

Alfred Stevens

My name is Alf Stevens.

My grandparents were from South Petherwin near Launceston, and my Dad Tom was born there.

Grandfather brought the family to St John in 1858 when my Dad was five years old.

My Dad grew up in St John and married his first wife Sarah in 1882 but she died the following year.

He married my Mum in 1886 and I was born in 1887.

I was my Dad's oldest son.

Dad worked on road construction and our family lived for a few years in Tunbridge Wells where Dad had a job....but we came back to live in St John in 1897 when I was ten.

So I grew up in St John, we lived at Holmwood cottage.

I had two brothers, Harold who died in 1903 when he was ten and young Frank who was born in 1895, they were both born when we lived in Kent.

In 1914 when the war started I was 27, Mum had died a couple of years before and so it was just me and my Dad and Frank, who was just 14.

In 1914 I volunteered to join the army and do my bit for the war. It was quite exciting.

I joined the 8th Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment.

We were a Service battalion of volunteers raised in Exeter as "Kitchener's army" in 1914.

Training at Aldershot was tiresome, but at last in July 1915 we were mobilized for war. We were happy to be shipped to Belgium, and straight away we were thrown into our first battle, the Battle of Loos.

In 1916 our battalion fought in the battles of Albert, Bazentum, Delville Wood and Guillemont. By the end of 1916 we were exhausted but worse was to come the following year.

In 1917 we fought at the bloody conflict in Polygon Wood at Ypres, this was the start of the terrible Passchendaele battle. Soon afterwards we were heavily involved in the battle of Broodseinde, just off the Menin Road, outside Ypres.

Here we fought with the Grenadier Guards, the Scotts Guards and the Gordon Highlanders, we were all supporting the Australian Division.

After a massive artillery bombardment we advanced over the top at 6 am on 4th October, up until now it had been dry, but today was the start of the heavy rain that instantly made the Flanders fields into a quagmire.

The action on 4th and 5th October was furious, but our attack was successful, and contributed to the advance by the Australians.

British casualties were 30,000 killed or missing, and nine VCs were won over the next few days.

For us it was terrible and our battalion suffered 55 men killed on the 5th October, with 11 men missing.

I was one of those 11 men, and I still lie under the fields of Passchendaele, remembered on a plaque at Tynne Cott cemetery.

I was the 6th man from St John to die.

I was thirty years old.