

ST JAMES CHURCH TAUNTON
WORLD WAR 1 MEMORIAL PROJECT

Stanley Hartnell



Name: Stanley Hartnell

Rank: Private

Service Number: 1893 and 200303

Regiment: Somerset Light Infantry, transferred to Dorset Regiment

Battalion/Unit number: 1st Battalion SLI, 2nd Battalion Dorsets

Date/year of Birth: c. 1897

Place of Birth: Castle Cary, Somerset

Place of Residence: Coal Orchard, St James Street

Date of Death: 30th June 1916

Place of Death: Nesbin, Mesopotamia

Burial/Memorial: Baghdad

Stanley Hartnell was the son of David and Emily Maria Hartnell. David was born and brought up in Sampford Arundall, the son of an agricultural labourer. In 1897 he married Emily Maria Carey, a Blacksmith's daughter from Castle Cary. Their son, Stanley however was born in 1895, and was registered as Stanley Hartnell Carey. It would seem the family may have initially lived in Castle Cary as Stanley and their second child Rosa was born there. By October 1899, when their third child, Eva, was born, David and Emily had moved to Taunton but the five year old Stanley remained in Castle Cary with his grandparents John and Emma Carey. He was still there in 1911 aged 15 and apprenticed as a cabinet maker.

His parents in the meantime had set up as publicans or beer sellers in North Town, Taunton at the Wheatsheaf Inn. It has not been possible to identify this establishment as yet, however from census records it seems to have been on Staplegrove Road near to what is now the entrance to North Town School. In 1901 David is described as a Beer Seller and Haulier. They have two children Rosa and Eva May. By 1911 they have a further child, Leslie David John and their address is 4 North Town, Staplegrove Road. Also at the Inn are two nephews and a niece from Wellington (24, 14 and 17), who are working in the business.

By 1914 the family appear to have moved to 13, Denmark Place, St James Street. (Houses which have been since demolished but were situated behind the old St. James school in what is now the entrance to the County Cricket ground). This was the given enlistment address for Stanley and also for David and curiously Stanley's sister, Eva May. David enlisted in the Royal Vet Corps and served in France and Belgium for three and a half years in a mobile unit. Eva May served for 14 months in the Royal Air Force.

Stanley initially joined the 1st /4th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry but was transferred to the 2nd Battalion Dorset Regiment, date uncertain. Both units were initially stationed in India and were then transferred to the Persian Gulf for the campaign in Mesopotamia, the Dorsets in November 1914 and the Somersets in February 1916.

The Long Long Trail comments on the Mesopotamian campaign:

For centuries before the Great War, Mesopotamia had been part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Lying along its eastern border was Persia, generally friendly to the British. The Arab Sheiks of nearby Kuwait and Muhammerah also supported Britain; the Arab tribes of coastal Mesopotamia often changed sides. Germany had for many years before the war assiduously developed Turkey as an ally, which it saw as an important part of the Drang nach Osten ("Thrust towards the East": Germany wanted new lands, new markets, "lebensraum"). The Turkish army was led by German 'advisors', as was much of its trade and commerce. Although this campaign began simply to secure oil supplies for the Royal Navy, victory over the Turks became believed by some - notably David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill - to be a less costly way towards defeat of Germany than the painful battering at the Western Front. Pushed by Germany - which also tried to encourage a Jihad (Muslim Holy War) against the British forces - Turkey was to strongly resist the British incursion.

It would seem that Stanley was in the 2nd Battalion Dorset regiment when it surrendered at Kut-el-Amara. Initially the British campaign had met with success on landing in Mesopotamia, capturing the oilfields and pipelines at Basra and Qurna. Kut was captured in September 1915 by a force under General Townsend in a drive towards Bagdad. Subsequent advances were halted and the Ottoman Turks under German Field Marshal Von Goltz besieged the town of Kut. Many attempts were made to relieve Townsend's forces, but all were defeated. Some 23,000 British and Indian soldiers died in the attempts to retake Kut, probably the worst loss of life for the British away from the European theatre. T.E. Lawrence was involved in an unsuccessful attempt to bribe the Turkish commander to let the troops escape. After a siege of 147 days, Townshend, finally surrendered Kut on April 29, 1916. Around 13,000 survived to be taken prisoner, the officers were sent to separate facilities, and many of the enlisted soldiers were pressed into hard labour until the Ottomans surrendered in 1918. 70% of the British and 50% of the Indian soldiers died. Townsend remained a prisoner for the rest of the war in relative comfort on the island of Halki.

The County Gazette reported the events that were happening at Kut; on 28th June 1916 they reported that, among others, S. Hartnell and L. Jones (see entry on Leonard Jones) had been captured. Stanley died on 30th June and Leonard on 16th July.

Stanley is one of the few soldiers for whom it has been possible to obtain information from family members, one of whom attends St. James Church. They have been able to provide a great deal of biographical information which has been included in a brief account of Stanley's history in the side chapel.