

Pte F. Page - The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment)

Frank Harold Page was born in Westcott in 1894, the eldest son of William and Elizabeth Page of Westcott Street. On leaving school Frank became a domestic gardener and, after the outbreak of war, enlisted in the 1st/5th Bn The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment) which had formed in Guildford. In October 1914 the battalion went to India and was stationed in Lucknow. A year later the battalion was mobilised for field service in Mesopotamia and sailed for Basra on 2nd December 1915 as part of the 12th Indian Brigade.

British forces had occupied Basra in 1914. The aim was to secure the oilfields and this was achieved after the defeat of the Turks at the Battle of Qurna. Encouraged by their success the British continued their advance to Baghdad but this brought disaster. Lack of supplies forced them to retreat to Kut-al-Amara where they were surrounded and besieged by the Turkish army. The siege began on the day 1st/5th Queen's landed in Basra - 7th December 1915.

After landing at Basra, the battalion advanced under very trying conditions to Nasariyeh, about 100 miles to the north. The battalion was under frequent attacks by local tribesmen who were still loyal to the Turks and conditions steadily got worse as heavy rains brought rising river levels. At Nasariyeh the camp became a quagmire and the men were constantly repairing bunds to prevent flooding. They had to guard a Turkish PoW camp; skirmishes with local tribesmen continued, and the men had to work in fear of sniper fire.

On 30th April 1916 the news came that Kut had fallen. Relief attempts had failed and 13,000 British and Indian troops were taken into captivity under brutal conditions. This humiliating defeat was largely due to a complete lack of adequate supply systems. To rectify this, the port of Basra had to be improved and roads and other facilities built before the campaign could be renewed. The 1st/5th Queens' remained near Nasariyeh to help with this work and maintain internal security.

The records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission show that Frank Page died on 16th May 1916. The regimental diary describes the very difficult conditions the men had to endure around that time, but there is unfortunately no entry for 16th May and the circumstances of Frank Page's death are not known. His name is recorded on Panel 6 of the Basra Memorial which bears the names of 40,500 members of the Commonwealth Forces who died in Mesopotamia and who have no known graves.

The memorial was erected on the main quay of the naval dockyard at Maqil on the west bank of the Shatt el Arab waterway about 8 km north of Basra. Because of the sensitivity of the site, the memorial was moved by presidential

decree and re-erected in its entirety. It is now situated 32 km along the road towards Nasariyeh.

The 1st/5th Queens' remained near Nasariyeh until June 1917 when they took part in the advance north to Ramadi, west of Baghdad. They were subsequently moved further north to the area of Kirkuk where they were engaged in the final actions of the war with the Turks which ended on 30th October 1918. Under the terms of the 1919 peace settlement, the Ottoman Empire was partitioned and Mesopotamia became Iraq.