



William Spencer

1886-1917

William was born in Dewsbury in 1886 and baptised in St. John the Evangelist Church, Dewsbury Moor on 5th August 1888. His father was John Spencer, a rag grinder born in Manchester around 1860 and died in 1929. His mother was Rhoda Hannah (nee Eaton, sometimes Heaton) born in Derby in 1862 and died in 1947. They were married in All Saints Church, Dewsbury on 28th October 1882.

Their other children who could be traced were; Hannah, born in 1883, Isaac, born in 1888, and died in 1889, Fred, born in 1890, Joseph, born in 1892 and served in World War1, Herbert, born in 1894 and died in 1894, Arthur, born in 1902 and died in 1902. On the 1911 Census they state eight children were born to the marriage of which four were still alive.

In 1901 William was a glass blower's assistant and was married on 16th April 1906 to Ann (or Annie) Elizabeth Ward (born 1885 and died in 1971) in All Saints Church, Batley. They had two children; Percy Ward Spencer, born in 1907 and Gladys Ward Spencer, born in 1911.

On the 1911 Census, calling himself *William Arthur Spencer*, he is a lodger at the Victoria Lodging House, 33, Leeds Road, Dewsbury; his occupation was recorded as a Railway Teamer. Annie and her children were living with her parents in Batley. After his death William Spencer's Soldier's Effects and his War Gratuity were paid in November 1917 and October 1919 respectively, not to his widow but to a Martha A. Soulsby for whom no link has been established. It seems that Annie was awarded a pension for their children.

In 1904, he signed on for the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, but he was discharged three months later as being "not likely to make an efficient soldier". Two years later he enlisted in the West Riding Regiment in Halifax, citing previous service with the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. He was convicted in a civilian court of making a false answer on attestation and sentenced to 14 days in prison; he was also discharged from the army.

He served as Private 21374 in the 9th, 12th and finally the 2nd Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment and was sent to the Balkan Campaign on 14th November 1915. He was later posted to the Western Front and was killed in action in the Ypres Salient on 24th June 1917. He was buried in a joint grave with five other men in Menin Road South Military Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium. William was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Menin Road South Military Cemetery is located 2 Kms east of Ieper (Ypres) town centre, on the road connecting Ieper to Menen. The Menin Road ran east and a little south from Ypres to a front line which varied only a few kilometres during the greater part of the war. The position of this cemetery was always within the Allied lines. It was first used in January 1916 by the 8th South Stafford's and the 9th East Surrey's, and it continued to be used by units and Field Ambulances until the summer of 1918. The cemetery was increased after the Armistice when graves were brought in from isolated positions on the battlefields to the east. There are now 1,657 servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in this cemetery. 118 of the burials are unidentified but special memorials are erected to 24 casualties known or believed to be buried among them. In addition, there are special memorials to 54 casualties who were buried in Menin Road North Military Cemetery, whose graves were probably destroyed by shell fire and could not be found.

William is commemorated on the Dewsbury Cenotaph in Crow Nest Park and in the Dewsbury Roll of Honour kept in Dewsbury Central Library.

In Memory of
Private
W Spencer

21374, 2nd Bn., West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own) who died on 24 June 1917

Husband of A. E. Spencer.

Remembered with Honour
Menin Road South Military Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Photograph courtesy of Ms. Danielle Roubroeks, Antwerp, Belgium.