

William Henry THOMAS



Born: 28th December, 1893, Padstow, Cornwall

Occupation: Tin miner

Enlisted: Redruth: February 1915 (Volunteer)

Unit: 24th Royal Fusiliers (2nd Sportsmens)

Rank/number: Private: No.SPTS/3143

Death: Killed in action, 28th July 1916

Detail: William, or Harry as he was known, died during the Somme offensive in 1916. On 25th July his unit took over Longueval Alley, a communication trench that meandered north from Trones Wood to the frontline at Waterlot Farm. It was the target of constant heavy shelling and was littered with the unburied dead. Survival was a lottery and on the 28th Harry's luck ran out.

Age at death: 23

Military info: Harry enlisted in the 2nd Sportsmens, a privately-raised battalion, at Redruth in February 1915. The battalion was redesignated the 24th Royal Fusiliers (City of London Rgt.) and arrived in France on 15th November 1915 as part of 99th Brigade, 33rd Division. A month later they transferred to 5th Brigade, 2nd Division. and spent the winter in trenches near Annequin battling the Germans, the rats and the weather. In July the 24th RF joined the Somme offensive and on the 28th, somewhere near Trones Wood, Harry was killed by a shell. In a letter to Harry's family, Capt. Cecil Meares, commanding officer of C Company, wrote: "I do not know another man who could be as cheerful as he was in conditions such as we are now going through." A day later Meares was dead himself. The captain was killed as he led a frontal attack on enemy lines and his body had been left hanging grotesquely on the German barbed wire.

Grave/memorial: Harry's body was never found. He is commemorated on Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, at St Petroc's Church, Padstow and on Padstow War Memorial.

Family info: Father: Henry Thomas, born Plymouth, Devon in 1849. Steam ship engineer. Mother: Fanny Tresidder, born Padstow, Cornwall in 1863. The couple wed in 1892 and had 4 children. Henry died in 1905 and Fanny married Charles Truman.

Additional info: On 23rd May 1914 Harry, then aged 20, married 19-year-old Ethel Thomas, a girl from Redruth in Cornwall. They shared a surname, but were not related. A year later Harry enlisted. Their only child was conceived when the young soldier was granted a few days leave in June 1916, but he knew nothing of his wife's pregnancy when he was killed in July. Baby Eileen Thomas arrived in February 1917. Her widowed mum gave her daughter a middle name befitting the terrible times she had been born into - Louvain. This was the Belgian city whose ruthless destruction by the Germans in 1914 helped provoke England into war.



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