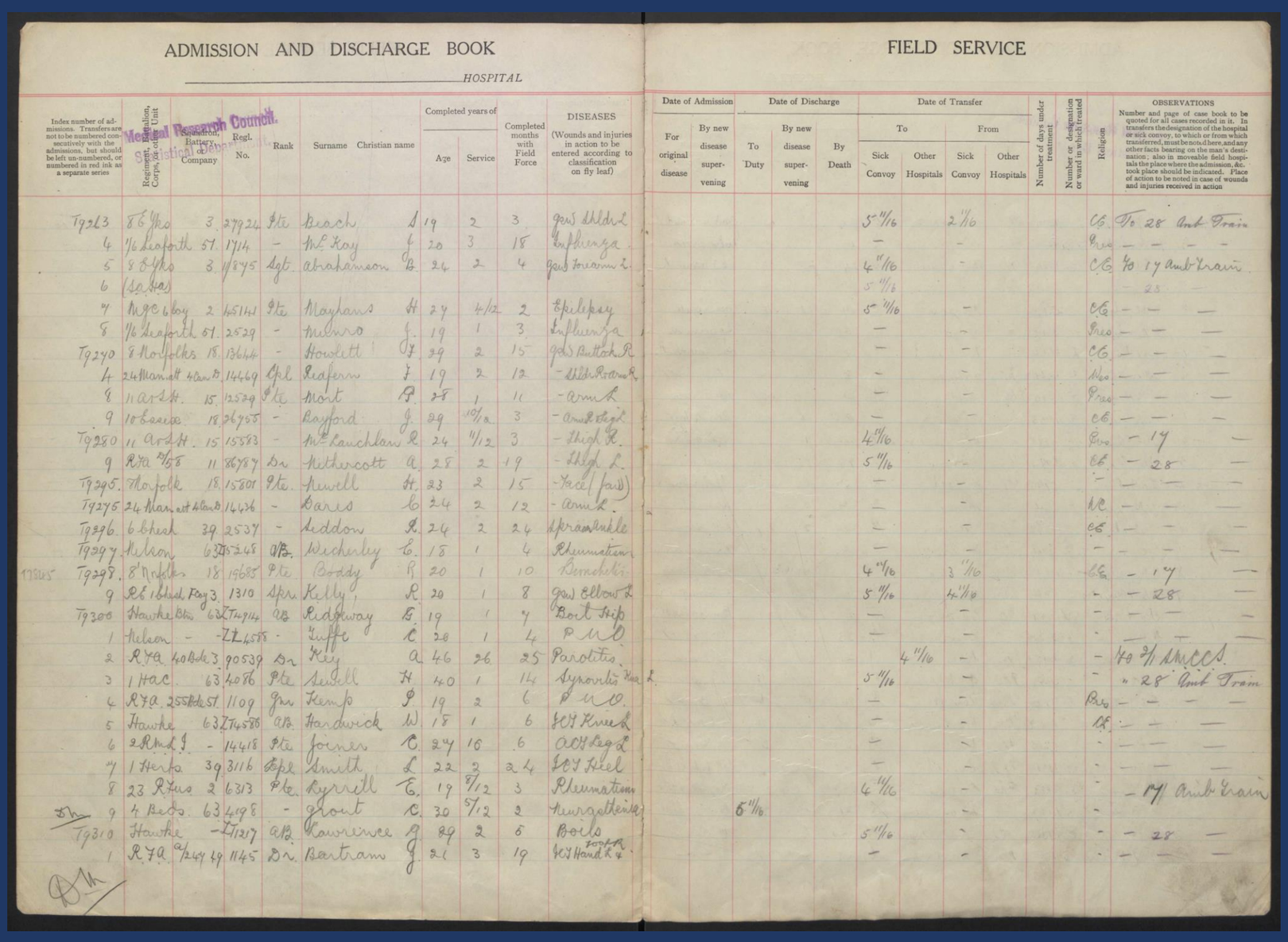
Sam Beach

Sam Beach was born in Bletchley, Buckinghamshire in 1897. His mother, Susannah (née Dawes), had grown up in Tansor. It seems that by 1902, Sam's parents had parted, and Susannah brought Sam back to Tansor to live with William Dawes, her father. According to both Sam's daughter Margaret and John Hudson, the family lived in Orchard Cottage, which is where Bernie and Hilary Francis now live. Sam went to school in Tansor between 1902 and 1911. He initially enlisted with the 4th Northamptonshire Territorials, but at some point he was transferred to the 8th Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment. It seems likely that his transfer occurred soon after March 1916, after the passing of the Military Service Act, following which men could be transferred by the army as it saw fit. The 8th Battalion was a service regiment deployed close to the front line, south-west of Arras in August 1916. The war dairy records duties including digging and cable laying. The diaries make it clear that the regiment also took part in front line operations. On 18th August 1916, the commanding officer sent two platoons 'over the parapet, forming the first wave of attack', to which the German gunners responded with 'heavy machine gun fire'.

Sam Beach, with his family at Bridge End, Tansor
(Photo courtesy of Val Beach)

19.8.16
"The day was spent getting in the wounded and burying the dead, and improving the trenches which were very narrow. At night, a number of dead were buried about 100 yards from our own trenches."

The battalion spent much of the following month training, and in October they were billeted at Bus-lès-Artois, from where they proceeded to the front line trenches for 48-hour 'tours'. From this point, the battalion was involved in a number of night-time raids on enemy trenches. One such raid on 31st October 1916 was described in the war diary. 'The raid was carried out – no prisoners were taken and we suffered casualties of one officer and twelve other ranks (wounded).' An earlier raid had been cancelled, due to 'inclement weather and the sticky state of the ground', which gives some idea of how difficult and unpleasant it must have been to move around. It seems likely that Sam Beach was involved in these raids, and during this period he is recorded in the logbook of the 11th Casualty Clearing Hospital, which was stationed at nearby Varennes, having sustained a gunshot wound to his left shoulder. Perhaps he was one of the ten wounded men mentioned following a tour of the Serre sector. The war diary for this period makes for harrowing reading, with men being sent over the tops of the trenches in waves, generally to be met with a barrage of rifle and machine gun fire. Perhaps Sam Beach was lucky to receive just a single gunshot wound in the midst of this melee.


ADMISSION AND DISCHARGE BOOK

HOSPITAL

FIELD SERVICE

Admission Book, 11th Casualty Clearing Hospital, Varennes, 31 Oct 1916 – 10 Nov 1916

13.11.16
"The hostile barrage opened quickly and accurately, the rear company receiving several casualties in the first five minutes."

Fortunately, Sam survived the horror, returning to Tansor after the war, where he settled and raised a family.