

Two Brothers Go to War

Frank Nightingale was born on the 20th January 1898. His parents were Joshua and Mary Ann who had lived in Pattishall and later moved to Bugbrooke. They had 6 surviving sons and 2 daughters, Frank being the youngest child. He worked right from a young age with his brother Wallace on a farm as a labourer.

They grew up together as there was only two years difference in age. Life was hard for their family but a happy one until the 4th August 1914 when Britain declared War on Germany. Many young men rushed off to join up.

Wallace signed up in October 1914 at the age of 18. He was enlisted into the London Regiment of the Territorial Force posted to 1/11th (County of London) Battalion. They were unofficially called The Finsbury Rifles. To the shock of his family Frank followed his older brother and enlisted. However, he was under age at sixteen and a half but he had the calling to follow his brother and serve his country. What must his mother Mary Ann have thought? Her baby son leaving home to fight!! His Medical Inspection Report read that his apparent age was eighteen and 10 months. His height was 5ft 6ins and he had a girth of 36ins and excellent vision.

Frank joined the 4th Res Northamptonshire regiment as a Private and was stationed at Peterborough from October 1914 to May 1916. We think his true age was discovered so he was not allowed to go to France. While on leave he came home to Bugbrooke and met Flossie Bannard who was a nursemaid for the Harrison family at the Hall, they got engaged. We feel they may have thought themselves very young but with the war showing no sign of ending and being deeply in love then it was the right thing to do.

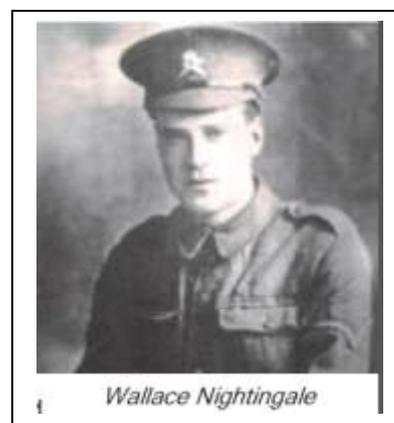


Wallace had been sent to Gallipoli sailing from Plymouth in July 1915 and landed at Mudros, Sulva Bay some 12 days later. He fought until January 1916 and after spending time in Cairo Hospital was sent back to England suffering the after effects of dysentery. After he recovered he decided to join The 2nd Machine Gun Corps in July 1916 as a Lance Corporal. He was sent to France where he was wounded in the Right shoulder and taken prisoner. His family received the news that he was missing; therefore they thought he had been killed.

In the meantime Frank had been promoted to Lance Corporal in May 1916 and later in that July only two weeks after Wallace had joined the Machine Gun Corps he decided to follow his brother into the Corps. We know he trained at Killingham Moor Camp as he injured his hand on the practice range. The Machine Gun Corps was known as 'The Suicide Club' as the corps always accompanied a regiment in the first wave of every assault and remained to cover every retirement usually losing many men. It was hard work with the carrying of the Vickers machine gun weighing 42.5lbs with 7.5 pints of cooling water to prevent overheating.

Each gun was carried by one member of the squad while the other seven men carried the tripod and ammunition.

In the First World War 170,500 officers and men served in the Corps with 62,049 casualties. Our thoughts were that Frank made a good soldier even for his young age. However, in October 1916 he was reported for Neglecting his duty by allowing his work party to be dismissed without permission. This did not stop him from being promoted to Acting Sergeant in January 1917. On the 24th February 1917 he embarked at Southampton and landed two days later landing at Le Havre in France and was later promoted to Sergeant. He served in the 174th MGC (Infantry) assigned to 59th (2nd North Midland) Division. 176th Brigade under Major General C.F. Romer. In September 1917 he attended an Aircraft Course. Was he having second thoughts fighting in such a dangerous unit? He could have been thinking about his fiancée at home.



On the 28th November 1917 his unit was part of the Battle of Cambrai. Under the orders of General Bung the division entered the recently captured line between Cantaing and Bourlan Wood. The weather was terrible, it had snowed and sitting in the trenches and shell holes must have been terrifying and this young man must have wanted to be home with his family. The battle on the 30th November started at 7am and in the wave one group of the MGC fired over 70,000 rounds. However, the Germans counterattacked and

regained the ground that had been taken. Bourlan Wood was subjected to a gas attack and Cantaing Mill was set alight. There was a great loss of life believed to have been 44,207 dead, wounded or missing between 20th November to the 8th December. Some 6,000 soldiers were taken prisoner. In the fighting on the 30th Sergeant Frank Nightingale was killed alongside a private in the same corps. Their bodies were buried side by side at Anneux British Cemetery near Cambrai. Mary Ann had lost her youngest son and Wallace was still missing.

Family discussions said that she never got over losing her son. She was allowed to visit Frank's grave in 1921 which was paid by the War Graves Commission. It took her two weeks to get there. Firstly travelling by cart to Castle Station.

Wallace was released as a prisoner in February 1918 and was repatriated via Rotterdam where he wrote postcards to his family. He was discharged in July 1918 as he was no longer fit for military duty. He was awarded the Silver War Badge alongside his 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and Victory medal.

But the story did have a happy ending. When Wallace returned to Bugbrooke he visited Flossie to console his onetime future sister in law. Their friendship grew and they fell in love and were married in May 1920. They had three children Enid, Michael and Frank the first born son named after his uncle. So you see from losing one brave man we gained another, our grandfather Wallace Pateman Nightingale who died in July 1958 aged 62.

On the 30th November 2017 one hundred years since Frank Nightingale was killed his great niece Jan Curtis will stand by his grave and visit Bourlan Wood where so many heroes died.

Jan Curtis and Barbara Bell

