

Albert Dawson

Gunner

112867

241st (Howitzer) Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery



Thomas Dawson was Albert's father and was born in Jersey. He moved to England where he enlisted into the Berkshire Regiment. In 1878 he married a lady called Annie and shortly after they started a family. First to arrive was Elizabeth in 1879 swiftly followed a year later by her mother's namesake Annie in 1880. It is assumed that at this time the family were living in London with both Elizabeth and Annie being born in Battersea and Kensington respectively. In the 1881 census Annie, Elizabeth and baby Annie are living at 19 Firs Street, Lewisham but there is no sign of Thomas. In 1883 Frederick Dawson was born in Sydenham, South London and it can be assumed that these three children were born while Thomas was serving in the army and possibly out of the country.

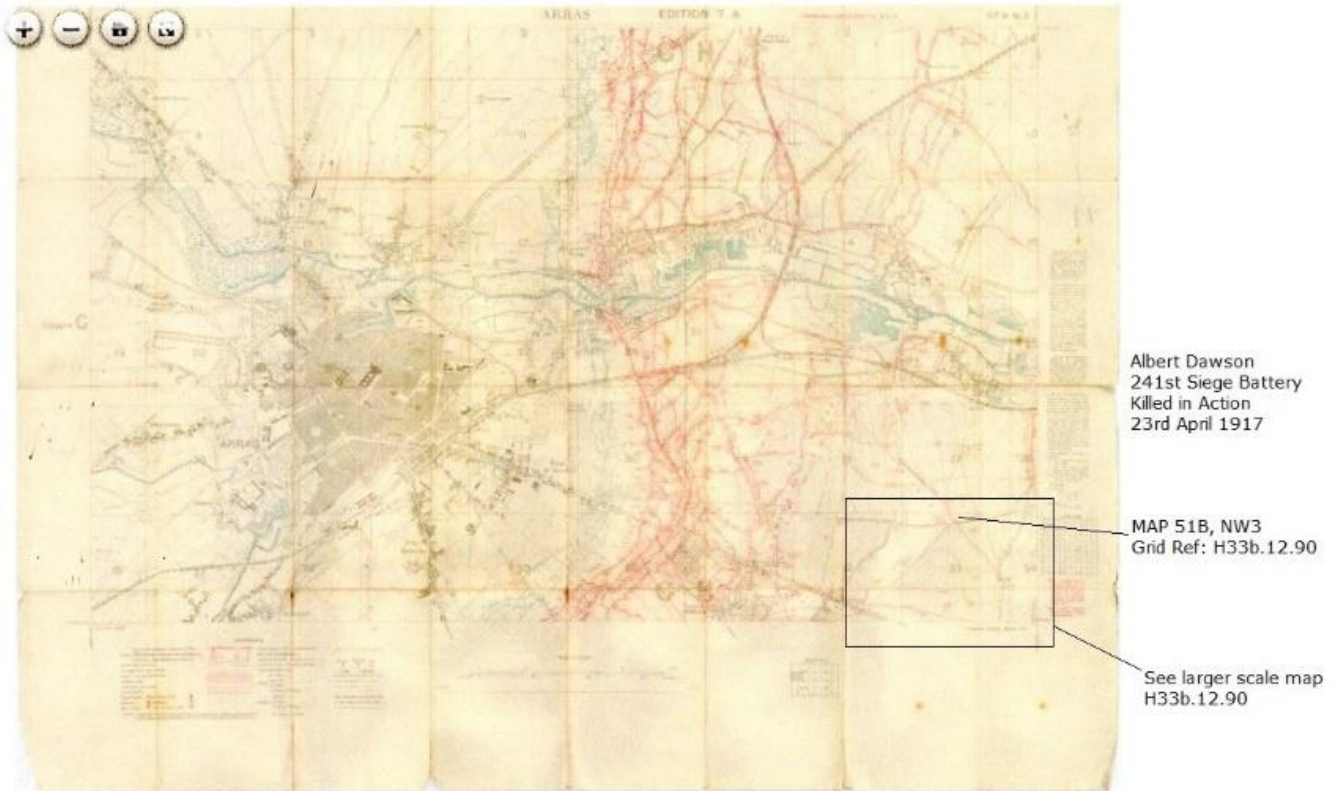
However, sometime after Frederick was born Thomas left the army and moved the family to the Welsh Marches. In 1886 Thomas junior was born in Clyro, followed three years later in 1889 by the hero of this piece, Albert Dawson, also born in Clyro. By the time of the 1891 census the family had made their first links with Kington and were living at 24 Haywood Common. But again, Thomas is conspicuous by his absence at the family's home address. Some lateral thinking discovers that Thomas had been taken on as Butler to the Banks family at Ridgebourne, Kington and on the evening of the census, 5th April, was working at Ridgebourne, for Mr Richard Banks. A couple of years later, in 1892, a fourth son, Frank, was born, more about Frank later. Albert attended Kington Boys School at Gravel Hill but when old enough spread his wings and moved away from Kington, in search of work. In the 1911 census he is recorded as being a domestic gardener to a Mr Thomas Kinsey of The Hill, Wormhill near Buxton.

