

CHICHESTER IN THE GREAT WAR

Lieutenant Algernon Martin, 29.7.1886 – 30.7.1918
Nicholas Shaw

Introduction

Algernon Martin's name appears on the War Memorial at Apuldram and I wanted to see whether he had close connections with the City of Chichester. He was a Lieutenant in the 70th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, and was 32 years old at the time of his death.

Biography

Algernon Martin was born at Eastgate, Chichester on 29th July 1886, the eldest son of Edwin Henry and Laura Martin, formerly Reed, of 136 Main Road, Sidcup. In the 1891 Census, the family lived at Park Road, Chichester. Edwin H. Martin, Algernon's father, was a commercial clerk, who had been in Chichester in the summer of 1855. Algernon's grandfather, Merric H. Martin had been a solicitor's clerk and lived in a private house in Rumboldswyke. Algernon was one of ten children, and by the 1901 Census, six of them were present, namely: Algernon who was 4, Evelyn, 8, Frank 6 months, Nina A., 5, Gerald, 3 and Leon aged 2, and they were all living at 38 Bognor Road, Chichester with mum and dad. Edwin was still working as a commercial clerk.

Algernon was 23 when his father died on 17th November 1909; he was only 54 years old.

By the 1911 Census, Laura, Algernon's mother, was a widow and living at 13 Bognor Road, Chichester with Hilda Caroline, aged 28, a bookkeeper in a local hotel, Evelyn, aged 18, Nina, aged 15, Gerard, aged 13 and Leon aged 12.

Algernon had emigrated to South Africa to join up with the South African Police on 14th November 1906, when he was just 20 years of age. He was a Police Constable and enlisted at Potchefstroom and served with the force for 5 years, finally leaving on 13th November 1911. He had been living at Witbank, Transvaal and worked in the same area. After leaving the South African Police he enlisted with the Overseas Expeditionary Force Signal Company Royal Engineers on 6th October 1915. Algernon decided after nearly 6 years to apply for a commissioned rank in the Royal Field Artillery (Special Reserve). He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant from 17th June 1917 and was later gazetted on 6th July 1917. His previous job working in the Signals, regimental number 6486, had certainly ensured he had the right experience to obtain his commission with the Royal Field Artillery. Algernon was commissioned into the 70th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, who were attached to the 15th Scottish Division.



The 70th Brigade or LXX Brigade as it is often described, made up of 220, 221 and 222 Batteries of the Royal Field Artillery and the 71 Brigade Ammunition column served with the 15th (Scottish Division). The Division was formed in September 19th 1914, part of Kitchener's Second New Army. 70th Brigade proceeded to France in the second week of July 1915. They were in action at the Battle of Loos in September 1915. By 1917 the regiment were involved in many actions including the First Battle of The Scarpe (9th April – 4th May), the Battle of Arras (9th April – 16th May) which included the capture of Guemappe. They then moved north to Flanders and were in action during the Battle of Pilckem (31st July – 2nd August). They also fought at the Battle of Langemarck (16th-18th August) and the First Battle of Bapaume in the spring of 1918 (24th-25th March 1918). Algernon was present at all these battles and by 18th July he was involved with the Battle of Soissonais and the Ourcq (18th-22nd July). Finally he took part in the attack on Buzancy which began on 23rd July and was taken by 28th July. Two days later Algernon was killed in action on the 30th July 1918. He is buried at Buzancy Military Cemetery, Row 111, Plot F.8. He was just 32 years of age.

He had been recently promoted to Lieutenant on 18th June 1918 and this was gazetted on 19th July 1918. He stood 5ft 8½ inches in height, had a 38 inch chest, brown hair, blue eyes and described as having a fresh complexion when he attended his interview for a job at the Royal Field Artillery. He had also been a former chorister of Chichester Cathedral. He had left his wife Sybilla Atha Martin effects of £132 19s 10d in his Will. She later died on 9th March 1936, aged 72.

He is commemorated on the Chichester City Memorial at (The Litten Gardens) St Pancras road, and also on the War Memorial at Apuldram, near Chichester.

Conclusion

Algernon was born in the City of Chichester and so was his father in 1855. He was the second oldest member of his family and was brought up in Chichester during the early part of his life. He decided to emigrate to South Africa when he was only 20 and when the war broke out decided to gain important military experience with the South African Royal Engineers before applying for a post with the Royal Field Artillery. He fought many battles between spring 1917 and July 1918 and served his country with much pride and distinction. He left a wife, aged 55 to look after 10 children, although by 1918, at least two of them were of adult age.

Sources

www.ancestry.co.uk (Family details)

www.cwgc.org (Cemetery details)

Kew Archives: WO339/74464

Wartime memories project at www.wartimememoriesproject.com

