

ST JAMES CHURCH TAUNTON
WORLD WAR 1 MEMORIAL PROJECT

Percy John Marks



Name: Percy John Marks

Rank: Lance Corporal

Service Number: 1345

Regiment: Welsh Guards

Battalion/Unit number: 1st Battalion

Date/year of Birth: c. 1896

Place of Birth: Taunton

Place of Residence: Moors Police Station, Splott, Cardiff
(formerly Priory Dairy, Obridge, Taunton)

Date of Death: 4th September 1917

Place of Death: Ypres, Belgium

Burial/Memorial: New Irish Farm Cemetery St-Jean-les Ypres

Percy John Marks was the son of Ernest and Kate Marks who lived in Obridge, where they had a dairy business. Ten years earlier Ernest had been a journeyman bread maker living in Noble Street. Percy had four younger brothers and sisters, Florrie, Archie, Gertrude and Cecil. He attended St. James School. In 1911, aged 15,

he was employed as an assistant in his father's diary business. Percy was apparently over 6 ft tall and after working for his father for a while he joined the police force in about 1914, serving in the Cardiff City Police stationed at Splott. He joined the Welsh Guards and must have enlisted by 1915 as he was awarded the 1915 star (the qualifying date on his medal card is 17th August).

The records of the Welsh Guard Regiment state that Percy Marks was promoted to Lance Corporal on 15th February 1915 and that he served for 3 months in Rome and 2 years in France. I can find no indication from the regimental history that the Regiment served in Italy – could Rome be a mis-reading of Home?

The Welsh Guards were a new regiment raised in on 25th February 1915 by order of King George V to complete the national complement of Foot Guards identified with the countries of the United Kingdom. On inception the Regiment took its place alongside the English Grenadier Guards, Coldstream Guards, Scots Guards and Irish Guards. On 17th August 1915 the 1st Battalion sailed for France and formed part of the Guards Division; they remained in France/Flanders for the rest of the war. Their first battle was fought at Loos on 27th September 1915. The Guards Brigade fought on the Somme so it is likely that Percy fought in the trenches during the battles of 1916 and 1917. The third battle of Ypres took place over the period when he died. He is buried at New Irish Farm Cemetery St-Jean-les Ypres where only about a quarter of the identities of those buried are known. From the records he appears to be the only named Welsh Guardsman buried there.

In the Somerset County Gazette there are some details of his service. "He went through 2 memorable charges at Hill 70 and was also actively engaged in the important action near Loos. The following letter was received from Sergeant DJ Richards one of his Comrades:

Dear Mrs. Marks

Just a few lines to inform you of the death of your son. Cpl Marks and myself were very good chums, because we belong to the same battalion and came together on the job. All the boys miss him because he was so cheerful. He always had a smile on his face and I miss him very much, because he was one of the best NCOs I had under me. The way he met his death was by a shell dropping right on top of the dugout killing one NCO and 3 men. They were killed outright, buried beneath the dugout. I was out digging for him last night and this morning and I shall do my best as a soldier and a pal to see that your son and the others are buried properly. If there is anything you would like to know I shall be only too pleased to help you. Your son was a good soldier and a brave one as well. Please accept the sympathy of all the boys and myself in your great loss. DJ Richards Sergt"

Perhaps it was Sergeant Richards' determination to retrieve his body that enabled his grave to be named. The Welsh Guards War diary indicates that there was heavy shelling on 2nd/3rd September and that the Guards were in the forward trench until the 4th when they were relieved by the Coldstream Guards but no specific mention of this particular incident. It may have been that the deaths were not confirmed until later.