Micheal Cunningham





Rank: - Private

Regiment: - 1/7th Duke of Wellington's (West Yorkshire Regiment)

Number: - 240953

Date of Death: - 11 October 1918

Cemetery: - Wellington Cemetery, Rieux-en-Cambresis, Nord, France.

Michael was the second son of coal miner William Cunningham and his wife Catherine (Kate) McCormick. The couple, both from Batley, married in 1892. Eldest son, James, was born the following year. Then came Michael born on 20 January 1895 and William was born in 1897. They welcomed a daughter, Mary Ann, in 1899. In December 1901 their final son, Thomas, was born—but his birth came the month after William's death.

Widowed Kate worked as a rag sorter to try to provide for her five young children, but times were tough. In March 1905 she narrowly avoided a prison sentence after being found guilty of stealing a pair of lady's boots from the Commercial Street shop of Messrs. Stephen Hilton and Sons, boot and shoe dealers. Her widowed status, and children, influenced the magistrates to leniency. She was also in the early stages of pregnancy.

In late 1905 Kate and her family moved to Dewsbury, possibly after she began a relationship with Herbert Hardy, a former Boer War soldier. In October 1906 Kate had another son, Herbert, born prior to her marriage to Herbert Hardy in 1907. He had the Hardy surname on the censuses and was acknowledged as his son in war pension records but this was not in the General Registry Office birth registration.

In 1911 Herbert and Kate lived at Ingham Road, Dewsbury with Herbert, Nora born in April 1909, Michael and Willie (both working as coal mine hurriers) Mary Ann and Thomas. James had died in Dewsbury District Hospital in January 1909 aged 15 years. In April 1912 William died aged 15 years. In late 1913 James Gilbert was born.

At the outbreak of war Herbert Hardy was recalled to the Colours, with the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. In October 1914 the family was living at Milton Street, Batley Carr. At around this time Michael gave up his job as a hurrier at Soothill Wood Colliery to enlist with the Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment).

On 21 April 1915, Herbert Hardy went to France to reinforce the 2nd KOYLI. A little over 2 weeks later, on 7 May 1915 he was involved in action at the infamous Hill 60 and was posted missing. At this time Kate and the family were living at Balk Street, Batley and another soldier wrote to his wife asking her to tell Kate that her husband had "*gone under*" in a charge, and nothing more had been heard of him.

Kate told the *News* staff that her eldest son, Michael, was in the army and she now had only 25s a week to support herself and the five children, who remained at home, including one who described as "*a cripple*". This was Thomas Cunningham. Her story was published in the paper as an example of the real hardships being faced by soldier's families. She never gave up searching for her husband until on Wednesday 19 July 1916 she received a letter from the War Office, notifying her that in the absence of further news the Army Council had regretfully concluded that he had died on or around 7 May 1915. On the same day Kate received this letter she also received news Michael was now at the Front.

Michael was initially with the 2/5th West Riding Regiment and served on the Western Front for over two years coming home on leave only once. He was wounded twice and his latter service was with the 1/7th West Riding Regiment.

Days before the Armistice Kate Hardy received a letter from an officer. It informed her that Michael had fallen in action on 11 October whilst bravely doing his bit on the Western Front. On that day the 1/7th Duke of Wellingtons were heavily involved in the actions which later became known as the Pursuit to the Selle, when the Germans were driven back and rapidly withdrew to the line of the river Selle.

In the early hours of 11 October, the Battalion were in the Escaudoeuvres area of northern France, better known pre-war for its beet sugar production. They were assembling ready for their part in an attack later that morning, in which they advanced 1,000 yards. The push continued until 13 October and in addition to officer casualties in this three-day period 56 other ranks were killed and 237 wounded with several more missing. Michael was amongst the dead.

Michael was awarded the Victory and British War Medal. He is remembered on Batley War Memorial and at St. Mary's Church, Batley.

In October 1921 his 19- year- old brother, Thomas, died and in February 1925, his 15- year- old half- sister, Nora, died. Kate never remarried and remained at Balk Street until her death in 1941.



Thanks to Jane Roberts and for further information please see pasttopresentgenealogy.