

HUBERT JOHN BRIGHT

1.1.1897-17.4.1917

CORPORAL, No.25800, MACHINE GUN CORPS



The Bright Family's surname is of great antiquity. The Saxons introduced the Proto-Germanic language into Britain around 500 A.D. This included the word "BEORHT" which meant bright, shiny or beautiful. By the time of the Norman invasion of 1066, it had become a nickname and later became a surname.

The Bright family were Devonian farm labourers. His Grandfather John Bright, (1845-1906), was born in Colyton and married in 1864 Jane Dunster, in Luppitt, a small village a few miles due north of Honiton.

Hubert's father, Frederick Bright (1874-1932), was also born in Colyton and married, in 1896, Charlotte Jarman (1874-1946), at Awliscombe, near Honiton. Charlotte was born in Holcombe, being a daughter of Charles Abraham Ware Jarman (1844-1933) and Agnes Anne Honour (1848-1911). Charles Jarman was a retired sea captain who had become a market gardener.

Hubert was born on 1.1.1897 at "The Thatches" in Holcombe. His elder twin brother Reginald, (1.1.1897-19.2.1918) served in the Royal Navy and was lost at sea.

Their births were registered in Newton Abbot on 13.3.1897 by their aunt, Agnes Jarman. His father, like his grandfather was a farm labourer and, as was customary at that time, had to find employment wherever he could. From census returns and birth registers we know that in 1897 the family lived in Holcombe. By 1899 they had moved to Awliscombe, a couple of miles east of Honiton. In 1901 they had moved to Kenn, living at Kerswell Cottage. By 1904 they had moved to Dalwood, near Honiton and in 1911 they were living at Burrows Farm in Clayhidon, in the Blackdown Hills, a few miles south of Wellington.

In 1911, Hubert had left school and left home. He lived in Queen Street, Honiton with his employer Thomasine Richards. He had a portering job in her printing

business. Later he moved to London, possibly living with a relative, Robert Bright. He was employed as a manservant.

It is known that he enlisted in Walworth, south London but exactly when is unknown. He was posted to the 3rd.Battalion, 3rd.Rifle Brigade, his service number being Z/502.

He must have landed in France in 1915; if any earlier then he would have been awarded the 1914 Star.

On 14 October 1915 the 3rd.Rifle Brigade was transferred to the 17th.Brigade of the 24th.Division. He was posted to the 3rd.Battalion Machine Gun Corps (Infantry) and issued with the service number 25800.

This 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.

From other sources it is known that from 25 September 1915 to 13 October 1915 his battalion fought at the Battle of Loos. (Pronounced Lowce). This was the first time that the British used chlorine gas against the Germans. It was also the first time that the Machine Gun Corps fired a barrage over the heads of the advancing British troops and also behind the German trenches to prevent supplies and reinforcements reaching the enemy. Although the allies made significant gains the lack of co-ordinated reserve units impeded the exploitation of these gains. The

battle eventually ended in stalemate and the removal of Sir John French as the Commander-in-Chief.

From 14 February 1916 to 2 March 1916 his battalion fought at the Battle of The Bluff, near Ypres in Belgium. This small piece of high ground changed sides several times before the allies were victorious.

From 15 July 1916 to 3 September 1916 the battalion fought at the Battle of Bois d'Elville /Delville Wood, near to Longueval. This was one of a series of engagements during the Battle of the Somme. The fighting was so ferocious that it led to the nickname Devil's Wood. Although the allies won the battle, they lost 33,000 soldiers killed or wounded.

His unit was then moved to northern France and took part in the Battle of Arras, 9 April 1917 to 16 May 1917. It was an allied victory which came at great cost, with over 100,000 British soldiers killed or injured.

The main Battle of Arras had ended but fighting continued for a few more days during which Hubert was killed. His body was never identified.

It is clear that Hubert, who had had a poor education and an unstable home life, showed his true abilities in the Rifle Brigade and later became a twice-promoted leader in the Machine Gun Corps. Having fought at the front for two years he must have had many harrowing experiences before his own death.

He was awarded the 1915 Star, the British Medal and the Victory Medal.

His father, who was receiving parish support and living at Egypt Cottage in Hemlock, received a death grant of £7. 4s. 4d and a war gratuity of £13.0s. 0d.

Unlike his brother, he is not recorded on the Holcombe War Memorial. (His brother had returned to Holcombe to live with his grandfather.)

Both are recorded on the Clayhidon Roll of Honour, in the Parish Hall.

Hubert is recorded on Bay 10 of the Arras War Memorial, Pas de Calais.



17.4.2017