

Pte A.J.Uffold – The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment)

Alfred James Uffold was born in Peaslake in 1884, the son of William and Caroline Uffold who later lived in St John's Road, Westcott. Alfred's mother, Caroline, died in 1907. His father, William, was a blacksmith by trade and Alfred was a bricklayer's labourer.

Alfred enlisted at Dorking and after basic training joined the 34th (Labour) Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers which formed at Falmer, Sussex in May 1916. The role of labour battalions was to build and maintain the roads and other facilities needed to support their Divisions' operations. The Army Service Corps also had labour companies to operate dock facilities and labour companies of the Royal Engineers built railway installations.

By 1916 the requirement for labour had grown enormously and this fragmented structure could not meet the demand. To overcome this problem the different components were brought together into one integrated Labour Corps. More resources were needed and men unfit for front-line service, including returned wounded, were drafted in to bring the Corps up to 390,000 men (more than 10% of the Army's total strength). This was further increased by recruiting over 300,000 workers from China, Egypt, South Africa and elsewhere.

The effect of the re-organisation on the Royal Fusiliers was that in May 1917 their four labour battalions – the 33rd, 34th, 35th and 37th – became the 99th to 108th Labour Companies of the new Labour Corps. Alfred Uffold's battalion, the 34th, became the 101st Labour Company and went to France in May 1916. By November 1918 the Labour Corps Companies in France had a total strength of some 200,000 men, but few records remain of their movements and activities - the labour companies did not keep war diaries and their other records were destroyed by German bombing in 1940.

We have not been able to trace Alfred's record of service, but we have found a partial record for his younger brother Edward George Uffold and, quite remarkably, it appears that the two may have soldiered together through much of their service. Edward enlisted at Dorking in December 1915 and had also joined the 34th (Labour) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers; his regimental number was G/26148; Alfred's was G/261613, indicating that Edward joined first. When the battalion was re-formed as the 101st Labour Company in May 1917 all the men were given new service numbers –

Alfred's was 60499, Edward was given the next number – 60500. The two brothers were clearly serving together.

The 101st Labour Company continued to serve in France until 17th May 1918. Shortly before, on 12th May, Edward was wounded by gas near Bapaume and hospitalised in Rouen. On 1st June 1918 he was evacuated to Lincoln Hospital suffering from gas poisoning and survived – he lived to the age of 71 and died in 1956.

We do not know the circumstances of Alfred's death. He died in Cardiff Military Hospital on 25th May 1918 and it is possible he also was suffering from gas poisoning, perhaps sustained in the same incident. He was buried here at Westcott on 1st June 1918; this was on the same day as Edward was brought back from France to Lincoln. Alfred's grave is marked by a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone in the old section of the churchyard, just to left of the path near the exit to Westcott Common.

Alfred was the second son widower William Uffold had lost in the war and with Edward's evacuation as a casualty, it must have been a particularly harrowing time for William and his family. Frederick, the son who was killed earlier, is also remembered on our memorial.