

HAROLD SHEPHERD

Private 29452

Harold Shepherd was born in Newton Ferrers on 29 December 1896, the youngest of the eight children¹ of Samuel (a labourer) and Eliza Shepherd. They lived at 9, Fore Street, now Riverside Road East, not far from Samuel's brother John² and his family. Harold was baptised at Holy Cross Church on 16 March 1897, and attended school (Roll No. 391) from 1900 (date is not given) to 23 December 1909.

He enlisted at Plymouth, joining first 2/1st North Somerset Yeomanry (Official No. 2266) before transferring to the 1st Battalion, The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (1 DCLI). 1 DCLI was part of 95th Brigade in 5th Division. The Division moved from France to Italy in December 1917, but had returned to the Western Front in April 1918 as part of the fight to contain the massive German offensive which began on 21 March 1918. The action in which Harold Shepherd fell wounded was the Battle of Hazebrouck, also known as the third phase of the Battle of the Lys, in which 5th Division played a prominent role in the defence of Nieppe Forest.

1 DCLI's war diary records the battalion moving out on 12 April 1918 from bivouacs at Thiennes to go into the front line. A battalion of Coldstream Guards were to their left, and on their right a battalion of Devon's. The Germans held L'Épinette in front of them. At 10.00am on 13 April the Germans attacked the Coldstreams, who were forced back thereby leaving 1 DCLI's left flank exposed. In manoeuvring to protect this flank, 'A' Company lost nearly half its strength in casualties. After desperate fighting, the line was stabilised, and a quiet night followed with the British and Germans dug in 200 yards apart. At first light on the 14 April, the enemy were seen to be preparing to attack along the whole battalion front. The attack did not come until 1.00pm and two hours of fierce fighting ensued before the Germans were beaten back with heavy loss. Next day 1DCLI was relieved in the line by 1st East Surrey's.

At some time during these two days of hard fighting Harold Shepherd received wounds from which he subsequently died on 17 April 1918 at the age of 21. He is remembered with honour at Aire Communal Cemetery (Plot III.C.31).



¹ Harold's elder brother Everard was killed in action one week after Harold – see next entry. The 1901 Census shows Harold as the elder brother, but this appears to be an error.

² The father of William Henry Shepherd, killed at the Battle of Coronel on 1 November 1914.