

Percy Manuel Age 24

Herbert Percival Manuel was born on the 23rd October, 1893 at Melbury Sampford in Dorset. He was the seventh child of Frederick and Grace Manuel. Frederick was a dairyman and the family lived at Hazel Farm, part of the Ilchester Estate.

By 1901, the family were living at East Stoke, Stoke sub Hamdon. There were 10 children, ranging in age from 16 years to 11 months. The family moved several times again, but by 1914 were settled at West Knole Farm.

Somewhen between 1911 and 1915, Percy joined the exodus to South Wales. By the time he was called up for recruitment in December 1915, he was working as a colliery surface man and lodging at 55, Bailey Street, Brynmawr.

He was put on the Army Reserve list, but not called until August 1917 when he was enrolled in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. He is described as being 5'6" tall, chest measurement 34½", with dark brown hair, gray eyes and a fresh complexion.

He arrived in France on 2nd January 1918 and joined the 1st Royal Marine Battalion in February. He was almost certainly with them in the Cambrai Sector in March 1918 when the front collapsed as the Germans launched their Spring Offensive. His battalion was present at the bitter defences of St-Quentin and First Bapaume. By April they had continued the rearguard action and withdrawn to where the line had been more than a year before. From there they continued to defend against massive assaults made by the German forces.

A reorganisation at the end of April meant that Percy was transferred to the Anson Battalion. Then, in the third week of June, he went down with influenza which was spreading rapidly through the troops there. He was admitted to a Casualty Clearing Station on the 23rd June and moved the next day to the 6th General Hospital at Rouen. After two weeks in hospital he was transferred to a Convalescent Depot and did not rejoin his battalion until early September.

He was probably involved in the battle that led to the subsequent crossing of the Canal du Nord between 27th September and 1st October 1918. This was followed by a further week of intense fighting. Percy died with seven others from his battalion when they took part in the capture of Niergnies, near Cambrai, on 8th October 1918. He was 24 years old.

He is buried in the Rumilly-en-Cambresis Communal Cemetery.