Bert's story now progresses on to his war service. His service record partially survives and from this we discover he married a Hannah Elizabeth Stevens, with the marriage being registered in Haslingden, Lancashire on the 18th August 1914. Hannah and Albert had a year of happiness but must have known that Bert would need to volunteer or run the risk of being called up later. Bert took the first option and enrolled into the army on the 9th December 1915. He joined the Royal Regiment of Artillery (Royal Garrison Artillery) as Gunner, 112867 Dawson. At this time he was still working as a gardener and gave his address as 67 Huttock Top in Bacup, Lancaster. Bert was not mobilized immediately but placed into army reserve awaiting call-up. On the 10th July 1916 that call-up came and he was posted to No.2 Heavy and Siege Depot at Brockenhurst in Gosport, Hampshire. After some initial training he was posted to 28 Company (RGA) based in Weymouth, joining on the 12th August 1916. Just a few weeks later he was posted again, this time to 241st Siege Battery, in which he would serve until his untimely death. He and the battery were put on notice for active service on the 9th January 1917 and the following day embarked in Southampton, bound for France. The battery and Bert first set foot on French soil on the 11th January 1917 at Le Havre.



The 241st Siege Battery were attached to the 77th (Howitzer) Brigade of the 16th Division. It is worth exploring briefly what constitutes a siege battery and the sort of weapons they used. Siege Batteries (RGA) were heavy howitzer units using 6", 8" and 9.2" calibre guns. Some units operated huge 12" howitzers which were mounted on large railway or road carriers. They were placed well back from the front line with the objective of sending high explosive shells in a high trajectory, producing

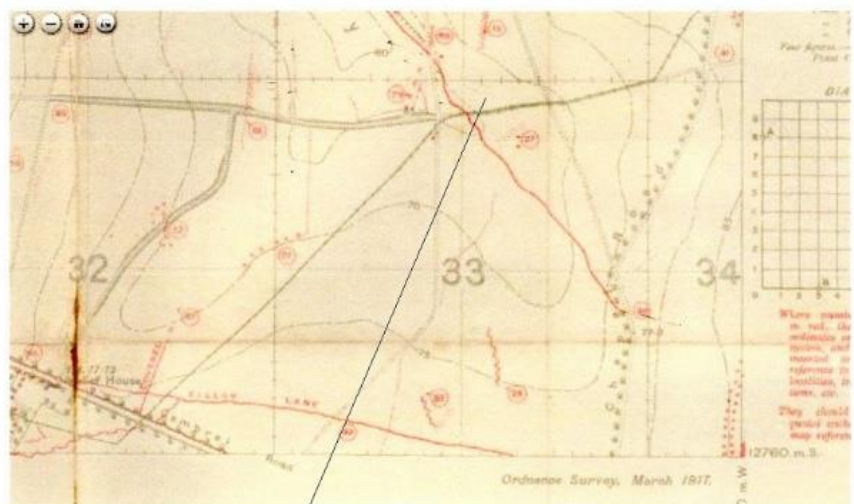
plunging fire, aimed at destroying enemy heavy guns as well as enemy strongpoints, storage dumps, and other strategically important targets such as supply railways and roads far behind the front line. Siege batteries were generally fixed in one place, being moved infrequently. The guns were brought to bear on enemy positions by Observation Officers using ranging equipment and more latterly Observers of the Royal Flying Corp targeting and observing fall of shot. The Observer in the aircraft communicated with land based Royal Flying Corps (RFC) units using morse code via wireless telecommunications and this information was passed to the Siege Batteries as targeting information. The photograph above shows a 9.2" Howitzer Battery operating on the Western Front, this would have been a scene very familiar to Bert. Working as part of a siege battery was a very dangerous occupation. Yes, we know they were attempting to neutralise enemy heavy artillery, but of course that made them an equally high value target for the enemy. It was not uncommon for such units to become the target.



The battle of Arras was waged between 9th April and 16th May 1917, it was during this battle that Albert was sadly killed in action on **23rd April 1917**, he was 28 years old. At the time the Battery was bombarding German positions but, as we have discovered, the enemy were also targeting them. The desired effect resulted. It is unusual for Other Ranks to be mentioned by name in official war diaries, but Albert is and the report of the incident states.

