Albert Gunn





Rank: - Guardsman

Number: - 18656

Regiment: - Grenadier Guards 1st Battalion

Killed in Action: - 17th October 1915 aged 27

Cemetery: - Loos British Cemetery, Pas-De-Calais, France XV1. H.15

Albert had served five years in the Royal Navy as a First-Class Stoker before enlisting in the Grenadier Guards shortly after the outbreak of war.

Batley News, 13 Nov 1915 (photo)

Family Details:

Albert was born in Boking, Essex in 1888 the son of John and Jane Gunn (Nee Ruggles).

In 1891 the family was living at Hoppitt Square, Braintree with children John (1877), George (1878), Jane (1880), William (1882) and Charles (1884).

The family must have fallen on hard times because in 1901 Albert was an inmate under scholastic instruction at Chelmsford St. Mary the Virgin. This was a home for destitute boys. His mother, Jane was in the workhouse at Braintree Union Workhouse, Boking, described as a pauper and his father, John, was living in Notley Road, Boking with his widowed mother and brothers working as a mat maker.

Jane died in 1905 and before 1911 John was also in the workhouse in Rayne Road, Boking.

On Sunday 2nd April 1911 when the census was taken in England Albert was on board a vessel belonging to the Royal Navy and his occupation was given as Stoker First Class. His religion was Church of England.

Albert served in the Navy for five years before coming to Batley as the adopted son of Mrs. Annie Brewer of Victoria Street, Carlinghow. He worked at White Lee Colliery as a boiler fireman before the war and was well known in the Carlinghow area.

Service Details

He enrolled at Dewsbury in 1914 into the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards and embarked on the 16th March 1915. At this time the 1st Battalion was part of the 7th Division but on 4th August 1915 it became part of the 3rd Guards Brigade Guards Division. This was unusual that it was actually formed in France. The Battle of Loos was the first battle in which this new Division fought and it lasted from 25th September-18th October 1915.

Compared to the small attacks in the Spring of 1915 this was a mighty offensive and was known as “The Big Push “. The battle took place on land not chosen by the British and also before sufficient stocks of ammunition and heavy artillery had arrived. It was notable because it was the first time the British Army used

poison gas. On the first day there was, despite heavy casualties, considerable success and they broke deep into the enemy positions near Loos and Hulloch. The reserves were held too far back from the battle front to exploit the success and the following days only minor gains were made. It was the biggest battle that the British took part in during 1915.

More than 61,000 British casualties were sustained in the Battle of Loos. 50,000 of them were in the main fighting area between Loos and Givenchy and the remainder in the subsidiary attacks. Of these, 7,766 men died. Casualties were particularly high amongst the Scots units. Many New Army units, pushed into a battle area for the first time only a matter of days after landing in France, were devastated. A significant proportion of the remaining pre-war regular troops were lost, and more than 2,000 officers were killed or wounded. This irreplaceable asset in experienced men and leaders was a most serious loss to the army. The New Army units that had taken part in a major action for the first time had suffered heavily but had shown without doubt that they were worthy soldiers.

Private Samuel Collinson (Cameronians) of Taylor Street, Batley wrote home to a friend describing the battle :-

"Dear Friend *2nd November 1915*

A line or two in answer, and of thanks for mits, which I received today. They will be very useful as the cold weather is starting out here. I am pleased to say I'm in the best of health, although we've had a pretty bad time of it these last few days. However, we are once more out for a rest. The trenches have been very bad owing to the heavy rain of the last week, in some places a foot deep in water. It's rather bad when you have to stay there and stick it, wet through, for days at a time. That's besides the shells and bullets the Bosches send across. You should have seen some of our chaps with twelve days growth of beard on, and unwashed! I had only one wash in all the twelve days, and no change, so this will give you a faint idea of what we've been through.

In some parts of our line we are only 15 yards off the Huns, so we had a pretty hot time of it. By the way, I think I am as fortunate as it's possible to be. One day I walked down the trench about 20 yards and when I came back could hardly own it. It had been smashed about so much by the shells. If I hadn't taken that

wee walk, I might not have been writing this now. Anyway, I'm still alive and kicking and that's all we need worry about for the time being. I am sending a postcard for wee Mary so I hope she receives it alright and likes it. I don't expect there are many like it across there. I am pleased to see "the Batley Lads" are still rolling up to the call, and I think if every town is giving as many recruits, we'll soon settle this dirty tribe. We cannot have too many. All the same the men are wanted, and the sooner they're here sooner the war will be over, so if anyone is dying for the war to finish, I say join in and help. More the men, quicker the finish. I think we are leaving before long (not before time, we've done a good share not reckoning the Loos and Hill 70 affairs), So I hope I shall be able to see you all. "

Albert had been wounded twice before he was fatally shot on the same day that his adopted brother, Alfred Brewer, had been rescued after being buried alive by falling earth.

His last letter home had been received about a month before his death when he said he was "quite well".

The following telegram was received from the War Office: -

"Regret to inform you that Private A. Gunn, Grenadier Guards, reported killed in action, 17th October"

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

He is remembered with Honour on Batley War Memorial, St. John's Church Carlinghow and Loos British Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group