

Percy HENWOOD



Born: 1891, Padstow, Cornwall
Occupation: Wheelwright
Enlisted: Newquay: Possibly 1915 (Volunteer)
Unit: 2nd South Wales Borderers (Also Royal Engineers)
Rank/number: Private: No.44396 (RE No. 67103)
Death: Killed in action, 19th May 1917
Detail: Percy died during a 3-battalion attack on a German frontline trench at Monchy-Le-Preux during the Battle of Arras. A machine-gun firing through the British barrage felled many of the men, including Private Henwood, after just a few yards. A Borderers sergeant charged the gun to save his pals and was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

Age at death: 26

Military info: The 2nd SWB had already seen plenty of fighting before Percy joined its ranks. In 1914 it helped capture the German naval base at Tsingtao, in 1915 it took part in the doomed battle for Gallipoli and on 1st July 1916 it attacked Beaumont-Hamel on the first day of the Somme and in a few terrible minutes suffered 399 casualties - more than half the battalion. Percy was still a sapper in August 1916 and must have transferred to the 2nd SWB a few months later. The Battle of Arras began in a snowstorm on 9th April 1917, when Australian, Canadian and British armies fought on a front from Vimy Ridge in the north to Bullecourt in the south. In the middle were trenches outside Arras from where the 2nd SWB was helping carry the attack to the Germans. Though the British hoped for a breakthrough, the real purpose of the battle was to hold the Germans while the French attacked on the Chemin des Dames. But the battle was a disaster and by 13th May it was petering out. That day 2nd SWB took over Monchy-Le-Preux trenches and on the 19th they attacked. A single machine-gun killed many, including Percy. Arras ended in failure. The French attack it was supposed to support achieved even less, causing mutiny in their army. Arras has the grim distinction of being the greatest killing battle of the war, with a daily casualty rate of 4,076 as compared to the Somme's 2,943.

Grave/memorial: Percy is commemorated on Arras Memorial, at St Petroc's Church, Padstow and on Padstow War Memorial. His brother John, killed at the Battle of Nebi Samwil in Palestine in November 1917, is also listed with him.

Family info: Father: John Henwood, born Padstow, Cornwall in 1863. Wheelwright.
Mother: Ida Rawlings, born St Allen, Cornwall in 1864. Died 1900. John remarried in 1902. Wife: Eliza Brenton, born St Merryn, Padstow in 1885. She married Percy on 3rd August 1916. He was still a sapper at the time.



This information was researched by Peter Smith, who is currently writing a book about Padstow's part in the Great War. Anyone wishing to correct errors or supply additional information can write to him at 24 Mallard Drive, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 5PW. Also phone 01825 762226 or email smithpeter24@gmail.com

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