Matthew Farrar





Rank: - Private

Number: - 33525

Regiment: - Border Regiment (Formerly 113466 Royal Garrison Artillery, 37069 Lancashire Fusiliers)

Died: - 3rd October 1917 aged 36 years

Cemetery: - Zuydcoote Military Cemetery, Nord, France

Matthew was the youngest of 10 children born to Matthew and Mary Farrar (formerly Pendergast).

Matthew was from a Batley family whilst Mary was amongst the early waves of Irish immigrants who came from the Charlestown area of County Mayo in the 1850's. They married at Gomersal Registry Office in April 1860. Their eldest son, John, was born in November 1860 followed by Thomas on Christmas Day 1861 but he only survived three weeks. The family lived at New Street, Batley.

William was born in July 1863 and died aged three weeks, and in October 1864 Susannah arrived. In 1867 another boy, Thomas, was born, followed in 1869 by Joseph

who died in August 1870 aged nine months. Mary Ellen was born in 1871, James in 1874, George 1876 and Matthew on 17 November 1879.

Matthew (snr), who died in 1899, worked predominantly as a willyer, in a woollen mill. The 1901 and 1911 censuses the records show Matthew (jnr.) working as a cloth finisher. In July 1912 he left the employment of J. T. and J. Taylor's Blakeridge Mills and emigrated to Canada. He returned to Batley 17 months later for Christmas 1913. Once back in Batley he worked as a cloth finisher with Messrs, G.H. Hirst and Co. at Alexandra Mills, Batley. This was his occupation when he enlisted, and he and his mother had moved to Cobden Street.

Matthew attested on 11 December 1915, which was the last day of registration under the Derby Scheme. This placed him on the Army Reserve and returned home until his eventual call up. He was eventually called up in August 1916. His papers describe him as being 5' 9" tall and weighing 156lbs. He also had a hammer toe on each foot.

He was originally posted to the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA), service number 113466 and went to No.21 Company based in Leith to undertake coastal defence work. From there he went to the Heavy Artillery Depot at Woolwich in October. In November 1916 he was transferred to the 21st Lancashire Fusiliers but this home-based Reserve Battalion had recently converted into the 72nd Training Reserve Battalion in the 17th Reserve Brigade. He was given a new service number, 37069.

At the beginning of 1917, he was posted to France to join the 11th Border Regiment and sailed from Folkestone arriving in Boulogne on 4 January. From there he made his way to Etaples, before joining his Battalion in the field on 7 January. His newly allocated service number was 33525.

Matthew at this time made an informal will leaving all his property and effects to his mother. In the event of her death, everything was to go to his sister Susannah (Brook) who had lost her son John, in the opening days of the Battle of the Somme and her husband Lawrence who died suddenly on Sunday 17 December 1916.

On 7 April 1917 the 11th Border Regiment moved to Holnon, around five kilometres from St. Quentin, in northern France. On 12 April they were in the Front Line undertaking general work including making improvements to the trenches, fire positions and communication trenches. The Unit War Diary records nothing beyond this, but Matthew sustained a shrapnel injury. He wrote home to his mother: -

"I am sorry to tell you that I have been wounded in the left arm. It happened on Thursday, April 12th. I was struck by a piece of shell, but I am going on nicely so far.

It is not so serious as I thought it was going to be, but I am a lucky man to have my left arm. However, I don't think it will be many months before I am alright again and on the war path."

He did quickly re-join to his Battalion, only to sustain fatal injuries a few months later.

At the beginning of October 1917, the Battalion was in the line at the Lombardzyde Sector along the Belgian coast near Nieuwpoort, undertaking working part duties. The Unit War Diary notes that on 2 October 1917 one Other Rank was killed and 14 more wounded. With serious shrapnel injuries to his head and leg, Matthew was transferred to the 36th Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) which was based further down the coast and over the border in France, in the village of Zuydcoote, some 10 km north-east of Dunkirk.

Matthew never made it out of the 36th CCS. He died on 3 October 1917, one of 23 deaths the CCS recorded that day. The Sister-in-Charge wrote to Matthew's mother, who by now was living at Jacob Street, Woodwell with married daughter Mary Ellen Travers. The letter said: -

"*It is with much regret I tell you that your son died a short time after admission on Oct.3rd Your poor lad sustained fatal wounds in the head and leg, and was quite hopeless."*

The letter was followed by the official War Office notification.

Matthew is buried at Zuydcoote Military Cemetery.

He was awarded the Victory Medal and British War Medal and remembered with Honour at St. Mary's Church and Batley War Memorial.



Thanks to Jane Roberts and for more information see www.pasttopresentgenealogy.co.uk