

William BLATCHFORD

Born Ipplepen, 26 May 1891
Private PLY /1971 (S)

Missing in action, assumed dead, 26 October 1917, aged 26
Royal Marine Light Infantry, 2nd Battalion, Royal Naval Division

William Blatchford was the son of a farmer, John Blatchford *, and had been working as a shepherd until he enrolled in the Royal Marines at Exeter on 12th February 1917. His grandfather, James Blatchford, had been farming for some years at Whitchurch, near Tavistock. James Blatchford (1812-1904) was married to Grace Oxenham (1817-1909) and in 1871 they were farming at Moortown, Whitchurch and the census record shows:

James Blatchford , Head, 60, farmer of 150 acres employing 2 men, born Sampford-Spring	
Grace Blatchford, wife, 53	born Whitchurch
Elizabeth dau, 26	"
John Blatchford * son, 20	"
Emma dau, 18	"
Martha M dau, 15	"
Frederick son, 10	"
Alfred son, 8	"

John Blatchford (1850-1930) married Ann Creber(1849-1901) on 1 May 1875. She was also from a farming family, at Sheepstor, and the daughter of John and Elizabeth Creber.

In 1881 they were established at North Huish, Totnes district, with three children:

John Blatchford, Head, 30 farmer	born Whitchurch
Ann " wife, 30	born Sheepstor
Frederick William, son, 5	born Meavy
Thomas son, 3	"
Ida Mary dau, 1	born North Huish

In 1891 they had moved to Lylesford, Ipplepen where they had four more children:

Alfred H, son, 1	born North Huish
John son, 6	"
James son, 4	born Ipplepen
Emmaline dau, 2	"

In 1901 they were established at Hensford Farm House, Dawlish, with two more children:

William, son, 9	born Ipplepen
Grace, dau, 6	"

Ann had died early in the year and John Blatchford was now a widower and working his farm as an employer in his own account. There were six sons and three daughters, the eldest, Ida Mary being shown as carrying out "Housekeeper duties". The five oldest boys are shown as farm workers, at home.

Ten years later, in 1911, still at Hensford Farm, the three oldest children had left home and John Blatchford is still employer of the four younger sons with Emmaline taking over the role of housekeeper. Ida Mary is shown as beneficiary in the Will of John Blatchford at his death on 28 September 1930, when he lived at Creedy Barton, Shobooke, Crediton.

William Blatchford may have been conscripted or he could have been an RMLI recruit when he enlisted at Exeter on 12th February 1917 for three years. His papers show that he was a shepherd, baptised in the Church of England.

He was 5' 10" tall with fresh complexion and blue eyes, and he was sent for training to the Royal Marine Depot, Deal, Kent until 27th May when he was transferred to the strength of the Plymouth Division.

It is likely that he went straight to one of the RND reserve battalions training at Blandford Camp. The reinforcement draft in July 1917 was formed up at Blandford.

He embarked at Folkestone for Boulogne on the 30th June and arrived on 1st July. From 10th to 31st July he was at the Royal Naval Division Base Depot near Calais. On 2nd August he was drafted to the 2nd Royal Marine Battalion and he was one of a party of 28 other ranks who joined the 2nd Royal Marine Battalion in the field on 2nd September. The battalion then moved forward into support trenches between Gavrelle and Oppy.

William Blatchford was reported "Missing" and later "assumed dead" as a result of enemy action" on 26th October 1917.

The record shows that on the 24th : "Operation Order No. 90 issued. Bn. Proceeded by route march to IRISH FARM."

Oct 25 Operation Order No. 91 issued. Bn. Proceeded into line pm & took up position for attack.

Oct 26 Front Line 5.40 am. Bn. Attacked enemy's position opposite its front in conjunction with other Bns. of the 188th Inf.Bde. Objectives gained and consolidated. Casualties 7 Officers and 301 Other Ranks.

The difficulties faced in this landscape are described in the 188 Brigade Report of Operations noting: "The concrete building shown as Varlet Farm did not exist in reality and, except for a few scattered bricks, all the farm buildings had completely disappeared ... owing to the flooded shell holes in the neighbourhood, the farm moat could scarcely be recognised."

At the end of the day five strong points had been established and the line advanced 300-400 yards. General Gough, the Army Commander, sent a message: "Please convey to all ranks engaged in to-day's operations my very great appreciation of their gallant efforts; they have my sincere sympathy, as no troops could have had to face worse conditions of mud than they had to face owing to the sudden downfall of rain this morning. No troops could have done more than our men did to-day, and given a fair chance, I have every confidence in their complete success every time."

William is recorded on the Devon Roll of Honour for Dawlish.

Probate was granted to his father, John Blatchford, retired farmer, in 1918.

Dawlish War memorial inscription: BLATCHFORD W. PTE. R.M.L.I.

Commonwealth War Graves entry:

Private Service No: PLY/1971(S)

Date of Death: 26/10/1917 Age: 26

Regiment/Service: Royal Marine Light Infantry 2nd R.M. Bn. R.N. Div.

Memorial: [TYNE COT MEMORIAL](#) Panel Reference: Panel 1 and 162A.

Additional Information: Son of John Blatchford, of Creedy Barton, Newton St. Cyres, Exeter.

It is now the largest Commonwealth war cemetery in the world in terms of burials. At the suggestion of King George V, who visited the cemetery in 1922, the Cross of Sacrifice was placed on the original large pill-box. There are three other pill-boxes in the

cemetery.

There are now 11,961 Commonwealth servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in Tyne Cot Cemetery. 8,373 of the burials are unidentified but there are special memorials to more than 80 casualties known or believed to be buried among them. Other special memorials commemorate 20 casualties whose graves were destroyed by shell fire. There are also 4 German burials, 3 being unidentified.

Last known address: Hensford Farm House, Dawlish

Next of kin: John Blatchford, father

References:

Free Birth Marriage Death records

National Archive, Kew for R.M. service record

Fleet Air Arm Museum for personnel records

Extracts from "Royal Marines in the War 1914-1919"

Refs via subscription websites:

Census data

Probate records

Devon Heritage site for Dawlish War Memorial

UK, RN & RM War Graves Roll

Ware family tree (ancestry.com)

In the Third Battle of Ypres an offensive was mounted by Commonwealth forces to divert German attention from a weakened French front further south. The initial attempt in June to dislodge the Germans from the Messines Ridge was a complete success, but the main assault north-eastward, which began at the end of July, quickly became a dogged struggle against determined opposition and the rapidly deteriorating weather. The campaign finally came to a close in November with the capture of Passchendaele.