

THE STARBUCK FAMILY IN WW1

Ralph Starbuck was born in April 1895, in Market Rasen, the youngest child of John Bissell Starbuck, a photographer in the town, and his wife Harriet. In the 1911 census Ralph at age 16 was described as a hairdresser and living at home.

On 19th August 1914, with the clouds of war starting to appear, Ralph went off to Grimsby to join the 49th Royal Field Artillery, with the service number 72492. He travelled to France as part of the Expeditionary Forces in October 1914 as a Gunner, a member of the 4th Brigade. This was a brave and dangerous role which earned these men title of the 'Old Contemptibles'. Their mission was to hold back the German army at the front line until new recruits could be trained and equipped because there were simply not enough troops at the front, where casualties were enormous.

Ralph's name is listed in the Rasen Mail, which published a weekly list of local men who had enlisted, as Bombardier Starbuck, Royal Field Artillery. As part of the Expeditionary Forces, Ralph would have seen fierce fighting along the Western Front, although there are no records available to show exactly where he fought.

In a letter he wrote home to his parents on 24th October 1914, he said 'getting on well', which was probably not strictly true as soldiers often spared their loved ones details of the horrors they experienced. He also asked for cigarettes, as he said, 'I cannot get the right kind here'.

He mentioned seeing two local men, F Castle of the Lincolnshire Regiment and J Fergusson of the Coldstream Guards. His parents duly sent him the cigarettes, which would have been a welcome reminder of home. At some point he was wounded, although there are no exact details. On 28th June 1917, Ralph was back in England to marry Gertrude Emily Sturgess who lived in Trussel, near Market Harborough.

Sadly, on 27th April 1918, Ralph Starbuck died of wounds received while fighting in France. A citation to him states: 'we tender to this gallant soldier's young widow, his father and brothers and sisters our sincerest sympathy in their bereavement, which they feel keenly. Corporal Starbuck, who was only 23 years of age, went out with the first draft from these shores in August 1914, and went through the battle of Mons unscathed. He had seen a lot of fighting during the last three and a half years, but had always come up smiling, having only been wounded once.'

As one of the early volunteers to enlist, Ralph would have been eligible for three Campaign Medals: the 1914 Star, the British War Medal and finally the Victory Medal, known affectionately as Pip, Squeak and Wilfred. The names came from a popular comic strip published in the Daily Mirror. Pip was a dog, Squeak a penguin and Wilfred a young rabbit. However, these medals were not issued until the 1920's and the families of deceased soldiers had to apply. It is not known whether Ralph's widow or parents did this.

Ralph's final resting place is in Lapugnoy Military Cemetery in the Pas-de-Calais department in France, plot number VIII.E.24.

One hundred years on

One hundred years after the start of what was called the War to End All Wars, the moat at the Tower of London was flooded with 888,246 red ceramic poppies to commemorate the number of British deaths in the war.

The global scale of casualties is estimated at more than 17 million dead and 20 million wounded, including about 10 million military deaths and 6 million amongst the Allied Forces.

Remembrance Day is still marked every year with the laying of poppies. The poem 'For the Fallen', by Laurence Binyon, which includes the following verse, is often read:

"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them."



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MARKET RASEN WAR MEMORIAL 2015

Bibliography

Ancestry.com

Census returns - war records - Medal and Award Rolls

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

For photograph and citation

Brian Starbuck

Great Nephew for family information and photographs

Doug and Rosalind Boyce

'Let them sleep now'

British Campaign Medal of the First World War website

