

## Private Francis Perry

21897

14<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

105<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 35<sup>th</sup> Division

died 9<sup>th</sup> November 1916



Francis Perry was born in the Summer of 1892 in Kidderminster. He was the son of Alfred (known as Fred, sometimes Frederick), born around 1874 and of Sarah, born around 1869. Both parents were born in Stone. In 1901 Frederick was a cowman on farm and in 1911 a farm labourer. Sarah was working as a jute winder in 1901 but did not have an occupation in 1911. The couple had five children during their marriage; Francis was the eldest and his siblings were Nellie, (born around 1895), Lionel (1902), Eva (1905) and Edna (1909).

The Perry family lived in Hoobrook and, in 1911, a specific address of 224 Hoobrook was given. Like many of our families, the Perry children worked in woollen mills – Francis is listed as a worsted spinner in 1911 and Nellie was an Axminster threader. Francis was later employed by Messrs Humphries and Sons in the dye house.<sup>1</sup>

We know very little else about Francis but we can surmise that he was not very tall. In August of 1915 he joined the 14<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment and was given the service number 21897. This battalion was a Bantam Battalion and recruits would typically be under 5'3" – the usual minimum height. Once Francis joined this unit he would have started a period of training and this took place on Salisbury Plain. By the end of January 1916, training was over and the men embarked for France, arriving in the early morning of 31<sup>st</sup> January in Le Havre. Over the next month the men engaged in training, rest and travelling, finally reaching Le Touret near Neuve Chapelle, by the end of February.

The war diary for Francis' unit is typical of many in that it describes very well the monotony of trench life. Typically, the Battalion would be in trenches for a few days, then in reserve and then would have some rest. Very little happened of interest, although there was the constant fear of enemy attacks or bombardments as well as sniper and machine gun fire. This situation continued throughout the Spring. Occasionally there was something of interest to report, such as on 2<sup>nd</sup> June when:

"Lt Kinred saved the lives of five men by throwing himself flat on a German Bomb which had been thrown into our trench. He was wearing a steel waistcoat at the time and this saved him from serious injury. For this he was awarded the MC [Military Cross]"

In early July, the Battalion moved to the Somme area finally reaching the front line on 19<sup>th</sup> July at Trones Wood. They were not involved in a major assault but were subject to heavy shelling and bombardments.

In mid-August, after some time training and practising for an attack, the Battalion moved into the front line once more. The enemy artillery was described as very active and there was constant shelling and raids. These were repulsed by Lewis gun and rifle fire. On 23<sup>rd</sup> August, a planned attack had to be cancelled because insufficient damage had been done to German trenches by British artillery.

In early September 1916, Francis was on the move again, this time to the area around Arras. At first the Battalion was in reserve but still subject to danger - there were frequent gas alerts during this time but they went into the front line on 16<sup>th</sup> September. The weather had deteriorated and heavy rain, coupled with Trench mortar activity, resulted in damage to the trenches which had to be repaired; this was the main work of Francis and his unit well into November. The officer who wrote the war diary described a mixture of very quiet days and others when British Stokes guns were very active. In early November working parties had to be cancelled due to the very bad weather.

There were occasional casualties during this time; on 1<sup>st</sup> November one "other rank" was wounded followed on 6<sup>th</sup> November by two more.<sup>2</sup>

It is likely that one of these men was Francis. He died of his wounds on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1916 (the St Mary's Church Roll of Honour incorrectly has the date as 9<sup>th</sup> November 1917). His obituary, in the Kidderminster Shuttle on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, mentions three letters that had been sent to his family. His Officer commanding wrote that:

"He was wounded while on duty at his post in the trench and was taken down to hospital immediately [ ] He was in my platoon, and was a splendid and cheerful example to the rest of his comrades, who will find his loss a great one"

The Sister in Charge at the hospital wrote:

"Your son took a sudden turn for the worse and died last evening. He was not conscious at the end, so there was no message left. He was seen by the chaplain. Everything possible was done for him. He died very quietly"

Finally, the Chaplain wrote

"I had visited the hospital the previous day and had seen him and prayed with him... I did not then anticipate an unfavourable turn, and I was greatly surprised when I learned of his death next day. You will like to know that he was in a most excellent hospital, beautifully fitted up. It is a large French country house, part of which has been turned into wards...I am very glad to assure you that Francis was surrounded by kindness and the best care at the end".<sup>3</sup>

Francis is buried in Habarcq Communal Cemetery Extension located 10 miles west of Arras. The cemetery was created by French troops in 1914 and was used by them until March 1916 when Commonwealth forces then took over this part of the front and field ambulances continued to bury in the extension. The cemetery, designed by W H Cowlshaw, contains 179 Commonwealth burials of the 1914-1918 war, 15 Commonwealth burials of the 1939-1945 war, 11 of which are unidentified, and 378 French burials of the 1914-1918 war.<sup>4</sup>

Francis' gravestone bears the inscription NOT MY WILL O LORD BUT THINE BE DONE.  
After his death, his mother Sarah received a payment of £2 13s 1d, which was the final balance of pay owed, and later, in 1919, a war gratuity of £4 10s.<sup>5</sup>



## References

Please note that these references refer to all information in the preceding paragraphs since the previous reference, not just to the immediate sentence in which the reference number appears.

1. Census documents: <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>
2. War diary: The National Archives - WO95/2488-1
3. The Kidderminster Shuttle, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1916

4. <https://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/3001/habarcq-communal-cemetery-extension/>
5. Register of soldiers' effects: <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>