

## **Sydney Albert Dennis**

I'm Sid Dennis.

Dad was a tin miner. He was born in Antony but lived and worked in the Calstock area where he met my Mum, Annie Vanstone, from St Dominick.

They were married in 1894 and we lived in St Dominick, where I was born two years after they were married. My two younger sisters Mabel and Elsie were also born in St Dominick.

In 1901 we were living in Metherell when I was five.

Later Dad moved us back to St John, where Dad got a local job as a wagoner.

We lived in Mark's cottage, behind the church.

In 1911, I was fifteen years old and had just left school. I got a job as a cowman working for Farmer Maddever who ran Trelay Farm in Antony, near Lower Tregantle. I boarded there with two other farmworkers.

In March 1915 when I was nineteen, I volunteered to join the army.

I joined the Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry.

I was put into the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which was one of the new Kitchener battalions raised to massively increase the British Army. The 10<sup>th</sup> was one of the new Pioneer Battalions whose role was to back up our infantry battalions by providing construction and engineering skills to maintain the trenches, roads and communications. We were recruited from farms, mines and the construction industries. Being an agricultural worker and son of a miner I was recruited into this battalion.

But we were given rifles for use in the fighting too.

After joining the Battalion we were sent for training in Penzance. For a short time we were billeted in the Fish Cellars at Portwrinkle.

Then on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1916 we were sent by train down to Southampton, and on 19<sup>th</sup> June we embarked for France on the SS Princess Clementine.

On 20<sup>th</sup> June 1916 we arrived at Le Havre.

From this time to November 1917 we saw plenty of action at the battle of Polcappelle in the Ypres Salient, and the battles of Delville Wood and Mailly Wood which were part of the terrible Somme offensive.

Luckily I survived this time OK.

By November 1917 we were assembled for supporting the Battle for Cambrai, which was a major railway junction serving the German troop movements.

The attack was supported by a massive tank assault, with 480 tanks, by far the biggest concentration so far.

We also dropped poison gas on the enemy.

The attack started well on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1917, we gained nine kilometres and captured 8000 German prisoners.

It was already heralded as a British victory and on that day the bell in St John's church was rung in celebration. This happened all over the England.

But then things went badly wrong: our advance became so congested that reinforcements could not get through to support the attack.

Our attack was halted on 28<sup>th</sup> November and we were ordered to lay wire and dig in. This was now a terrible time as a massive German counter-attack, using their newly formed "Stormtroopers", pushed us back to near where we had started.

The battle of Cambrai now became an utter defeat, and we lost some 44000 men killed or wounded.

During the retreat from the German counter-attack our Battalion had reached Hermies, near Havrincourt where the front line was stabilized in early December.

On 28<sup>th</sup> December I was helping to dig a communications trench. We were shelled, and I was killed, along with three of my mates.

My body was buried in the nearby Ruyaulcourt Military Cemetery near Arras, which has only 348 graves.

I was buried together with my three mates who were killed with me. We are the only ones from our regiment to be buried there.

I was the last man from St John to die in the War, and only the second to be buried.

The War Office sent my Dad the sum of five pounds and ten shillings, and my medals.

I was the last of the male line for the Dennis family.

I was twenty one.