

William Frank TAPLEY

Born Dawlish, Apr-Jun 1884
Private, no 21368

Killed in action, France, 4 October 1917, aged 33
Devonshire Regiment, 1st Battalion

The Tapley family had lived around Exeter for many generations. Daniel and Ann Tapley were in Pinhoe with three children when James Tapley (1819-1892) was born. His nine siblings were born either in Pinhoe or in parts of rural Devon.

James married Sarah Greenslade (1817-1917) in 1848 and they had four children, the youngest being William John Tapley (1857-1931) who was born in Ashcombe and Baptised in Starcross on 1 March 1857.

The 1871 census places James and Sarah in 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 (GRO ref 1878 Apr-Jun, Newton Abbot, vol 5b, page 205).

In 1881, William was a gardener and they had their first child Jane Pinkham, aged one, and William's mother-in-law, Harriet P Davey, living with them at Wick, Kenton, as well as the parents James and Sarah Tapley and their eldest daughter Sarah Jane. William and Sarah went on to have four children:

Jane Pinkham Tapley (1880-) Baptised at St Gregory the Great 22 February 1880

Emily Eliza Tapley (1881-1932) " " 22 June 1881

William Frank Tapley (1884-1917) (GRO Ref 1884 Apr-Jun, St Thomas, Vol 5b, p 82)

Arthur John Tapley (1889-1969) 12/9/1889 (GRO ref 1889 Dec, Newton Abbot, vol 5b, page 106) - (GRO ref 1969 Dec, Newton Abbot, vol 7a, p 1428). Born 5 September 1889 and Baptised at Cofton Chapelry 27 October 1889 with his older brother **William Frank Tapley**.

In 1891 the census shows the family at Week in Dawlish parish with the four children at school apart from the youngest, Arthur John, aged one. The grandparents were living in the adjoining property, aged 72 (James) and 75 (Sarah).

In 1901 they had moved to Rise Lodge, Dawlish, and **William**, 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 working as a gardener.

William Frank Tapley may have been conscripted during 1916 to join the Devonshire Regiment. He died during 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."

The 1st Battalion had moved up to an assault position on the evening of the 3rd October 1917.

At 6 a.m. the assaulting troops went over in splendid order and with great determination.

The Devons having to keep 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*

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remained in German hands until after the end of Third Ypres in 1917; by that time the whole area was a lunar landscape.)

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 were in strength and resisted stoutly. Indeed, No Man's Land was full of them for, as prisoners explained later, the Germans had been lining up for an attack in which three divisions would have been used against the Fifth 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 and well served. 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 about 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 N of it had been almost completely cut down, and its machine-guns swept the surrounding area, commanding the only possible passage over the Reutelbeck. 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 caught by the barrage and heavily punished. *(Extract from The Devonshire Regiment history)*

Dawlish War memorial inscription: TAPLEY W.F. PTE DEVON REGT.

Devon Heritage site info: 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.

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: 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

References:

Free Birth Marriage Death refs

Refs via subscription websites:

Census records

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UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects

UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War.

Ancestry family histories;

 Lieutenant Richard Tapley tree

 Harrison-Hewitt tree

<https://greatwarphotos.com/2012/03/06/flanders-polderhoek-chateau/>