

For King and Country



As part of the scaled back VE Day celebrations in Saltash we were asked to decorate our windows. I decided that I would like to put some photographs of family members that had served in the armed forces during the Second World War at the centre of my display. This led me to my 'family suitcase' searching for a photo of my dad in RAF uniform and also one of his half-brother Fred. As I had plenty of time on my hands due to lockdown I decided go through the letters and other papers contained in the envelope marked 'Fred' to find out a bit more about him.

Frederick John Williams was a Cornish boy (the family came from the Gunnislake/St. Ann's Chapel area). He joined the Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry at the start of the Second World War and went off to France to 'serve King and Country'. Sadly Fred never returned. Letters home ceased in 1940 and my

grandmother wrote many letters to the authorities to find out what had happened to him. She eventually received a letter from the War Office in 1942 stating that Fred had been injured and because of the severity of his wounds and the fact that nothing had been heard from him for two years, it had been recorded that he had 'died of his wounds in a casualty clearing station shortly after 28th May 1940 while serving with the British Expeditionary Force'.

My father told me that Fred died when the ambulance he was travelling in towards Dunkirk was blown up, but I do not know where he got that story from. It could be that his body was being transported somewhere and the ambulance story was true.

Although his death was recorded there was never any record of a grave. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission site states that he is listed on the Dunkirk Memorial which commemorates nearly 4,700 soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force who fell in the campaign in France and Belgium, in 1939-1940 who have no known grave. The memorial was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother on 29 June 1957. (My grandmother and my dad were in attendance at the ceremony – this was the only time that

either of them went 'abroad'!) I also had a chance to see his name on the memorial during a visit to the area in 2016.

My grandmother also learnt from the War Office that Fred had been awarded a Military Medal for an act of bravery, which resulted in him being injured. When my grandmother died my father decided that he wanted to give the medal to the Regimental Museum in Bodmin and they very kindly offered to carry out some research into the reason why Fred had received the award. This is the account:-

True extract from 'The History of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry 1930-1945

By nightfall on the 27th May 1940 the 2nd Battalion found themselves to the east of Kemmel (Belgium), one Company at least having got there on the general instruction to move to Kemmel and then march to the sound of the guns. Their task throughout May 28th was to assist the 5th Division in their mortal struggle to hold the Germans at bay in the area south of Ypres while the remainder of the allied forces fell back towards Dunkirk. The battalion were engaged in very heavy fighting throughout the day, and suffered many casualties, especially in B and C Companies, whose respective Commanders, Captain Farmer and Major Phillippo, were both killed.

Some of the battalion occupied a ridge east of Wyttschaete, from which they could clearly see the close-ranked masses of the Germans pressing northwards with little to molest them, for ammunition was low and there was little available air effort left. By contrast the battalion came under almost constant air attack as the day wore on. The carrier platoon, as had been the custom throughout the campaign, were operating under the direct control of the brigade commander, Brigadier Barker (later General Sir Evelyn Barker), and they also had an adventurous day. With ten carriers remaining to them they were ordered to carry out a show of force from Wyttschaete, through the village of St. Eloi and then back by another route. The total distance was about five miles and the exact location of the enemy was unknown. Captain Pine-Coffin (attached from Devonshire Regiment, Lieutenant Gason wounded and out of action) who at this time commanded the platoon, was instructed by Brigadier Barker to see if St. Eloi was occupied and to shoot up any Germans that might be encountered.

In Captain Pine-Coffin's own words 'We encountered the Germans well before we got to St. Eloi and found them in the village itself too. Fortunately they had only just got there and our appearance surprised and even scared them. They obviously thought we were tanks and ran about in all directions for cover. We took them on with our Bren guns but were a bit inaccurate as the gunners had to stand up and fire from the shoulder. My own gun I remember, chose to be difficult and refused to fire anything but single sounds which undoubtedly enabled many Germans to remain alive. One gunner put aside his Bren and instead tossed grenades amongst the Germans sheltering in the ditch beside the road. (This was **Private Williams** who lost an arm in the engagement and was awarded the Military Medal for his part in the action.) In all the platoon killed at least seventy that morning and our own casualties were one killed and three wounded.'



This scroll commemorates
Private F. J. Williams
Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry
held in honour as one who
served King and Country in
the world war of 1939-1945
and gave his life to save
mankind from tyranny. May
his sacrifice help to bring
the peace and freedom for
which he died.

THE ENCLOSED SCROLL
IS SENT
BY COMMAND OF THE QUEEN



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The Queen and I offer you
our heartfelt sympathy in your
great sorrow.

We pray that your country's
gratitude for a life so nobly
given in its service may bring
you some measure of consolation.

George R.I.

Jackie Austin