Clifford Fone



Rank: - Driver

Number: - 796028 (formerly 2067 R.F.A.)

Regiment: - 169th Bde Ammunition Col. Royal Field Artillery

Killed in Action: - 14 August 1917 aged 23

Cemetery: - Erquinghem-Lys Churchyard Extension, Nord, France 11.E.9

Batley News, 25 Aug 1917 (photo)

Family Details

Clifford was born in Batley in1894, the son of Samuel Henry Fone born in St. Giles, London and his wife Elizabeth (Nee Barnett) who came from West Bromwich. He already had an older brother John Mortimer (1891); Frank was born 1896 and Louise 1906. Gertrude born 1888 had died aged 10 months. In 1901 the family were living at 12, Taylor Street, Batley where Samuel was an Insurance Agent but by 1911, they had moved to 5, George Street and Samuel had changed his job to be a Gas Works Labourer and Clifford was working for the Great Northern Railway.

Clifford was a member of Batley Parish Church Lads' Brigade. Before enlisting he worked at Messrs. Watson Brothers, aerated water manufacturers, Batley Carr. His parents had moved to 12, Brookroyd Lane, Batley before April 1918 when it was reported, in the Batley News that Frank was suffering from gas poisoning and Signaller John Fone was in Beckett Street Hospital, Leeds having been wounded.

Service Details

Clifford enlisted at Bradford in March 1915 and disembarked 12th July 1915. He was a Driver in the Royal Field Artillery and was wounded and brought back to England in November 1915. He was sent back to France and was wounded three times before he lost his life.





Clifford was on board the hospital ship *Anglia* when on 17 November 1915 it was returning from Calais to Dover, carrying 390 injured officers and soldiers. At around 12:30 pm, 1 nautical mile (1.9 km) east of Folkestone Gate, HMHS *Anglia* struck a mine and sank in fifteen minutes. The nearby HMS Hazard helped evacuate the passengers and crew. Despite the assistance of the nearby collier *Lusitania* it was reported four officers, one nurse ,125 army soldiers, 25 crew and 9 R.A.M.C. staff were killed in the sinking.

The mine shattered the port side as she hit a mine which had been laid by the German submarine UC-5 .It was reported there were around 366 wounded soldiers on board many of them were from the 60,392 British casualties crippled from the Battle of Loos. The people in the two front wards hardly stood a chance, survivors spoke of nurses sticking by the wounded to the last, men without arms trying to swim, others without legs dragging themselves on deck, even men who could not walk suddenly having the ability to stand.

"*One moment the men were speeding home across a calm sea, the next they were drowning in their beds"*

Clifford returned to action in France but sadly he was killed in action on 14th August 1917.His exact whereabouts at the time of his death are uncertain but the Commonwealth War Graves Commission record that he was killed whilst serving with 169th Brigade Ammunition Column of the Royal Field Artillery (RFA).

169th Brigade, RFA was broken up in 1916 but was reformed in May 1917 as 169th Army Brigade, RFA. It was made up of 376th, 377th, 378th and 379th Battery, RFA (all with 18-pounders). The reformed brigade's war diary is available at The National Archives (reference WO95/204. In March 2014 it had not been digitised). It is known that the above Batteries were first stationed at Rue Flourie Farm, Bois Grenier near Armentieres.

Clifford Fone is honoured at the ERQUINGHEM-LYS CHURCHYARD EXTENSION near Armentieries in northern France and he was one of two RFA (169th Brigade) men killed on the 14th August 1917. Two other soldiers, one from the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment and another from the South Lancashire Regiment, suffered a similar fate on that day and are remembered at the same Cemetery. These two Regiments were part of the 57th (2nd West Lancashire) Division who had embarked for France in February 1917 and, from that time, had been located in the Le Tilleloy area some 6 miles south of Erquinhghem-Lys. Shortly after their arrival in France the 57th Division took over the right sector of II Anzac Corps north of Le Tilleloy.

In 1917 Le Tilleloy was on the front line and it is reasonable to assume that RFA Driver, Clifford Fone, lost his life, here or herabouts in the same action as his three soldier colleagues who are now buried alongside him.

This sector of the front line during the Great War was considered 'quiet', if indeed any part of the line could ever be called quiet. For most of the war the lines never changed, and it was used by the British High Command to train new divisions in the day to day activities and duties of trench warfare. Indeed, the Australians referred to it as the 'Nursery Sector'.

As such, a soldier's daily life was occupied with maintaining and repairing the trenches and their defences. Each day, at dawn and dusk, he and his comrades would 'Stand To', often firing off their rifles and machine-guns. The Germans would bombard the front and support lines with shells of all calibres, trench mortar bombs, rifle grenades and gas. At night a battalion might organise a

wiring party in front of the trenches to repair the barbed wire, and even launch a patrol into No Man's Land to observe the Germans. Occasionally 'trench raids' would also take places: these could be anything from a dozen men under an officer to a whole battalion.

In August 1917, the month in which Clifford Fone lost his life, the "nursery sector" was the scene of diversionary and more intense activity intended to draw the enemy's attention and resources away from the battles further north in the action which was to become known as the Third Ypres or Passchendaele. Twenty miles to the south an allied attack on Hill 70, near the city of Lens, was planned for the 15th August, the day after Clifford's death.

There is no record of a particular action or battle on the 14th August 1917 in which Clifford and his three colleagues were killed and it was likely therefore to have been a "routine" bombardment of allied positions by the German artillery which caused their deaths.



British supply horse stuck in Flanders mud

The following letter to Clifford's parents from one of his officers appears to confirm this conclusion.

An Officer wrote to his parents,

"It is brave boys like your son who make England worth living or dying for. Your son was killed in action on Tuesday August 14th. He was returning from work when a shell fell between him and another man, both of them being killed immediately. His death was instantaneous. He was buried yesterday with full military honours, in a military cemetery and more than 40 men of this unit were present to pay their respects to him and his companion. He was a splendid boy, and one you can be justly proud of. I can't say how much I miss him myself, so that I can imagine what a deep sorrow his loss will be to you and all who knew

him well and whom he loved. He was always so bright and cheerful in spite of all the hardships and difficulties he has been through in the long time he has been serving his country. We are having a cross made to put over his grave."

Peter Robertson another Driver with the R.F.A. was also buried on the same day along with another two soldiers.

His brother Frank was with the R.F.A and John the K.O.S.B.

Clifford was due a total of £11 gratuity.

Clifford was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is commemorated on Batley War Memorial, Batley Parish Church, St. Saviour's Brownhill and Erquinghem-Lys-Churchyard Extension, France, along with another three killed on the same day.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group