



LANCE CORPORAL CHARLES PORTER

SERVIVE NO. 86272

50TH BATTALION MACHINE GUN CORPS (INF)

DIED 6TH JUNE 1918 AGED 21

Alfred James Clark was born in Odiham in the last quarter of 1892. He was the son of Joseph, a fish hawker, and Elizabeth Clark and in 1901 the family was living at Bartley Heath. At that time Alfred was employed as a farm labourer.¹ In the third quarter of 1904 Alfred married Ellen Appleford, who had been born in Steventon. At the time they were living in Up Nateley with their four children, Nellie (5), Kathleen (4), Alfred (3) and John (2). The children had all been born in Newnham. Alfred was employed as a general labourer working for the London & South Western Railway.²

Alfred enlisted for the duration of the War (Short Service) at Hartley Wintney on 22 November 1915. His Attestation shows that he was given two service numbers, 142483 (crossed out) and 298931. He was to join the Army Service Corps and was earmarked to be a packer and loader. The form was certified by the Approving Officer on 3 January 1916. Alfred's service record also includes family details and we learn that by this time he had two more children, a daughter, Dora, and a son, Herbert Frank, and the family were living at The Rookery in Up Nateley.³

The Army Service Corps ensured that soldiers on the front lines had all the support they needed to carry out their roles, be it food, equipment, ammunition and all the other essentials needed by those fighting at the front. Providing transport through the supply and care of horses and vehicles was an essential part of the ASC's role. Hence the notes on Alfred's Attestation form - 'packer and loader'. The Labour Corps came into being in January 1917, but prior to this date the ASC had Labour Companies which initially were formed to provide manpower to unload British ships and operate the docks in France, but developed into greater logistical operations. When Alfred transferred to the 197th Area Employment Company Labour Corps his second service number, 298931, was used.⁴ These Companies were formed for salvage work, which meant working on the Western Front near the front line. Furthermore, in March and April 1918 during the manpower crisis when the Army came close to defeat, they were used as emergency infantry.

Alfred was awarded the Victory Medal and the British War Medal. He is commemorated in Blargies Communal Cemetery Extension, Oise, France.

¹ Source – Ref: Class: RG13; Piece: 1102; Folio: 10; Page:11 – 1891 Census, Odiham

² Source – Ref: Class: RG14; Piece: 6285; Schedule Number: 62 – 1911 Census, Up Nateley

³ Source – British Army WW1 Service Records, 1914-1920, www.ancestry.co.uk

⁴ Source – Commonwealth War Graves Commission record



Charles Porter's story was told in the Spring 2011 edition of the Odiham Society Journal and is reprinted below.

Charles Lindsay Porter, the third son of Arthur and Linnie Porter, was born in Odiham in 1898. Fortunately, his service records have survived and give an overview of his experiences and movements from enlistment until he was killed in action⁵. We learn that he enlisted on 5 June 1916 at the age of 18 years and 5 months at Hartley Wintney, having previously been employed as a labourer. He was recorded as being 5' 5" tall, with a chest measurement of 35" and weighing 129 lbs. On 6 June he became Private No. 30082 and was assigned to the Territorial Force 4th Battalion, Hampshire Regiment at Winchester, where he completed basic training. On 2nd October 1916 he was mobilised and the following day posted to another Territorial Force Battalion, the 5th Hampshire Regiment at Southampton. During his time with the 5th, he had one lapse of 'conduct', his offence being "dirty on parade (dirty clothing)" in Parkstone on 7 November 1916. It is likely that this was for something trivial, such as not cleaning the instep of his boots, as he received the minimum punishment of 5 days confined to barracks. However, six weeks later Charles was transferred to another unit, the 5th Battalion, Machine Gun Corps (MGC) and given a new number, 82672.

Transfer to this new unit would have involved a further period of specialist training over the next few weeks before Charles joined the British Expeditionary Force, France on 2nd March 1917 and a posting to the 137th Coy. MGC. He travelled to France from Folkestone to Boulogne and arrived at the Base Depot, Camiers, on 16th March, 1917 for onward transfer to the battle fields (see Fig.1 for a picture of an MGC gun crew in operation). On 18 August 1917 Charles was reported "wounded (Gas)" and the following day admitted to the shell gas ward of the field hospital. From here he was moved to the 22nd General Hospital in Dannes and then to other hospitals to convalesce, initially in Étaples (25th August) and then in Buchy (31st August). Two months later Charles was back at the Base Depot at Camiers (29 October). In early December he returned to the field with the 245th Machine Gun Company who were

⁵ Ancestry.com. *British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920* [database on-line].



Fig.1: Gun crew with British Vickers machine gun wearing anti-gas helmets during the Battle of the Somme, July 1916. Source: IWM photograph Q3995, with permission

Divisional Troops in the 50th (Northumbrian) Division. After two weeks leave in England, during February 1918, Charles returned to his company which became part of 50th Battalion of the MGC in the same division. This battalion subsequently fought⁶ at the battles of the Somme – at St Quentin on 21 – 23 March as part of the XIX Corps, Fifth Army; in the actions at the Somme Crossings on 23rd March as part of the XIX Corps; and at Rosieres on 26 and 27 March as part of the XIX Corps, Fifth Army. They then moved on to the battle of the Lys, fighting at Estaires for three days from 9th April as part of the XV Corps, First Army; and Hazebrouck on 12 April, again with the XV Corps, First Army. On 26 April the Battalion was transported by train to the Aisne, joining the IX Corps under the 6th French Army on 28 April. On 6 May, the Battalion moved into the line taking over the Beaurieux Sector from the French. Three weeks later the battle of the Aisne began and continued until 6 June 1918 – the day that Charles was killed in action aged 21. His death is commemorated on the Soissons Memorial, Aisne, France and is one of nearly 4,000 casualties who died on the Aisne who have no known grave. He was awarded the British War Medal 1914-20 and the Victory Medal 1914-19 (Squeak and Wilfred) – see Fig.2.

⁶ The Machine Gun Corps Old Comrades Association have kindly provided us with a pack of information about the MGC and Charles Porter, which includes details of the battles in which he would have been involved.



Fig.2: WW1 medals awarded to Charles L. Porter and his Machine Gun Corps cap badge
- from left to right - British War Medal 1914-20; Victory Medal 1914-19