

Dawlish World War One Project

Margaret Maud Elizabeth Holloway, 10	Keyham, Devonport
Doris Irene Holloway, 8	Keyham, Devonport
Mary Downs Holloway, 4	Kinlochleven, Argyll
Phyllis Sarah Holloway, 3	Kinlochleven, Argyll
George Ian Holloway, 1	Kinlochleven, Argyll

The report in the Dawlish Gazette of 29th September 1917 says that **William Robert Holloway** "came home from South America to join the colours, after spending six years there with his brother, who is at present serving on the Western Front." That would be a reference to Albert Reginald Holloway. His father had meanwhile been engaged in constructing the Al Hindaya barrage across the Euphrates, south west of Bagdad, when he was interned by the Ottomans for the duration of the Great War. He died in a boating accident in Newfoundland in 1925, with his son Albert, and they are commemorated on their grave in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Their monument also commemorates **WRH** and his mother, Lucy.

William Robert Holloway signed his attestation for Short Service (For the Duration of the War) and swore an Oath of Allgiance in Stoke-on-Trent on 12th May 1915 for service in the Motor Machine Gun Corps. He was not married. The form shows that he was a Machinist and Electrician and living at 19 Cornford Grove, Balham, London SW. This address is that given in Elsie Holloway's statement of 1918 for Lucy Holloway and eight children, most probably where they had lived while W G Holloway was interned by the Turks.

The descriptive report on enlistment show that his father was at the time in Damascus.

William joined and was appointed (unpaid) Acting Bombardier on 2nd July 1915 and promoted to Corporal on 8th August and posted to the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). He disembarked at Le Havre on 6th February 1916.

William applied for a Temporary Commission on 6th August 1916 from the 19th Motor Machine Gun Battery, B.E.F, France. He had at that point reached the rank of Corporal with a regimental number 1158. His commanding officer gave a character reference for the 15 months in which he had been under his command and stated that "his moral character has been exemplary." Brigadier General Lecky personally interviewed **WRH** and recommended him for training at the Artillery Training School.

On 29th August he was accepted for admission to Cadet School in England and ordered to report to S.D.3 War Office, on return from leave granted from 29th September to 8th October 1916.

On 24th February 1917, **WRH** was granted a Temporary Commission as 2nd Lieutenant in the 19th Motor Machine Gun Corps.

Four days later, **William Robert Holloway** married Elsie Elizabeth Currey by licence at the Register Office, Aston, Birmingham on 28th February, 1917. He was 27 and she was 21 and they were living at 205 Bordesley Green. He was able to sign as a 2nd Lieutenant, M.G.C. (Electrical engineer); Elsie was a munition worker. Neither of the parents signed the register (her father was already serving in France, see below).

William made a Will in her favour dated 1st June 1917 which was witnessed by two 2nd Lieutenants in 69 Company, H.G.C.

Elsie Elizabeth Currey was the daughter of Thomas and Bessie Currey of Dawlish. Thomas Gibbins Currey (1861-1921) of Dawlish married Bessie Shapter (1861-) of Ashcombe on Christmas Day 1882 (GRO ref St Thomas, Oct-Dec 1882, vol 5b, p 71), and they went on to have ten children of which nine survived by 1911. Thomas was a general labourer and builder's labourer, and was drafted into the Army Service Corps at the age of 45 on 15th September 1915. (*this is the age given on the Short Service Attestation, but his real age was 54. He may have been attracted to serve by the Army pay, to support his family.*) His military record survived the Blitz and it shows that he was a Private , no 304814 in No 2, Labour Corps of the A.S.C. and arrived at Rouen on 22nd September 1915. He remained in France until September 1918 when he was returned to Home Establishment (Over-age) and was discharged on 1st October 1918.

The Machine Gun Corps was established on 14 October 1914, with King George V as its Colonel-in-Chief. The best men from the Rifle Brigades were chosen and underwent additional training. They had to learn how to fill ammunition belts, strip down and re-assemble their machine guns, both Maxim and Vickers, rectify stoppages, map reading, tactics and most important of all, to learn how to work out firing angles. In addition they learnt semaphore signalling and Morse code.

By 1915 the Maxim Machine Gun was replaced by the more efficient Vickers Machine Gun, which became the Corps insignia. This gun had a tripod base, and a barrel encased with a jacket, which held water to keep the gun cool. Including 10lbs. of water it weighed 58.5lbs. and had a six-man crew. Two men carried the equipment, two carried the ammunition and two helped to reload empty canvas ammunition belts. Each belt held 250 rounds and the gun could fire 500 rounds per minute.

