

Alfred Lewis Lancaster-Davies

Private

DM2/130260

Army Service Corps (Motor Transport)



Alfred Lewis Davies was the eldest son of Morgan and Elizabeth Davies. Morgan was a Currier, a leather worker, born in Kington in 1825. In 1860 he married Hannah Hadley a young lady from Brinckworth in Wiltshire. A couple of years later they had a daughter, Frances, named after one of Hannah's sisters. However, the 1871 census reveals that by the date of the census, 2nd April, Hannah had died, Morgan was a widower and Frances Hadley, his sister-in-law, was housekeeper at the family home, 49 Bridge Street, Kington. Morgan, now a Master Currier, employed two men and two boys in his leatherworking business. In 1875 Morgan remarried, a girl fourteen years his junior, called Elizabeth Graham from Hackney. The newlyweds soon set about building a new Davies dynasty. Laura Tamplin Davies was born in 1878 and in early 1880, the focus of this biography Alfred Lewis Davies, was born. Right at the end of that same year, Herbert Morgan Davies made an appearance. The 1891 census shows the family still living at 49 Bridge Street and Morgan had taken to making shoes as well as the other leather items synonymous with country life. By 1901 Morgan had retired and together he and Elizabeth were living at Albion House, Cefnylls, just outside Llandrindod Wells, where Elizabeth was recorded as a Fancy Goods shopkeeper. By 1911 Morgan and

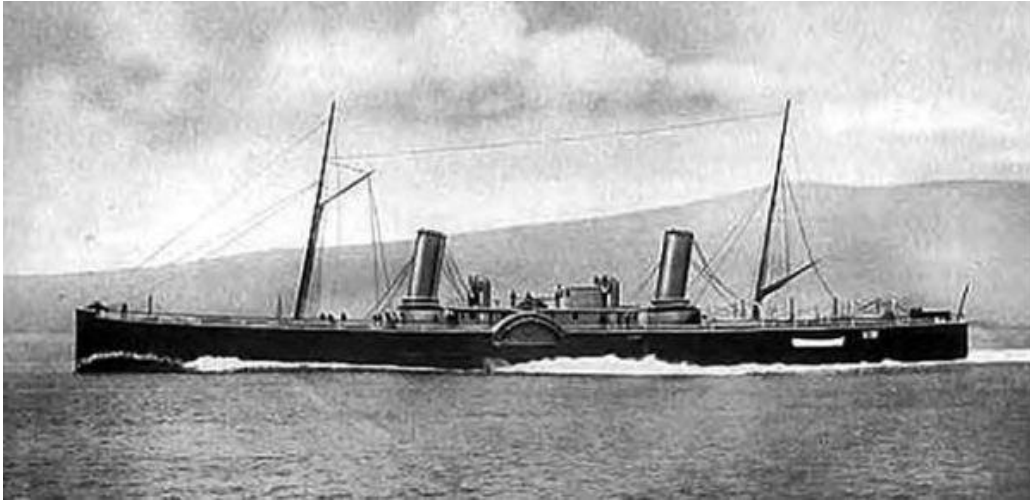
Elizabeth had again moved, this time to live with their daughter Laura, by the seaside, the three of them living at No.8 Third Avenue, Teignmouth, Devon. Both Morgan and Elizabeth were retired but Laura, aged thirty-two and still single, went by the rather exotic title of masseuse. But what of Alfred I hear you say. In 1911 he is nowhere to be found in British census returns, for all intents and purposes he had disappeared. However, examination of emigration records shines a light on his activities. On 24th July 1903 he was a passenger aboard the S.S. Tunisia which had arrived in Montreal, Canada. Alfred had apparently emigrated. At some point he travelled back to Britain because on 16th July 1906, he is once again recorded as arriving in Montreal, this time aboard the Lake Manitoba. On both occasions he boarded ship and left the shores of Britain from Liverpool, a key point of departure for Edwardian emigree's bound for adventure across the world. What the emigration documents reveal is a puzzling development in Alfred's life, he had adopted the additional name of Lancaster.

When researching Alfred's life story historians are fortunate in so much as many of his military records survive. Throughout those documents Alfred's surname flip-flops between Davies-Lancaster and Lancaster-Davies. The first military document available is his attestation papers dated 15th October 1915. The outbreak of war in Europe had drawn Alfred back to Britain whereupon he enlisted in Exeter. He gave his accommodation address as 69 Kenwyn Road, Torquay, where he lived with his nominated 'next of kin' Morgan, mother Elizabeth and sister Laura. This document also reveals that while in Canada he had served with the Montreal Heavy Artillery.

