

Sergeant Major Fred Mitchell (1871 - 1st July 1915)



SERGEANT-MAJOR F. MITCHELL.

From the Brighthouse Echo Friday July 16, 1915

Local War News

FIGHTING UNDER BOTHA.

BAILIFFE BRIDGE MAN KILLED

IN

SOUTH WEST AFRICA.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Mitchell, of Bailiff Bridge have received an official notification last Friday that their son, Sergt-Major F. Mitchell, of the Brand's Horse, fifth regiment, South Africa, had been killed in action near Otavi, in German South West Africa, whilst fighting under General Botha. The following is a copy of the communication:--

Downing-street, 8th July, 1915

Sir,--It is with deep regret that I have to inform you, on behalf of Mr. Secretary Bonar Law, that a telegram

has been received from the Governor General of the Union of South Africa, stating that Sergeant-Major F. Mitchell, of the Fifth Regiment, Brand's Horse, was killed in action near Otavi, on the 1st July. Mr Bonar Law is commanded by the King to assure you of the true sympathy of His Majesty and the Queen in your sorrow. --- I am, your obedient servant,

H.W.JUST

A further communication of the same date was also received. This reads as follows:--

Sir, With reference to my letter of today's date, I am directed by Mr. Secretary Bonar Law to inform you that Lord Buxton has asked that an expression of his sincere sympathy may be conveyed to you upon the death in action of Sergeant-Major F. Mitchell. --- I am, your obedient servant,

H.W.JUST

Sergeant-Major Mitchell was 44 years of age. He was a born soldier and has been in the army practically all his life. As soon as he was old enough to join he enlisted in the Prince Albert Guards. Most of his time has been spent in South Africa, and for close on twenty years he has served in the Imperial Forces in that country. He was there at the outbreak of war, and went all through that campaign, for which he received a medal with bars. He was one of the South Africa contingent who came

over to guard the route for the procession at the Coronation of King Edward. He has been with General Botha during the whole of the present campaign, which has been carried out so successfully, and it was not far from the place where the treaty was signed that Mitchell had the misfortune to get killed. He was the third son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Mitchell and brother to Mr. E. Mitchell, joiner and undertaker, of Bailiffe Bridge.

A briefer account appeared in the Halifax Courier Saturday 17th July 1915

BAILIFFE BRIDGE MAN KILLED

IN GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICA

Information has been received by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Mitchell of Bailiffe Bridge, that their son Sergt-Major F. Mitchell, of Brand's Horse, 5th Regiment, South Africa, has been killed in action near Otavi, in German South-West Africa, whilst

fighting under General Botha. Sergt-Major, who was 44 years of age, enlisted as soon as he was old enough in the Prince Albert Guards, and spent most of his time in South Africa. For close on 20 years he served in the Imperial forces of that country. He was in South Africa throughout the Boar War, and has been with General Botha throughout the campaign against the Germans.

Fred Mitchell was the third son of Henry Mitchell and Rhoda Crowther. Henry was a 25 year old fatherless "Miner" when he married 21 year old "Weaver" Rhoda Crowther, daughter of a "Labourer" John Crowther on 2nd December 1867 in Bradford Parish Church. Before the 1871 census the baptisms of two children born to Henry, a "Miner", and Rhoda Mitchell of Beck Hill were recorded at St Michael and All Angles church, Shelf. John William Mitchell was born on September 1868 and baptised on 18th October 1868. Daughter Sarah was born on 27th January 1870 and baptised on 3rd March 1870. All four were living in Buttershaw, North Brierley on the night of the 1871 census; Henry was a "Coal Miner" and Rhoda a "Worsted Weaver".

No baptism has been found for Fred Mitchell and it is impossible to distinguish between the various Fred Mitchells registered in the Halifax or Bradford districts 1871 – 1873. But by the time of the 1881 census he was a nine year old Scholar with his parents Henry and Rhoda, his two elder siblings John William and Sarah and four younger siblings. The family resided in "New Brighton", Scholes, Cleckheaton where the youngest child Annie, aged one, had been born. Father

Henry was again a "Coal Miner" and 12 year old John William was a "Coal Miner (Hurrier)". The four boys – there may well have been a fifth if Fred was the third son - Fred, James, Willie and Edwin who had arrived after the previous census were recorded as being born in North Bierley. Willie was born on 27th July 1875 and baptised on 5th September 1875 at St Michael and All Angels, Shelf.

Thirteen year old Edwin had become a "Hurrier in Coal Mine" by the 1891 census when his father was still a "Coal Miner". But the rest of the family were working in the Silk or Cotton industries whilst residing at 5 Waddington Buildings, Hipperholme cum Brighthouse. All that is except Fred Mitchell; he was a 19 year old "Private" at the Infantry Barracks, Fulford, York. As the newspaper articles state he became a career soldier taking part in both Boer War and the First World War in South Africa and rising to the rank of Sergeant-Major. Only Willie, Edwin and Annie were at home in Spring Field Terrace, Hipperholme with their parents, on 31st March 1901. Father Henry was still a "Coal Miner Hewer", Willie was a "Farm Labourer", Edwin was a "Joiner" and Anne was a "Cotton Reeler".

Sadly 27 year old Annie died on 30th September 1906 and was buried in St Matthew's Churchyard on 3rd October 1906 in plot C38. Her address is not known but her parents were by themselves at 9 Providence St., Scholes, Cleckheaton on 2nd April 1911. Henry was still a "Colliery Worker (Pit Top)". He and Rhoda had been married for 43 years and had had 8 children, 6 of whom were still alive. This suggests that there was another child, besides Annie, who had died.

The Mr E Mitchell, joiner and undertaker from Bailiffe Bridge was the son Edwin. He married Ruth Cheetham in 1908. They resided at 87 Springwell Terrace, BAiliffe Bridge, Brighthouse in the 1911 census when he was a "Joiner Builder Undertaker" "Employer". Although at the time he and his wife Ruth had no children they were probably the parents of Elsie, Annie, Maurice, Frank and Wilfred.

Sergeant-Major Fred Mitchell, service number 1031, was killed in action on 1st July 1915 just before the fighting in Otavi ceased. Although he probably had not seen his family in Bailiffe Bridge for some time he was commemorated on the family grave along with his sister Annie and his parents when they died. According to the burial register of St Matthew's Churchyard father Henry Mitchell was buried in plot B38 on 17th November 1920 having passed away on the 14th November. However mother Rhoda Mitchell nee Crowther was buried in plot C38 on 18th April 1925 having died on 16th April 1925.

Being an undertaker it is possible that Edwin was responsible for the family commemoration on plot C38. When Edwin died on 30th March 1940 he was also buried in St Matthew's Churchyard on 3rd April in plot 1A66. His wife Ruth was buried beside him on 18th April 1950.

D.M.Barker
December 2015