

Albert Henry WEST

Born Dawlish July-Sept 1889
Private 26971

Died France, 4th October 1917, aged 28
8th (Service) Battalion, Devonshire Regiment

Albert Henry West was the cousin of George Carter West (q.v.) who died fighting with the Australian Forces a few months previously, on 15th April 1917.

Their joint grandparents were Edward and Fanny West. Edward West (1813-1874) was born in Kenton and was a gardener. He married Fanny Pike (1817-1892), who was born in Exeter, on 30th August 1835.

In 1861 they lived at 9 Regent Street, Dawlish with six children:

William Charles West (1841-1921)

Mary Ann West (1846-1924)

Frederick Pike West (1849-1923) father of George Carter West

Thomas Pike West (1851-1931) father of **Albert Henry West**

George Edward West (1854-1902) worked for the Post Office, Dawlish, 1911

Robert John West (1856-1919)

Their eldest daughter, Frances West (1839-1893) was living away as a servant, a position she held in various households over the following thirty years.

Thomas Pike West married Mary Ann Maria Warren (1851-1923) (Death ref GRO Newton Abbot, 1923, Sept, vol 5b, p 104) in 1879. He was a builder's labourer and they lived at 9 Badlake Hill. They were to have five children, all of whom were living at the time of the 1911 census:

Frank West (1880-)

Ernest West (1881-)

Caroline Lydia West (1884-)

Edward I West (1886-)

Albert Henry West (1889-1917)

(GRO birth ref, July-Sept 1889, Newton Abbot district, vol 5b, p 104)

Albert Henry West is shown on the Dawlish Boys' School Roll of Honour. By 1911 he was 21 and a servant and baker to Rupert Charles Curtis, a confectioner shopkeeper in the High Street, Dawlish. The *Dawlish Gazette* report of October 20, 1917 (q.v.) records that he was a baker by trade and an esteemed employee of R C Curtis.

It is recorded that **Albert** enlisted at Newton Abbot.

He married Lizzie Dorcas Arnold in Lady St Mary's Church, Wareham, Dorset, on 14th October 1916. Lizzie was born in Kingston, Surrey (GRO ref Mar 1892, Kingston, vol 2a, p 321) and had been living in Dawlish. Albert gave Wareham as his address, being a Private in the 44th Training Reserve Battalion. This unit was originally the 11th Devonshires Reserve Battalion which had formed in Exeter in November 1914. It moved to Wareham in May 1915 and became the 44th Training Reserve in the 10th (Reserve) Brigade on 1st September 1916.

At some point **Albert** was transferred to the 8th (Service) Battalion which was sent to France in 1915. He would have joined it some time after his wedding. In April 1917 during the Battle of

Arras both 8th and 9th (Service) Battalions attacked Ecoust with great success and light casualties but, a month later, capturing part of Bullecourt cost them 382 killed and wounded. Early October found both Battalions near Passchendaele enduring the worst of the Third Battle of Ypres. It is here that **Albert** lost his life.

The 8th's move to the front had been a most unpleasant experience. Leaving their bivouacs at Chateau Sigard an hour before sunset on October 2nd, they had threaded their way to Hooze Crater, first along paved roads and then by corduroy tracks. After passing Hooze it was, as one account says, "a question of sticking to the corduroy or duck-board tracks, or sticking in the pools of mud and water which otherwise monopolized the scene." The whole place was an ocean of mud, in which every other feature seemed to have been obliterated except the pill-boxes and the Butte in Polygon Wood, at which battalion headquarters were eventually established. As the battalion neared the Butte it had to go right through a German barrage which there was no avoiding. Luckily, the mud did at least minimize the effect of the shells, and the 8th reached their positions with about 25 casualties. To these there were several additions during the 3rd, partly among the ration-parties, who had to negotiate the barrage on their way up, partly from the shelling and sniping to which the troops in front were subjected. The work of the ration-parties was not, as a rule, easy, and here it was particularly difficult, but the 8th had a splendid Transport Officer in Lieut. Imbert Terry, and his determination and resourcefulness rose superior even to the most formidable obstacles and difficulties; he never failed to get his rations up or keep his horses fit, and his untiring and assiduous labours meant much to the 8th throughout the war. But worse than any shelling or sniping was the fact that the rain, of which there had already been a superabundance, started again.

Early on October 4th, A and C Companies lined up on a tape corresponding approximately to Jubilee Trench. When they were ready B and D fell back through them from the outpost line and took station, B in readiness to mop up behind A and C, D in reserve. The battalion's frontage was about 400 yards. the two waves were 70 yards apart, the reserve the same distance in rear; the Borders and Gordons followed 200 yards further back.