Alfred was a mature thirty-six-year-old, still single, and declared his occupation as Land Surveyor. The following day he joined the Mechanical Transport Depot, Army Service Corps, at Osterley Park, a rather grand recruitment and training centre in west



London. On 16th December 1915 he passed his Motor Learners Test in preparation for service with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France.



SS Princess Henrietta

Alfred entered the fray on 21st December 1915 when he boarded the S.S. Princess Henrietta in Southampton and disembarked in Rouen the following day. But his time in France was short-lived. On 22nd March 1916 he was admitted to hospital in Etaples, suffering from bronchitis. So serious was his illness that on the 28th he was shipped back to Britain for recovery and convalescence in a military hospital. Alfred never saw action again. His medical discharge documents state he was suffering from 'tubercule of the lung'. A complaint which had originated many years earlier, in a place unspecified. Albert stated he was unaware of such a serious illness when he enlisted but declared that he had suffered from bronchitis as a child. Alfred spent thirteen weeks in hospital where he complained of a productive cough, wheezing and shortness of breath. The document is at pains to stress that the ailment was 'not the result of nor aggravated by active service'. The report concluded by stating his infirmity was permanent, with just 25% lung capacity and a full recovery unlikely. Alfred was invalided out of the army at Catterick on 4th August 1916. He was awarded a medical discharge pension of four shillings and eight pence per week, initially for an eighteen-month period, after which his condition was to be reviewed. Alfred was additionally also awarded the Silver War Badge (No.80408), which he was required to wear on his civilian clothing to indicate he had served but no longer could due to incapacity.

The initial medical assessment was correct, he never recovered, Alfred died of his illness on **23rd March 1919**. His obituary in the 12th April 1919 edition of the Kington Times, sheds light on his suffering and demise.

The death occurred at Paddington Military Hospital, on March 23rd last, of Alfred L. Davies Lancaster, RASC, MT, a son of the late Mr and Mrs Morgan Davies formerly of Bridge Street, Kington, where the deceased was born. He emigrated to Canada and there took the additional name of Lancaster. He joined up in 1914 and came to France, where he got gas poisoning very badly and was discharged from the Army through war service but had to have treatment in a military hospital. Those present at the funeral, which took place in Kington Cemetery, March 31st included Miss Davies (sister). The coffin was covered in the Union Jack.

The report suggests Alfred suffered gas poisoning in France but this was never attributed to his illness by the military. The report also reveals that by April 1919 both his parents were already dead. Very occasionally a memorial gravestone can reveal much about those interred below. This is the case with Alfred's gravestone in Kington cemetery.

Alfred's father had died on 20th February 1917 in Paignton, he had reached the grand old age of 93. His body was returned to Kington where he was buried in Kington Cemetery. Alfred was buried in Kington cemetery on 31st March 1919, he was thirty-nine years of age and still single. Tragically his mother died just a couple of weeks later in Paignton, on 11th April 1919. The grave was reopened and Elizabeth was buried with her beloved husband Morgan and son Alfred. A touching memorial is included on the shared stone which reads;



He gave his life for his country

Make them to be numbered with thy saints in glory everlasting

As for Herbert Morgan Davies, Alfred's younger brother, in 1907 he too emigrated to Canada. Herbert moved into the field of medicine's and became a pharmacist and chemist. It appears he did not serve in the war but settled in Montreal. On 1st June 1925, at the age of 40, he married Emma Amelia Menard in Lancaster, Coos, New Hampshire. The significance of the marriage in Lancaster and Alfred adopting that same name should not be overlooked.

A Peace Service was held on 6th July 1919 in the parish church of St' Mary's. The names of sixty-one men who had died due to war service were read out, Alfred Lewis Lancaster-Davies was among them. Alfred's pension was transferred to his sister Laura and on 5th June 1921 a terminal grant of £4 11s 0d was paid to her as a means of closing down his country's obligation to him. In memory of his service Alfred was awarded the Victory and British War Medals and his name was immortalized upon Kington War Memorial.

May he rest in peace with those who loved him most.



Biography researched and produced by Mark Wheatland