

William George DEACON

Private 8903 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards Killed in Action **14.9.1914**

Date of Birth: 9th February 1891, East Grinstead

William George Deacon was born on 9 February 1891 to William and Emily, and was baptised on 26 April that year in East Grinstead, Sussex. At the time the family were living at 38 Lower Glenvue Road, in East Grinstead, and were still there in the 1901 census. By then, three other children had been born to make the Deacons a family with eight children. At the time of the 1911 census William, aged 18, was at Victoria Barracks, Victoria Street, Windsor, having joined the Coldstream Guards. On 8 January 1913 he married Mary Alice Jetten at St George's, Hanover Square, London. He joined the Guildford Borough Police, on 15 November that year, as Police Constable 14, and was sworn in by the Local Mayor in Guildford on 19 January 1914. There is no other information about his Police service in the Police records as on 4 August 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, he resigned from the Force and re-joined the Coldstream Guards, serving with the 1st Battalion.

On 4 August 1914 the battalion was stationed at Aldershot as part of the 1st (Guards) Brigade of the 1st Division. It was mobilised for war and moved to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force. The battalion saw action on the Western Front in 1914, including the Battle of Mons & the subsequent retreat, the Battles of the Marne and the Aisne, and the First Battle of Ypres. William was killed in action on 14th September 1914. The War Diary for the 1st Battalion for that day states they were in action at the Battle of the Aisne, the river Aisne being situated in North Eastern France. The Diary states "The battalion acted as advanced guard to the Division and was directed to move north over high ground between Vendresse and Paissy, finally reaching and taking Cerny-en-Laonnois from which a retirement was ordered after dusk. Withdrew behind (south of) Vendresse during the night" The action that day cost the Battalion 11 other ranks killed, 10 officers and 180 other ranks wounded and 1 officer and 162 other ranks missing.

At first William was posted as wounded and then later as missing but subsequently was presumed killed. The Surrey Advertiser newspaper of 15 May 1915 published an article which stated he had been posted as missing on 14 September 1914. It mentioned that "one of his friends, [Private] Golding, also of the Coldstream Guards, who was now on sick furlough, had reported that:

"At 7.30 on the morning of September 14th, the company was ordered to advance up a narrow gully to the heights above the Aisne, to hold the hill close to the village of Vendresse. There was no supporting artillery and as the men arrived at the top they were simply shot down".

Private Deacon was shot and killed instantaneously. Private Golding and several others were taken prisoners but subsequently they overpowered their guard and escaped. Those who were left on the field that night were stripped of all papers and of their identification discs, so that when three days later, the burying party was sent to fetch them away, they could not be identified. Fortunately, Private Golding was one of the burying party and he knew and was able to identify several, among them

Private Deacon. They were buried in the churchyard at Vendresse by a Church of England clergyman, in a large grave facing east over the Aisne valley. In spite of their seeming failure, this hill was never lost, so Private Golding says, until it was finally handed over to the French when the British troops left the Aisne valley, so that the lives given so nobly were not given in vain. Private Deacon leaves a widow and little son". William was aged 23.

Records of the Army Register of Soldiers' Effects of 1919 shows that William left to his wife a total of £12 3s 6d which included a £5 army gratuity. He is commemorated on the La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre Memorial, Seine-et-Marne, France which is 66km east of Paris, which displays the names of 3,740 officers and men of the BEF who fell in the battles of Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne and the Aisne during August to October 1914.