It had an effective range of 2.5 miles and by the use of plunging fire was effective in attacking enemy held road junctions, supply lines, trench systems and areas of increased enemy troop build-up.

The Corps' duties included accompanying the first wave of every assault and to remain to cover every retirement. This often meant being well ahead of the infantry. Knowing the effectiveness of machine guns, each post became the target of every enemy gun within range. Casualties were very high and the Corps was nicknamed "The Suicide Club".

There are no surviving records for the Machine Gun Corps. They were all burnt when their H.Q. was burnt to the ground in a "mysterious" fire in 1922, shortly after the Corps was disbanded.

On 20th September 1917 the phase of the third battle of Ypres known as the Battle of Menin Road commenced.

A telegram was sent from the War Office on 24th September 1917 to Mrs Holloway, Stockton Road, Dawlish, " Deeply regret to inform you 2/Lt W R Holloway M.G.C. was killed in action September twentieth. The Army Council express their sympathy."

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On 28th September Mrs W R Holloway wrote to the War Office,
"Can you give me any information as to how or where my husband met his death.
I received the telegram on Tuesday stating that he was killed in action on Sept 20th since then I
have had no news whatever.

I am very anxious to know something of how he died and shall feel grateful for anything you
can tell me."

The Military Secretary replied on 1st October suggesting that she write to the Officer
Commanding, 69th Company, Machine Gun Corps for particulars. On 9th February 1918 the
Dawlish Gazette reported the receipt of a letter from the Captain, Commanding 69th Coy, MGC
to say that "Your husband was killed in action leading his men over the parapet on 20th
September. He was hit by a piece of shrapnel in the head and died almost immediately....Your
husband was respected and like by all who knew him, both Officers and men, and we all feel his
loss very much, and all unite in offering you our sincerest sympathy...."

In due course the effects of 2nd Lieut: W R Holloway were sent by registered post comprising 1
wrist watch with strap and guard, 1 identity disk and chain, 1 cigarette case and 1 photo.

Elsie Elizabeth Holloway was recognised as the next of kin and declared that a child, William
Robert Holloway, was born on 5th February 1918.

Other relatives were "8 children of the deceased officer's mother, Lucy Holloway, residing at 19
Cornford Grove, Balham, S W London."

Elsie also stated that **William Robert Holloway** was born at 44 St George's Road, Burnage,
Fallowfield, Withington. Her statement was given in the presence of the Vicar of Dawlish on 28th
February, 1918.

Elsie Elizabeth Holloway married again, to George H Baker in late 1920 (GRO ref Newton Abbot,
1920 Oct-Dec, vol 5b, page 290a). There were two further children of this marriage.

William Robert Holloway is shown on the Devon Roll of Honour as "Holloway W.E. Lieut
M.G.C. " No date or place of death is indicated.

Dawlish War memorial inscription: HOLLOWAY W.E. LIEUT M.G.C.

Devon Heritage site info: W.HOLLOWAY - 2nd Lieutenant William Robert Holloway of the 69th
Company, the Machine Gun Corps. Son of William George and Lucy Holloway; husband of Elsie
Elizabeth Baker (formerly Holloway), of 7 King St, Dawlish; Born in Sculcoates, Yorkshire in the
December Quarter of 1890. Died 20 September 1917. (*Date and Birth location incorrect, see
above-ed*)

Commonwealth War Graves entry: HOLLOWAY, WILLIAM ROBERT Second Lieutenant
20/09/1917 Age: 28 Machine Gun Corps (Infantry), 69th Coy.

Panel Ref: Panel 154 to 159 and 163A. [Tyne Cot Memorial](#), Flanders

Son of William George and Lucy Holloway; husband of Elsie Elizabeth Baker (formerly
Holloway), of 7, King St., Dawlish, Devon.

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Last known address: Stockton Road, Dawlish

Next of kin: widow, Elsie Elizabeth Holloway

References:

Birth Marriage Death refs

Officer Records, National Archives, Kew

Correspondence with family members, including family history data.

Research by Campbell Brown re Corporal Hubert John Bright, MGC (died 17/04/1917)

Refs via subscription sites:

- Marriage refs

- Census entries

- Military record T G Currey

- Clarke family tree - Ancestry

- Currey family tree