# Albert Edward Hill





**Rank: -** Gunner

**Number: -** 14317428

**Regiment: -** Royal Artillery 397 Bty., 122 H.A.A. Regt.

**Died: -** Accidental death through drowning 20/07/1945 Age: 44 years.

**Cemetery:** - Hanging Heaton (St. Paul) Churchyard, Batley. Grave 638.

Batley News, 5 October 1918. 28 July 1945 (photo)

Albert Edward was born on 2 Feb 1901 in Hanging Heaton the son of Albert and Sarah Ann Hill nee Summerscales, who had married on St. Paul's Church, Hanging Heaton on 11 Aug 1890. Percy was born in 1892, William 1899, Annie 1897, Lilian 1899, Albert, Doris 1903, Arthur 1907. When he was growing up the family lived at 92, Bromley Street, Hanging Heaton. His eldest brother Percy Hill MM was killed in September 1916 in France. His mother died in 1930 and his dad in 1932. Albert lived at 15, Nursery Wood Road, Hanging Heaton.

Albert had been a builder's labourer for George Kilburn, building contractors, Hanging Heaton before joining the Army in early 1943. Albert and his brother Arthur were both at home on leave in June 1845 which was the only time they had met since joining up.

Albert Edward was stationed at Walberswick near Southwold, Suffolk with the 397th Battery 122nd Regiment, Heavy A.A.

On Friday 20 July Albert and his friend Gunner Leonard Lomax left the camp at about 6.30pm, on evening leave, to visit Southwold. The ferryman took them over the River Blythe and said he would be there between 10.30 and 11 pm to pick them up when they returned. They had about 6 pints each at three different public houses. Leaving town at about 10.15 they walked to the ferry, but there was no sign of the man with the boat. They were about to return to Southwold to catch the liberty bus to camp when a boat containing two soldiers came from the Walberswick side. Witnesses said they both got in.

When they were about half way across Albert could feel his feet getting wet through the water coming over the top of his shoes. The soldiers who had brought the boat- strangers to them- had two paddles. At first, they used them sitting down but they stood up because they seemed not to be in control of the craft. They were within eight yards of the Walberswick side when the boat got into trouble with the tide and came back towards Southwold, and then drifted seawards. Albert got one of the paddles. The boat started to fill with water, presumably due to a leak, or it may have been overloaded. There was nothing for bailing. A fast tide was ebbing and the water was as a bit rough. A witness said the boat went right over and threw all four into the river. He got hold of a step ladder running down the side of the harbour wall, and another soldier did likewise. They got to the top but did not see the others. They walked to Southwold to inform the police.

Lance Bombardier Edward Davis gave evidence at the inquest saying that at about 10 am Bombardier H. Rennie and himself had arrived at the Walberswick side of the ferry and found the service had stopped. While they stood on the bank they heard shouting from the Southwold side for a boat. He thought this came from some of his colleagues who were stranded. As they were about to leave, they saw a boat moored in the water. It had no oars but two home-made

paddles. They took it and went to the other bank where they found the soldiers were strangers. There was no trouble getting across and no water appeared to have entered the boat. He had had three pints that night. When Bombardier Rennie and he started to row back the sides of the boat were 4 to 5 inches out of the water. Someone said the water was coming in. They found they were being carried downstream. The soldier sitting beside him took his paddle and the boat swung right round. When the boat overturned, he found the deceased could not swim and in trouble. Although not a strong swimmer, he tried to keep him up and managed to get him alongside the concrete wall. He caught hold of the weeds on the wall, but they broke away. He became exhausted and had to let go of Albert, who struggled at times. Davis managed to get hold of a ladder and said he had done a little boating but in non-tidal water. The coroner was informed that the boat was a yacht's dinghy used by a boat builder for going from one side of the river to the other.

In the summing up the coroner said he thought the soldiers knew nothing about boating but wished to congratulate Lance Bombardier Davis for trying to save Albert. He hoped it would be a warning to others not to take boats without permission and not to go on a swift flowing river unless experienced. It was difficult to blame anyone because it was pure ignorance.

He was buried at St. Paul's Churchyard, Hanging Heaton on 24 July 1945.

A letter of sympathy from his commanding officer was received by his sister, Mrs Hudson-:

*" On behalf of the ranks of this battery I wish to express to you our horror at this tragedy. Gunner Hill was a grand soldier and a man known and loved by the men of this unit."*

Albert is remembered with Honour at Hanging Heaton War Memorial (St Paul's) and Batley War Memorial. He was awarded the 1939-45 Star and the 1939-1945 War Medal.

Researched by members of
Batley History Group

