



Holt

World War I Casualty Biographies

Davis, Alfred James



Alfred James Davis was born at Enford, Wiltshire in 1881 to Henry, a bricklayer and Annie Davis. He was the fifth of seven children, 5 boys and 2 girls.

Alfred left the family home in Enford, possibly in 1887 when his mother died and went to live with his brother Fred and his family at Great Chalfield. Fred was a carter on a farm and Alfred an agricultural labourer. Before the outbreak of World War One it appears as though Alfred might have joined the army as his attestation papers suggest that he had served in the 3rd Wiltshire Regiment, but his time had expired in February 1905.

On 13th April 1907 Alfred married Maud Eliza Church at Hilmarton and within 3 years they had 2 children. Annie Winifred Mary, born 10th July 1908 and Francis Charles born 5th March 1910. By 1911 the family was living at Mill Cottage, Great Chalfield and Alfred was a Water Bailiff, possibly working for the owners of the manor. By 1915 however Alfred had been called up and enlisted at Trowbridge on 5th March .

He was now 34 years old, 5 feet 4 and three quarter inches tall with a chest measurement of thirty six and a half inches. Probably because of his previous service he was rapidly promoted to Corporal (22nd March

1915) and then to Sergeant (7th December 1915). He served at home for two years and then sailed with the British Expeditionary Force to France on 27th February 1917. Although initially in the 3rd Wiltshire Regiment he was transferred to the Labour Company of the Devon Regiment in February 1917 and subsequently posted as Sergeant to the Chinese Labour Company on 2nd October and thence to the Chinese Labour Corps on 5th November.

A scheme to recruit Chinese nationals to serve as non-military personnel was first pioneered by the French government in 1916. Recognising the need to provide manpower for British troops the British government followed suit and a recruiting campaign was launched by the War Committee to form a corps of labourers from China to serve in France and be known as the Chinese Labour Corps. The workers, 100,000 of whom served in the British Chinese Labour Corps were mainly aged between 20 and 35 and were tasked with carrying out essential work to support the frontline troops, such as unloading ships, building dugouts, repairing roads and railways, digging trenches and filling sandbags. The Corps was manned by British officers and other ranks who had been medically rated below the "A1" condition needed for front line service, but, in spite of this they were often deployed to work within range of enemy guns.

Within the year Alfred was dead. He died on 19th July 1918, aged 37, from pneumonia [or possibly from the Spanish flu pandemic]. His wife Maud was awarded a pension of twenty seven shillings and eleven pence a week on 27th January 1919 for herself and the two children. They were living at 57 Park Street, Trowbridge, when he died.

Alfred James Davis was awarded :
Victory Medal LC/107 B60/6118
British Medal LC/107 B60/6118

He is buried in St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen, France
Grave Reference Q.111.B.2

Alfred James Davis, Sergeant, 116th Chinese Labour Corps

The Corps always suffered from its treatment as something of a second class organisation. The men who died are commemorated under their original regiment, with Labour Corps being secondary. This is the case with Alfred. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has recorded him as Private, 54643, Devonshire Regiment. On Holt war memorial and at the church of All Saints Great Chalfield he is commemorated as Sergeant, Wiltshire Regiment.

References

Ancestry
Commonwealth War Graves Commission
1914-1918 Web Site
Holt Village Hall