

George Prescott Simonds
Lieutenant. Reserve of Officers, C Company,
South Wales Borderers 24th Regiment.
Born 16th March 1881 in Westminster, London
Died 26th September 1914, Vendresse, France



Father: George Blackall Simonds (1843-1929)

Mother: Emily Gertrude Simonds (née Prescott) (1859-1940)

Born in London as an only child, the family lived in London where his father had a studio and at Bradfield House, Bradfield, Berkshire. George was educated at Bradfield College nearby, where his father had been one of the 1st pupils.

On leaving school, he served in the Boer War as a Railway Staff Officer with the Gloucester Yeomanry and was awarded the Queens Medal with three clasps.

At the outset of WW1 George was called up as a Reserve Officer to the 1st Battalion, C Company, South Wales Borderers, 24th Regiment. He arrived at the front on the 19th of September and was killed in action just a week later on the 26th in the battle of the Aisne near Vendresse, in hand to hand fighting as the Germans attacked their positions in a disused quarry.

This is a poignant extract from an officer's diary, which is held at the Public Record Office, in document WO95/1280.

"Saturday 19th September, 1914.

Officers Simonds, Gilbert and 190 men arrive as replacements. Our third reinforcement.

Saturday 26th September, 1914.

The most ghastly day of my life and yet one of the proudest because my Regiment did its job and held on against heavy odds. At 4.15am Germans attacked. The main attack was apparently against my regiment, which is the left of our line. D and A Companies in the trenches. B and C hustled up to support, and soon the whole place alive with bullets. News comes that they are trying to work round our left. The CO asked the Welsh Regiment to deal with this, which it did. Poor D Company had to face the music more than anyone else.

Presently the news comes that the Germans are in a quarry in the middle of our line, i.e that our line was pierced. C Company drove them clean out. About 3pm, things began to quieten down, D and A companies had done their share of the work on the right and left. We were able to reorganise more or less, except for D

Company's far advanced trenches, and those we searched at night and found James wounded, Silles and Welby killed.

Total casualties. Killed Welby, Simonds, Coker, Silles and 86 men; wounded - Pritchard, James and Gwynn slightly, and 95 men; and missing 12. These 12 were of D Company, and apparently surrendered. May they be spared to reach England again and be tried by court martial and get what they deserve. Never has the 24th surrendered yet and in spite of casualties the rest of the Regiment stuck to it and fought as Englishman and 24th men could fight.

We are now left with three Officers each in three companies, and only two in the fourth, instead of six in each. A sad, sad business, but everyone played up, and as the French say, "Qui perd, gagne". We have lost men and officers, but have again won a name for doing what it is our duty to do and in this case we held a very important line without giving a yard.

[Second Lieutenant Charles Caldwell Silles, 20, has no known grave and is commemorated on the Memorial to the Missing at La Ferte sous Jouarre. He joined the regiment after graduating from Sandhurst in September 1913].

[41 year-old Major Glynn Everard Earle Welby, officer commanding D Company, had been serving with the regiment since December 1893, and had seen service in the war in South Africa. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Memorial to the Missing at La Ferte sous Jouarre].

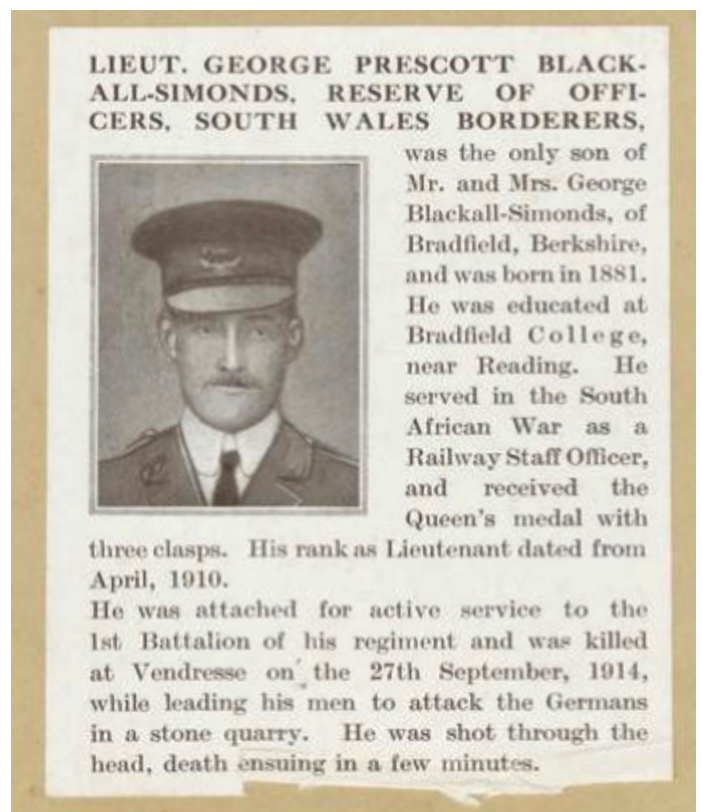
[Lieutenant George Prescott Blackall-Simonds, Reserve of Officers, attached South Wales Borderers. Saw service in South African War as a railway staff officer. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Memorial to the Missing at La Ferte sous Jouarre. Aged 33].

[Second Lieutenant John Cadwallader Coker, 27, is buried in Vendresse British Cemetery. He joined the regiment in August 1908]."

This is the Imperial War Museum Record from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission:

George is commemorated in the village church of St Andrew, Bradfield, in a stained glass window. The window depicts St George, with a head bearing a remarkable similarity to George Prescott and bearing the inscription: To the Glory of God and in loving memory of George Prescott Blackall Simonds Lieutenant 1st S Wales Borderers 24th Regt. Killed while leading the attack in a quarry at Vendresse in France 26th Sept 1914.

Also in the Illustrated London News of November 14th 1914.



This unusual portrait was painted posthumously by WC Cox. In 1922,



In 1922, George Blackall Simonds, by then Chairman of H&G Simonds Brewery, came out of retirement as a sculptor to create the war memorial that stands at Bradfield Cross and includes his son on the Roll of Honour.