

### **Wilfred CARMAN**

Born Chudleigh, 20 November 1890

Died France 20 June 1918, aged 27

Company Sergeant Major 240083 1/5th (Territorial) Battalion, The Devonshire Regiment

**Wilfred Carman** was the son of Robert Burton Carman (1853-1931) and Harriet (nee Snell) (1855-1917). They were married in 1884 and Robert was a groom/coachman living in Fore Street, Chudleigh in 1891.

Robert Burton Carman was born in 1853 in East Carleton, Norfolk (close by Norwich) to Mark (1820- ) and Sarah Carman (1821- ).

Harriet Ann Snell was born in Chudleigh in 1856 to Simon (1805-1883) and Eliza Snell (1818-1893). The Snell family were residents of Chudleigh for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

By 1901 Robert and Harriet had moved to Dawlish Lodge, Mamhead where Robert was still employed as a groom. **Wilfred** was at Dawlish Boys' School.

In 1911 they were living at Alma House, Luscombe Terrace, Dawlish and Robert was still employed as a groom. They had lost one child out of five born before this date, and **Wilfred** was working as a carpenter and cabinet maker while his sisters Hilda, 23, and Norenie, 18, were unmarried.

**Wilfred** became a member of the Devonshire Volunteers and joined the Territorials in March 1908 and became a proficient soldier to reach the rank of Sergeant in charge of the Dawlish Detachment by the outbreak of war.

#### The 1/5th and 2/5th (Territorial Force) Battalions The Devonshire Regiment in World War One.

In 1908, when the Volunteers became part of the newly formed Territorial Army, two longstanding Devon volunteer units merged to form the 5th (Territorial Force) Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment. Based on Plymouth, the 5th recruited from the south-west of the county. The outbreak of war found them at their annual camp on Woodbury Common, Exeter. They never returned.

Training on Salisbury Plain in the first weeks of war, a second battalion were formed. Known initially as the 5th (Reserve) Battalion, they became the 2/5th, and they were formed of the relatively few Territorials who did not volunteer to serve overseas and the huge number of new recruits to the rapidly expanding wartime army. The 2/5th Devons remained in England until September 1915 when they were sent to Egypt, where they performed garrison duties until disbanded in June 1916.

Meanwhile, the 1/5th were sent to India in October 1914. They spent two years at Multan, supplying drafts to units in operational theatres, including 50 men who in 1915 were sent to join the 2nd Dorsets at Kut el Amara. In March 1917 they left for Egypt and early May found them at El Arish. In June they crossed into Palestine, where the newly-appointed General Allenby was planning how to capture Jerusalem by Christmas. Their baptism of fire came on 8th July at Samson's Ridge, near Gaza, when they were heavily shelled. On the 20th they suffered 80 casualties from shelling at Umbrella Hill while supporting the Bedfordshire Regiment's attack. After Beersheba was captured in late October the Battalion took part in the advance towards Jerusalem. Their march was often a torment of heat, dust, thirst and exhaustion. On 13th November they advanced under heavy fire and took the Turkish positions at Junction Station, suffering 57 casualties. On the 19th they took the town of Saris at a cost of another 39. In another attack on the 23rd at El Jib the Turks' machine guns reduced the Battalion's attacking

force to six officers and 120 men, who were pinned down behind the stone walls surrounding an old vineyard. Now mustering only 250 men, the 1/5th continued the advance above Jerusalem in torrential rain and in late December received a welcome influx of reinforcements. In April 1918 the 1/5th fought perhaps their most successful action at Berukin, capturing the town at a cost of 88 casualties.

In May 1918 the 1/5th were ordered to France where they fought on the Marne. Capturing the village of Bligny on 28th July took a toll of 388 killed and wounded. From late August they took part in the rapid advances around and beyond Havrincourt south of Cambrai. On 25th September at Marcoing they took 350 prisoners but, by early October, their strength had been depleted to just 10 officers and 194 men.

The Armistice found the 1/5th behind the line at Monplaisir after 30 months' fighting in Palestine and France which had cost the lives of 342 of their comrades and won the two battalions ten battle honours. (*extracted from The Keep Museum history*)

In June 1918 the 1<sup>st</sup>/5th Battalion was at Fonquevillers, a village about 18 km south west of Arras. The War Diary shows that it was relieved on the night of 18/19 June and moved to the area occupied by the forward battalion of the Res.Bde relieving the 2/4th Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

"On the 20<sup>th</sup> June 'D' Company in RUM TRENCH was heavily shelled at midday.

Casualties **3 Other Ranks(O.R.) killed**, 6 O.R. wounded.

The reports do not give names of other ranks, only those of officers killed or wounded.

**Company Sergeant Major Wilfred Carman** was one of three killed by a shell-burst on the 20<sup>th</sup> June. The extract from the *Dawlish Gazette* records the incident and carries a tribute from his company officer, Captain Arthur G W Church (q.v.) who was to die in action himself only a few weeks later.

His Commanding Officer wrote, "It is difficult for me to express adequately the debt which the battalion and this company owe to your son. In the old Territorial days before the war he was the backbone of the Dawlish contingent. From that time to this he has fulfilled his duties with the most unswerving energy and thoroughness.... By his death we have lost an upright and gallant soldier, and those of us who knew him well, a faithful and loyal friend."

He had been on continuous service without home leave since 1914.

Commonwealth War Graves entry: CARMAN, W Company Sergeant Major 240083

20/06/1918 Devonshire Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup>/5th Bn.

Grave ref: XXI. D. 1. Bienvillers Military Cemetery, France.

His name is inscribed on both the Devon Roll of Honour and the Dawlish Boys' School Roll of Honour.

Dawlish War memorial inscription: CARMAN W. SGT-MAJ DEVON REGT.

Devon Heritage site info:

Dawlish World War One Project

240083 Company Sergeant Major Wilfred Carman of the 5<sup>th</sup> (Prince of Wales) Battalion, the Devonshire Regiment. Son of Robert and Harriet Carman. Born in the March Quarter of 1890. Died 20 June 1918 aged 28.

Last known address: Alma House, Luscombe Terrace, Dawlish

Next of kin: Robert Carman, father

References:

Free BMD refs

The Keep Military Museum

refs from subscription sites:

De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour, vol 4

Census data