. Within a few days Percy found himself at Aldershot where he proved himself a competent Baker as the certification shown below confirms.

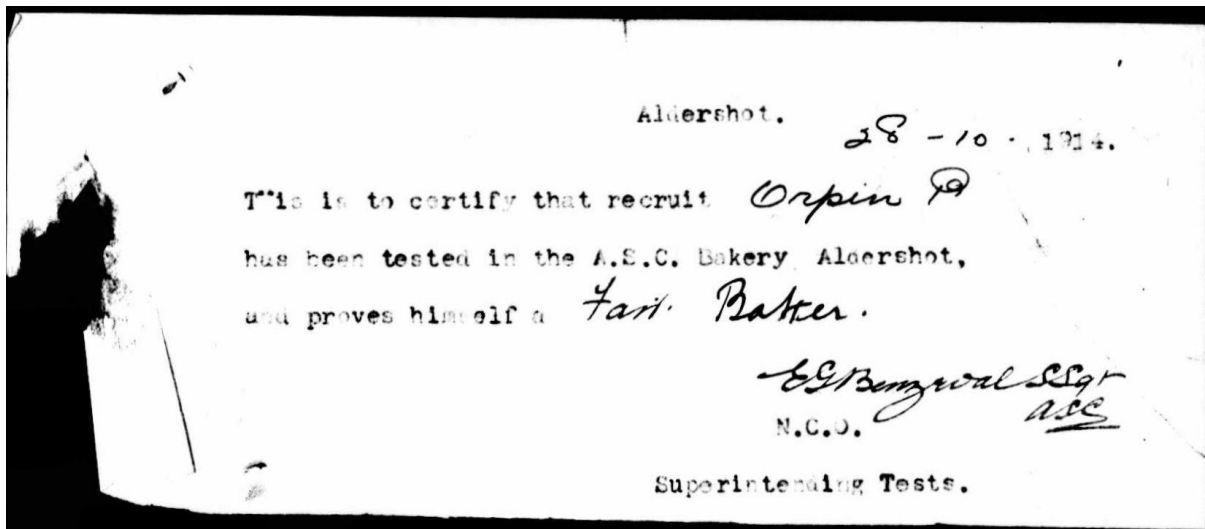


**Above:** *Private Percy Orpin.*

**Left:** *Tollgate Cottages on the Harrold Road which lie just within the Lavendon parish (and county boundary) where Percy Orpin grew up.*

Private Frank Percy Brealey Orpin - 1st Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment, No.  
33169

---



Percy was doubtless upset to find himself discharged on medical grounds only a short while later on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1915. His medical record shows that he was rejected because he had hammer toes on both feet which were operated upon. Percy's enlistment papers show him to have had brown eyes, brown hair and a sallow complexion. He was 5ft 5ins tall and he appears to have exaggerated his age by two years when he enlisted!

Clearly Percy was not intending to readily accept his discharge because in July 1916 he again enlisted, this time into the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment. However, before doing so he had met and married Rose White at Eynesbury (near St Neots) on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1916 and they went on to live at 29 Union Street in Bedford. They had two daughters, Alice Elizabeth Orpin on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1916 and Frances Irene Orpin on 14<sup>th</sup> Jan 1918. Alice was later brought up by her Grandparents, Frank and Elizabeth.



Percy's wife, Rose (see left) had a very tough life. Born in 1895 at Islington, Rose was one of eight children who were deserted by their father. Her mother died of TB in St Pancras Workhouse in 1900. The family split up and Rose was 'boarded out' to a couple of families at Croxton, St Neots – first with George Saywell and later Violet Childerley. The Childerleys had relations living on the Lavendon side of Harrold, and it is likely that is how Rose met up with Percy at Snelson.

Percy was sent to France two months after his re-enlistment. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment was involved in a good many battles on the Western Front over the next two years. From September 1916, when Percy was with the Battalion, these included the Battle of Guillemont and the Battle of Flers-Courcelette. In 1917 the Battalion fought at the Battle of Arras in April and the Third Battle of the Scarpe in May. It was also involved in the capture of Oppy Wood in June, the (third) Battle of Ypres in July 1917 and the Second battle of Passchendaele in October and November, before being moved to help stabilise the front in Italy.



## Private Frank Percy Brealey Orpin - 1st Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment, No. 33169

---



At the beginning of April 1918 the Battalion boarded trains and returned to the Western Front in response to the German Spring offensives. From mid-April the Battalion was involved in the Battle of Lys and other front line actions. After further periods of fighting, support and training, the Battalion moved in the first half of August to prepare for further front-line action in the Second Battle of the Somme. The Battalion took part in the Battle of Albert on 21 August and the Battle of Bapaume on 23 August 1918. On the latter day, the attack which was aimed at taking Achiet-le-petit near Bapaume, began at 11 am and seemingly all objectives were taken. Nevertheless, this was the fateful day for Percy and many others, largely due to heavy enemy machine gun fire: nine officers were killed and two wounded; altogether another 129 other ranks from the Battalion were killed or wounded in this particular action.

Percy was buried at ADANAC Military Cemetery, Miraumont, France. He was entitled to the British War and Victory medals. Percy's wife Rose re-married in 1924 and had two more sons. She died in 1940 from cancer. Percy's daughter Alice married, for a second time, Frank Bedford from Lavendon. Interestingly, his uncle was Walter Bedford, also named on the War Memorial. Coincidentally Walter was in the same Battalion as Percy and died on the same day and in the same location.

**Below:** *Adanac Military Cemetery (the name was formed by reversing the name "Canada") was made after the Armistice when graves were brought in from the Canadian battlefields around Courcelette and small cemeteries surrounding Miraumont. -CWGC*

