



PRIVATE JAMES STAPLES
SERVICE NO. 3/3463
15TH BATTALION, HAMPSHIRE REGIMENT
DIED 7th June 1917 AGED 39

James was born in Odiham, on 12 November 1878.¹ His mother Jane's occupation was recorded as 'Farm Work' in 1881. He had four sisters, Mary, born in 1871, Ellen, born in 1874, Elizabeth, born in 1876 and Edith, born in 1881². James attended London Road Board School from 2 March 1885 until 16 May 1890. On 13 September 1897 James completed an Attestation document to join the Hampshire Regiment – 37th and 67th Foot, at the age of 18 years and 10 months³. In 1881 these former North and South Hampshire Foot Militia units became the Hampshire Regiment. He gave his occupation at that time as a baker. In 1911 James, then a 30-year-old farm labourer, was living with his mother and 8 year old niece, Dorothy, in Cemetery Hill, Odiham ⁴.

From his service number, an old Militia (Special Reserve) number, it is likely that he returned to the Colours and enlisted between June and December 1911⁵. He first entered a theatre of war in France on 24 March 1915 ⁶. On 2 July 1915 James was admitted to the 3rd General Hospital, Le Treport⁷. The reason for his hospitalisation is not known. It is likely that he transferred to the 15th (Service) Battalion after it arrived in France on 2 May 1916⁸ as part of the 122nd Brigade, 41st Division. From this date the 41st Division remained on the Western Front until after James' death.

From June 1916, the 41st Division were on the Front Line, initially in the Battle of Ploegsteert Wood⁹ and other Battles of the Somme¹⁰. On 1st June 1917 the Battalion was on the Front Line in the St Eloi sector and over the next three days the casualties were listed as 8 wounded, 1 killed, 3 suffering from shell shock and 8 gassed. On 5 June 1917 they had moved to St Eloi Sector & Middle Camp West where casualties included 4 gassed and 3 wounded. On 6 June the Battalion marched to a "position of Assembly for Attack (Old French Trench) – Damstrasse" in readiness for the first day of the Battle of Messines on 7 June, Zero hour being 3.10

¹ London Road Board School Admissions and Withdrawals Register

² 1881 Census, Odiham, ref RG11, Piece no. 1249, Folio 17, Page 26

³ British Army Service Records 1760-1915, Findmypast.co.uk

⁴ 1911 Census, Odiham, ref. RG14, Piece 6245, Schedule No.197

⁵ Source – The Royal Hampshire Regiment Museum, Winchester

⁶ British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920 – Ancestry.co.uk

⁷ Source – The Royal Hampshire Regiment Museum, Winchester

⁸ Source – The Royal Hampshire Regiment Museum, Winchester

⁹ Source – 15th (Service) Battalion, Hampshire Regiment war diary.

¹⁰ The Long, Long Trail. www.longlongtrail.co.uk



a.m. This was a day of heavy losses for the Battalion, James being one of 38 other ranks killed in action. 136 other ranks were wounded and 3 were missing. In addition, 1 Officer was killed, 1 died of wounds and 6 were wounded¹¹.

James qualified for the 1915 Star, the Victory Medal and the British War Medal by virtue of his service and these would have been sent to his next of kin after the cessation of hostilities¹². He is buried in the Bus House Cemetery, Voormezele, Ypres. A War Gratuity of £13.0.0 was awarded to his mother, Jane, in September 1919¹³.

I would like to thank Lt. Col. Colin Bulleid of the Royal Hampshire Regiment Museum in Winchester for all his help and advice in the research of James Staples' story and also for his attempts to find William Varndell's link with Odiham.

During the rest of 1916 and early 1917 the Battalion took part in fighting on the Ancre, the Battle of Thiepval Ridge, the Battle of the Ancre heights and the Battle of the Ancre again. The Battalion Journal for February 1917 lists Thomas as 'Sick', as 'Wounded in Action' in September 1917 and 'Missing, previously wounded' in the November 1917 Journal¹⁴. The Casualty Ledger supports some of this – 'Transferred to Base Details (unfit) on 14 March 1917.'

On the first day of the Battle Of Pilkem, the first phase of Third Ypres (Passchendaele), the War Diary reported that the Battalion had captured two Field Guns and one 4.5 How, 17 machine guns (counted) and over 200 prisoners. However, two officers had been killed, five officers had been wounded, one of whom died of those wounds. For other ranks, 17 had been killed, one died of wounds, 156 were wounded and 42 were missing¹⁵. Thomas was one of those casualties.

Thomas is commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial. He was awarded the British War Medal 1914-20 and the Victory Medal 1914-19¹⁶.

¹¹ 15 (Service) Battalion Hampshire Regiment War Diary

¹² British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920 – Ancestry.co.uk

¹³ National Army Museum, Chelsea: Soldiers' Effects Records, 1901-1960

¹⁴ Details kindly provided by Lt. Col. Colin Bulleid, the Royal Hampshire Regiment Museum

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920, www.ancestry.co.uk

