



SERGEANT WILLIAM FUTCHER

SERVICE NO.1635

1ST (ROYAL) DRAGOONS

DIED 12TH JANUARY 1916 AGED 27

William, the third child of Cantilo Fred and and Louisa, nee Sawkins, Futchter, was born in Woodmancott, Hampshire on 18 April 1888¹. From the 1911 census we learn that Sydney, mostly known as William, had eleven surviving brothers and sisters. His father was a labourer working on a steam roller and the family lived in Up Street, North Warnborough². From March 1895 until reaching the school leaving age William was a pupil at London Road Board School³. Some time after leaving this school William followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Army. His father, Cantilo Fred, was a Chelsea Pensioner, who had attested to the Hampshire Regiment – 37th & 67th Foot on 21 December 1880⁴. In 1911 William was a Private serving with the 1st Royal Dragoons in Muttra, India⁵.

From the Bickersteth Diaries, 1914-1918⁶, we learn that the "Royals" had been in South Africa in 1914 and it was from Potchefstroom that they left South Africa, where William had served initially with the 2nd Royal Dragoons in the South Africa War⁷ to sail to Southampton at the start of the war. They arrived there on 19 September 1914. The regiment "was dispatched to Luggershall to join the newly-formed 6th Cavalry Brigade of 3rd Cavalry Division." Here they underwent training before first entering the France and Flanders theatre of war in Belgium on 8 October 1914⁸, having arrived at Ostend and Zeebrugge the previous day. By this time William was a Corporal⁹. Action in the First Battle of Ypres during October and November 1914 followed. In early 1915 the Royals were again in the area undertaking trench-holding duties in the vicinity of Zillebeke. During the Second Battle of Ypres they fought boldly and suffered many losses at Railway Wood on 13 May 1915 before being engaged in more trench fighting near Hooze Castle and Sanctuary Wood in May and June. During the Battle of, the regiment entered the

¹ Date of birth source – London Road Board School admission register and 1901 census, Odiham, Class: RG13; Piece: 1102; Folio: 42; Page:1

² 1911 census, Odiham, ref: RG14PN6246 RG78PN296 RD109 SD1 ED12 SN93

³ London Road Board School Admission Register

⁴ Chelsea Pensioners' discharge documents 1760-1887, www.findmypast.co.uk

⁵ 1911 Census, 1st Royal Dragoons, Muttra, India, ref: RG14PN34990 RD641 SD15 ED12 SN9999

⁶ J Bickersteth (ed.), The Bickersteth Diaries 1914-1918, London, Leo Cooper, 1995 p.57

⁷ Source – Obituary in the Hants and Berks Gazette, 22 January 1916

⁸ Source: British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920, www.ancestry.co.uk

⁹ ibid





town on foot "to shore up the defences and rally troops of the 15th (Scottish) Division." It was here that William was promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

In December 1915 William was granted home leave over the Christmas period so that he could marry his fiancée, Lydia Crisp.

On his return to the front line in January 1916 The Royals "provided a company as part of 6th Cavalry Brigade Dismounted Battalion", i.e. again on foot. The role of this unit was to "garrison a section of the front line close to Hohenzollern Redoubt. On the morning of 12 January 1916, Sergeant Futchter was having breakfast when a shell landed in the trench he was in and killed him almost instantaneously".

Bickersteth wrote the following tribute to William in a letter shortly after his death <http://www.longlongtrail> –

"By common consent he was the most promising young Sergeant in the regiment and was marked out to become a Squadron-Sergeant-Major. He was just my age, and a month ago I got him leave to go home and get married. I have written to his young wife. At the moment he was killed he had a mug of tea in his hand and a piece of bread and bacon."

William is commemorated on the Loos Memorial. He was awarded the 1914 Star, the British War Medal 1914-20 and the Victory Medal 1914-19¹⁰.

I would like to thank Don Knibbs and Glyn Jones for their help in finding and researching the Bickersteth Diaries and other information on Sidney William Futchter. Thank you also to Janet Cumner for all her help.

¹⁰ British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920, www.ancestry.co.uk