

The supreme sacrifice

By Will Brown, researcher at the Museum of Policing in Cheshire

With the recent centenary marking the end of the First World War or the Great War as it was known, it is perhaps timely to reflect on the supreme sacrifice made by the many thousands who lost their lives during that terrible conflict and the story of PC Albert Richard Lawrence is a good illustration of this.

Albert was born in 1880 at Welshpool, Montgomeryshire and when he was 20 joined the 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards. He soon found himself serving in the Second Boer War, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions had been deployed to South Africa where they took part in a number of battles including the Battle of Modder River and the Battle of Belmont both in November 1899, as well as a number of smaller actions.

For his service, Albert was awarded the King's South Africa Medal with clasps South Africa 1901 and 1902 and the Queen's South Africa Medal with clasps Modder River and Belmont.

On completion of five years' service, he left the Army and worked as a railway porter. In 1905 he married Matilda Ellen Williams. Having decided on a career in the police, he joined Cheshire Constabulary on 20 April 1907 becoming PC 145. Following initial training at Hoole, he was posted to Nantwich Division, working at Nantwich and later at Audlem. On 1 July 1913 he was transferred to the Wirral Division and became the village bobby at Port Sunlight.

Following the outbreak of war, there was a massive influx of volunteers to the Army and police forces were asked to second

officers with previous military service to help with the training of these new recruits. Cheshire loaned eight officers including Albert who were all former Guardsmen. Their job was to train recruits in foot drill and they were promoted to the rank of acting sergeant for the duration of the secondment. In July 1915 Albert was released and returned to the Force with his temporary rank of acting sergeant being made substantive.

On 31 January 1916 Albert enlisted as a private soldier with the 74th Training Battalion Cheshire Regiment, he did not need to join up but no doubt thought it was his duty to serve his King and country. He was soon promoted to sergeant and later was made Company Sergeant Major.

On 1 November 1917 he was posted to the 53rd Manchester Regiment at Kinmel Park, Rhyl and on 26 March 1918 he was posted to the British Expeditionary Force with the 12th Battalion Manchester Regiment. During 1918 the Manchester Regiment was involved in several battles including the Battles of St Quentin, Bapaume, Albert and Cambrai followed by the pursuit to Selle.

On Monday 9 September 1918 CSM Lawrence was shot in the right side of his chest at Rocquigny, Somme, France and died later that same day from his wounds. He is buried at Rocquigny-Equancourt Road Cemetery, Manacourt, Somme.

At the time of his death, he was 38 years of age and left Matilda Ellen and seven children, the youngest being just three-years-old.



Albert as a young Corporal in the Grenadier Guards.

His widow would receive her husband's British War Medal and Victory Medal, together with the Memorial Scroll and Death Plaque commonly known as the 'Death Penny'. As he had enlisted as opposed to Reservists and those conscripted, he had to resign from the Force and therefore his widow did not receive a police widow's pension although his pension contributions would have been repaid to her.

A total 145 members of the Cheshire Constabulary served in the Armed Forces during World War 1, 14 of these men made the supreme sacrifice.