



WORLD WAR ONE – ROLL OF HONOUR

WALTER EDGARD SANDFORD

Gunner (56924), 14th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery

Died of Wounds, Bruay, France – 4 October 1917

Walter Edgar Sandford was born in Manningford Bohune, Wiltshire on 8th December 1885, the son of Henry Sandford and Mary Ann Sandford (nee Sloper), who had married in 1881.

At the time of Walter's birth, Henry Sandford is recorded as being a Carter and the family was still living in Manningford Bohune on the 1891 census. However by the time of the 1901 census the family had moved to Woodborough and Henry was now employed as a Railway Packer.

Walter was one of seven children, being the third of five sons - brothers George (born 1882), William (1884), Henry (1888), Frank (1890) and sisters Frances (1893) and Beatrice (1910).

On leaving school Walter began work with the Post Office and, aged 15, is recorded as being a Post Office boy on the 1901 census living with his parents in Woodborough.

On 2 June 1909, aged 23, Walter married Mary Farr at the Parish Church of St Peter in Manningford Bruce and the following year their daughter Violet Irene Sandford was born.

On the 1911 census Walter and his young family are recorded as living with his mother in Little Woodborough and, following in his father's footsteps, he is now employed as a Railway Packer working for the Great Western Railway (probably at Woodborough Station just a few hundred yards away). Walter's father Henry was by this time ill (probably already suffering from tuberculosis) and resident at the County Asylum in Roundway, where he was to remain until his death in 1917.

It was nearly a year after the outbreak of war before Walter joined up. Aged 29 years and 6 months Walter is recorded as having enlisted at Pewsey on 19th July 1915. The enlistment papers record Walter's height as 5 foot 8 ½ inches.

A cousin (William John Sandford), also from Woodborough, had been a regular in the Royal Artillery, having served in South Africa during the Boer War, and this might explain Walter's joining the Royal Garrison Artillery. Cousin William had been recalled from reserve in 1914.

Four days after enlisting at Pewsey, Walter arrived at No. 2 Depot, Fort Rowner, Gosport. Following gunnery training, Walter was posted to the 14th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery (part of the Royal Regiment of Artillery), arriving in Gallipoli on 4th November 1915 where his new comrades in arms had been since April of the same year. The Battery consisted of six 6 inch Howitzers.

Walter's stay in Gallipoli was brief. Allied forces began their evacuation of Gallipoli on 8th December 1915 and this was completed by 9th January 1916. 14th Siege Battery were evacuated on the nights of 31 December 1915 and 1 January 1916, eventually arriving in Alexandria on 29th January where they were assigned to the defence of the Suez Canal.

However, again, this was a short stay as the Battery was posted to France, arriving in Marseilles on 15th April 1916 before being transported to the front near Arras as part of the 24th Heavy Artillery Brigade.

Although not part of the initial bombardment prior to the commencement of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916, there is some evidence that Walter's Battery was moved to support troops fighting in the Battle, which was to last until November 1916, as part of the 36th Heavy Artillery Group.

Walter's service record notes that he was granted leave to the UK for 10 days from 26th December 1916 to 4th January 1917. It seems likely that word had reached Walter that his father was now close to death. Walter's father, Henry, died from his long term tuberculosis at the County Asylum on 4th January 1917 (the date Walter was due to return). This would explain why Walter's leave was extended by a further 3 days until 7th January 1917.

This was to be Walter's last visit to Woodborough to see his family and is perhaps the only memory his daughter Violet would have of her father.

On 8th January 1917, Walter's Battery was assigned to the 70th Heavy Artillery Group, located near Arras, and is recorded as providing artillery support to Canadian troops at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, which took place between the 9th and 12th April 1917.

The 14th Siege Battery was still in the Arras area supporting Canadian troops in early August 1917 but their exact whereabouts on 4th October 1917, the day of which Walter died, is not known.

The 4th October 1917 was also the start of the Battle of Broodseinde, part of the 3rd Battle of Ypres (also known as Passchendaele), when it is known that the Royal Garrison Artillery took heavy casualties. However, Walter's service record states that he died of wounds, received in action, at No 22, Casualty Clearing Station, which was located at Bruay, not far from Arras.

It therefore seems likely that Walter's Battery was still supporting Canadian troops in the Arras area and that his death was the result of a direct hit on his Battery from German Artillery. Also killed was his comrade, Albert Green of 14th Siege Battery, who similarly died from wounds on the following day, 5th October 1917.



The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records that Walter is buried in a marked grave at the Bruay Communal Cemetery Extension, just outside Bruay in the Pas-de-Calais, France. Walter's comrade Albert Green is also buried in Bruay.

Walter's wife Mary was granted a widow's pension of 18/- 9d per week effective from 15 April 1918. Mary and Walter's daughter, Violet, remained in Woodborough and are recorded as living at Free Trade (next to Nursery Farm) in 1920.