

William Frank TAPLEY

The Tapley family had lived around Exeter for many generations. Daniel and Ann Tapley were in Pinhoe in the eighteenth century with three children, when James Tapley, who became William Frank's Grandfather, was born (1819-1892). In 1848 James Tapley married Sarah Greenslade (1817-1917) and they had four children, the youngest being William John Tapley (1857-1931), to become William Frank's father. He was born in Ashcombe and Baptised in Starcross on 1 March 1857. By 1871 James and Sarah were at Dawlish Road Cottage, Wick, Kenton. James was an agricultural labourer and his daughter Sarah Jane, aged 16, was a Dressmaker. William John was still at school, aged 14.

In 1878 William John Tapley married Harriet Joanna Davey (1853-1927) who was born in Islington, Middlesex. By 1881, William was a gardener and was living at Wick in Kenton. They went on to have four children: Jane Pinkham Tapley (1880-), Baptised at St Gregory the Great 22 February 1880, Emily Eliza Tapley (1881-1932)) Baptised at St Gregory the Great 22 June 1881, William Frank Tapley, the subject of today's service and Arthur John Tapley. William Frank and his younger brother Arthur John were baptised at Cofton Chapel on 27 October 1889.

By 1891 the family were at Wick in Dawlish with three of the four children at school. In 1901 the family had moved to Rise Lodge, Dawlish, and William Frank, now aged 16, was a gardener like his father. In 1911 they had moved into Dawlish itself and were living at No 1 Court, High Street and William was the only child still living at home and still working as a gardener.

Although not verified, William Frank Tapley may have been conscripted during 1916 to join the Devonshire Regiment, and by October 1917 was serving with the 1st Battalion.

There is a lengthy Extract from The Devonshire Regiment's history concerning the third battle of Ypres, which I have préciséd and will read to you.

On the evening of the 3rd October 1917 the 1st Battalion had moved up to an assault position. At 6 a.m. the assaulting troops went over in splendid order and with great determination, the Devons having to keep in touch with the 13th Brigade, whose goal was Polderhoek Chateau. (Polderhoek was a small hamlet north of the Menin Road close to the village of Gheluvelt and not far from Polygon Wood. It saw fighting during the First Battle of Ypres in 1914 and then remained in German hands until after the end of Third Battle of Ypres in 1917; by that time the whole area was described as a lunar landscape.)

A dash was out of the question over such ground, but despite swamps, mud and the German shells, the battalion kept well up to the barrage. They had hard fighting, for the Germans had been lining up for an attack in which three divisions would have been used against the Fifth British Division alone. A bog, too, at the Southern end of Cameron Covert proved impassable. Later on German counter-attacks drove both them and the D.C.L.I. back a little, but reinforced from the supports by two

companies of the East Surreys, they made good a line just West of and through the Covert, though only about twenty men and one officer of No. IV were left to hold it. The mud delayed movement, but, as some compensation, it was so soft and deep that it smothered the shell bursts and the casualties came almost entirely from machine-guns. These were numerous. The leading wave had to swing to the right to avoid one particularly bad swamp. Others, keeping their direction better, penetrated further and dug in N.W. of the chateau. A few apparently even reached the final objective North of the chateau, but all in vain. It was a nasty position. The chateau, or rather the strong point constructed from its ruins, was on a crest. The woods North of it had been almost completely cut down, and German machine-guns swept the surrounding area. There were several pill-boxes level with the chateau, and these proved to be held in considerable force by the enemy, who soon disposed of the handful which had reached the final objective, hardly any of whom got back. However, the bulk of the attackers managed to dig in just West of the Polderhoek woods, and there they held on all day, though under considerable artillery fire and repeatedly counter-attacked. More than once Germans were seen advancing in several waves and were caught by the barrage and heavily punished. William Tapley died during this part of the third battle of Ypres, known also as Passchendaele. The record shows only "presumed dead" and this implies that his body was not recovered. The Western Times of Tuesday 20 November 1917 reported, "Private F Tapley is officially reported missing since October 4. He belongs to the Devon Regiment and is a marksman and sniper."

William Tapley is commemorated on the Dawlish War memorial, inscription: TAPLEY W.F. PTE DEVON REGT.

The Devon Heritage site information shows : 21368 Private William Frank Tapley of the 1st Battalion, the Devonshire Regiment. Son of William and Harriet Tapley. Born in Dawlish in 1884. Died 4 October 1917, aged 33.

The Devon Roll of Honour records his death, without date, and that he was "missing". He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Commonwealth War Graves entry shows: TAPLEY, WILLIAM FRANK Private 21368 04/10/1917 Devonshire Regiment, 1st Bn. Panel Ref: Panel 38 to 40. Tyne Cot Memorial, Flanders.

Last known address: 1 Court, High Street, Dawlish Next of kin: Father, William John Tapley.