The enemy were holding no well-defined position, but were scattered about in pill-boxes and small posts on slightly rising ground. Shortly before "Zero" a German barrage came down. Then, at 6 o'clock, the British guns opened fire, the barrage moving forward 100 yards every four minutes, and the attack started. A Company, under Captain Froud, encountered a pill-box whose garrison also manned a dug-out covered by a machine-gun in rear. However, a Lewis gun engaged and neutralized the machine-gun, while bombers rushed and took the position. A little further on a grenade-thrower gave some trouble, but Captain Froud worked round its flank with a section and rushed it, taking 20 prisoners, though he himself was wounded. Twenty minutes after "Zero" A was on its objective, just West of Jay Barn, and had got touch with the 91st Brigade. The Germans, though in great force, had not put up as good a fight as usual. This was also C's experience: it met little serious opposition, the Germans surrendering quite freely, though when the company reached its objective snipers about 150 yards to the front

gave some trouble, as our protective barrage prevented men going forward to deal with them. Meanwhile B, under Captain Roper, following hard behind A and C, had "mopped up " most effectively: a strong point just behind Captain Froom's first pillbox was dealt with by a Lewis gun, 20 Germans being killed here; some hutments further to the left yielded 50 prisoners and a machine-gun just in rear which A opened fire was put promptly out of action. Effective work was also done by the reserve company, which accounted for two pill-boxes which previous lines had missed. D, however, had the heaviest casualties, mainly through having caught the enemy's barrage before "Zero." Altogether the attack had been a brilliant success, especially as the smoke and the total absence of landmarks made keeping direction most difficult. The British barrage had been excellent, and the first line had kept right up to it and had lost very few men. Indeed, casualties had been extremely light, far fewer than the prisoners, who numbered nearly 250 (a dozen machine-guns and trench mortars were also taken), drawn from half-a-dozen different regiments. It came out from them that our barrage had caught the Germans forming up to attack, the overhead machine-gun fire which had supported our advance had been particularly deadly, and in consequence the defenders were found half demoralized and ready to surrender.

At 8.10 a.m. the Borders and Gordons came through the 8th, to be equally successful in attaining their objective. It was now that the 8th's worst trials were to come. As the day wore on the German shell fire, observed and directed by aeroplanes, increased in intensity. "No sooner had we dug a fresh trench in what seemed a quiet spot," writes one officer, "than a hostile aeroplane would fly only a few yards over our heads, and we soon learnt what that foreboded." The almost incessant rain complicated matters, not merely by reason of the discomfort and additional fatigue, but because it interfered greatly with trench digging. Directly men got down a couple of feet the trenches filled with water. Mud clogged rifles and Lewis guns, had the battalion been counter-attacked in force half its rifles would have been out of action and casualties mounted up. Moreover, instead of being relieved, the 8th had to remain in the captured position until about midnight on October 7th-8th.

All through October 7th and 8th the shelling persisted, and the casualty list rose steadily. When at last the 22nd Brigade relieved the 20th there was no relief for the 9th Devons. The 8th, exhausted with a long turn in the line, and "almost finished for want of sleep," got back to Chateau Sigard early on October 8th. They had in the end quite a heavy casualty list, six officers (Capt. Drake, Lieut. Cornelius, 2nd-Lieuts. Tarbett, Relf, Silley and Dcdeane) and 57 men killed, 11 men missing, eight officers (Capt. Foord, Lieut. Pennington, 2nd-Lieuts. Baker, King, Harding, Puddicombe, H Gibbons and R Marshall) and 198 men wounded, 280 of all ranks, nearly half those who had gone into action. Still, the battalion had achieved all that had been set before it, had taken almost as many prisoners as it had had casualties, apart from other losses inflicted on the enemy, and this despite adverse conditions of ground and weather.

(Extracted from "The Devonshire Regiment 1914-1919" by C Atkinson, 1926)

Albert Henry West is recorded on the Devon Roll of Honour, and on the Dawlish Boys' School Roll of Honour.

Dawlish World War One Project

Dawlish War memorial inscription: WEST A.H. PTE DEVON REGT

Devon Heritage site info: 26971 Private Albert Henry West of the 8th Battalion, the Devonshire Regiment. *Parents not yet identified.* (My italics -ed) Born in Dawlish in the September Quarter of 1889. Died 4 October 1917 aged 28.

Commonwealth War Graves entry: WEST, ALBERT HENRY Private 26971 04/10/1917
Devonshire Regiment, 8th Bn. Panel Ref: Panel 38 to 40. [Tyne Cot Memorial](#), Flanders

Last known address: High Street, Dawlish

Next of kin: widow, Lizzie Dorcas West. Lizzie married again in Exeter in 1919 to Harry J Cross (GRO ref Exeter, March 1919, vol 5b, p 165).

References:

Free Birth, marriage, Death refs

Great War Forum.

refs via subscription website Ancestry:

Census records

UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects

Probate record

Family trees on Ancestry:

Hearne

Gary & Gail

Chambers