"241 were just East of Arras under command of Acting Major S. Wenman, at coordinates H33b.12.90 which is Map 51B NW3 1/10,000 (Arras). Gun (How) No 1007 was struck by enemy shell and put out of action. Gunner A. Dawson was killed in action (shell) at Battery position, another Gunner died of wounds received".

The other man was almost certainly Gunner Mathew Walsh, SN 110638, who served in 241st Siege Battery and died on the same day. Both Bert and Mathew are buried at Faubourg D'Amiens Cemetery Arras. Bert at grave reference V.B.19 and Mathew at V.B.10, just nine graves apart. To emphasise how dangerous the roll of the Siege Battery was, in April 1917 alone, nine men of 241st Siege Battery were



Albert Dawson
241st Siege Battery
Killed in Action
23rd April 1917
Field Map: 51B NW3
Grid Ref: H33b.12.90



killed. All but one is buried in Faubourg D'Amiens Cemetery.

In August 1917 the authorities passed Hannah her deceased husband's effects. These amounted to little but were typical of those items held dear by every man in the conflict. Letters, photos, cards, diary, pocket book, testament, identity disc, silver watch. Hannah acknowledged receipt of these meagre belongings on the 4th of August. They also forwarded his cash account which amounted to £5 17s 2d. (A further £3 War Gratuity was forwarded to her after the war on 5th Dec 1919). A letter from her to the authorities dated the 1st of August 1917 indicates that she knew Bert had made a will and requested it be forwarded to her so that she could 'sort out her affairs'. On the 30th August 1917 Bert's

probate was administered in London. Effects of £221 6s 0d were forwarded to his widow Hannah. Taking inflation into account, today that would amount to approximately £9500.

After the war the authorities tried to make contact with Hannah in order to forward his medals, but she could not be traced at the address in Bacup. Enquiries made by the local Chief Constable identified that Hannah had moved to Bridge Lane in Wimblington, a village outside Peterborough in Cambridgeshire. Why she had moved can only be speculated upon. For his service and sacrifice Albert was posthumously awarded the British War and Victory medals and a memorial scroll and next-of-kin, bronze, memorial plaque were also forwarded to Hannah at that time. However, Bert was not the only Dawson boy to have fought in the war. It is always interesting to see how family members fared and I would now like to return to his brother Frank.

Frank Dawson was born in Kington on 13th July 1892. He was the youngest of six children born to Thomas and Annie and their third son. He attended Lady Hawkins' School and was very interested in all things mechanical. In the 1911 census he is found working in Chelsea, as a chauffeur and mechanic. On the 23rd September 1914 he joined the Royal Navy and was issued with service number F550. In his service record he is recorded as being an Air Mechanic working at HMS Pembroke III, a shore establishment in Chatham. His record shows that he gave exemplary service and rapidly advanced through the ranks, becoming a Petty Office Mechanic by March 1915. In April 1915 he was moved to another shore establishment, HMS President II. These shore establishments were more affectionately known as 'stone frigates', as they still are to this day. President was a generic name for a shore bases at that time and Frank worked at Plymouth, Crystal Palace and even Aberdeen. On the 31st March 1918 the record shows that his time in the Royal Navy, serving in the Royal Naval Air Service, came to an end. This was because on the 1st April 1918 the Royal Air Force was formed and Frank transferred across to the fledgling service. With this move his service number and rank changed, becoming 200550 and Chief Mechanic respectively.

Franks Royal Air force service records survive and from these we discover that he married on the 1st June 1912, before the outbreak of war and his consequent voluntary service. He married Alice G. Wain, with the marriage being registered in Paddington. Ten months later their first child was born, Derrick, on 3rd April 1913. A second boy, Victor Leslie arrived on the 8th Mar 1915 and a third on the 7th July 1918, Arthur Royston. The family were living at 10 Victor Road, Willesden, London. While serving in the RAF he worked at Royal Naval Airship Station, East Fortune, located on the outskirts of Edinburgh. This was one of the bases where fighter pilots were trained. Frank was transferred to RAF Reserve on the 17th April 1919 and finally discharge from service, a year later, on 30th April 1920. He left the service of his country with great credit and was awarded the 1914/15 Star, British War and Victory medals.

Back in Kington, life for the Dawson's continued, as it must. Thomas, Bert's father, passed away in 1935 and the Kington Times recorded that he was a highly regarded member of the Banks' staff, working as their Butler until his retirement. He continued to live on Heywood Common until his death at the age of 89. Annie, his wife, outlived him and passed away in 1943 also at an advanced age, 87.

In developing Albert's biography my sincere thanks go to the Dawson family, many of whom still live in Kington. In particular Sandra, his great niece and Kimberly his great-great niece, who have been most generous in providing personal details about their family. Both are very proud of their uncle, as should we all be, for he gave the ultimate sacrifice for his country.

