

## *Henry William Bull*



Signaller, Royal Garrison Artillery. Enlisted at Trowbridge, August, 1916. Served in France. Wounded while bringing in a wounded comrade, near Etaples, April 11th, 1918. Died in Etaples Hospital, April 17th. Buried in Etaples Cemetery. General Service and Victory Medals.



**H**ENRY WILLIAM BULL was born at the end of 1882 in Yatton Keynell and was the son of John and Isabella Bull. John was a Biddestone man and Isabella had been born in Bristol. By 1891 Henry was living in the Linleys in Corsham and his father was a roadman working for the Rural Council. He was living with his parents, his sisters Alice, Rosina and Florence, and his younger brother John. In 1901 Henry, now aged 18, was a stonemason living in Broadstone Cottages in the Linleys (the next-door record in

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the census is for Claremont College, which was a boarding school). His father John was now a foreman working on the Parish roads, and Rosina, Florence and John were still at home with another daughter, Martha. The family continued to live in Broadstone Cottages and they were certainly there in 1911, when Florence and Martha were still living with their parents. The 1911 census shows that John and Isabella had a total of nine children, of whom six survived. Their youngest daughter Martha worked at the glove factory.

Henry, now 28, had moved away, and in 1911 he was recorded as a bricklayer, boarding in Worksop in Nottingham. He enlisted in the Army in February 1916 and was appointed to the Army Reserve; his extensive service records, which are unusually intact, show that at the time of enlistment he was 5 feet 6 inches tall and weighed 145 pounds, and that at the age of 32 years and 11 months he was in good health apart from 'several teeth missing and others decayed'.

Henry was married to Mary Ann Brewer and had a son, Reginald Job Bull, before he was mobilised in August 1916 and attached to the Royal Garrison Artillery. He was based in the United Kingdom for almost a year and was in Bere Island in Ireland and in Catterick for training. He passed examinations in signalling and telegraphy before being posted to France in July 1917 attached to 12 Siege Battery – his rank was Gunner. His wife had a daughter, Winifred, in June 1917, just as Henry was being posted to France.

His service record shows that he was directly involved in battle and that he was wounded in the field some time between 9th and 11th April 1918, having received a shell wound to the abdomen. *War Records of Corsham* adds that he had been rescuing a wounded comrade. He was transferred

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to the Canadian Military Hospital in Etaples, where he died from his wounds on 17th April 1918. His personal effects were posted home and they were listed as photos, two pipes, a pocket knife and a 50 centime note (defaced).

Henry is buried in the Etaples Military Cemetery in Pas-de-Calais in France.

The story of Henry William Bull continued after his death when Henry's wife received a letter from Albert, a pal of Henry's, who in November 1918, just before the war ended, was at home on leave in South Wales. Albert was obviously a close friend of Henry (whom he referred to in his letter as Harry), and Albert and Harry were together when the latter received what turned out to be a fatal injury. Harry had written to Albert from hospital after his injury, and Albert had replied, but his letter had arrived after his friend's death.

The heartfelt and very touching letter written to Mrs Bull explained the circumstances of her husband's injury, which involved them assisting a wounded colleague – a Bombardier. In attempting to recover the soldier, Henry was badly wounded by a piece of shrapnel, which meant that he himself had to be recovered by Medical Corps staff. He was eventually admitted to the Canadian-run No 1 General Field Hospital in France. The letter from Albert implies that there was much more to the action involving their Battery prior to Henry's injury. It relates specifically to their last hour together and questions how 'a chap could get through anything like that untouched'. Albert told how his friend had been wounded and recovered and that he had also been 'gassed' prior to being admitted to hospital. He had been operated on but obviously died from his wounds.

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Albert and Henry had clearly had a pre-arrangement that they would write to each other's family if anything happened to one of them, and Albert told Mrs Bull that his own photo would have been among the personal possessions held by Henry. Photos were indeed listed in Henry's service records as having been returned to Mrs Bull.

It must have been very difficult for Mrs Bull to receive the letters, but they tell a story of friendship, respect and bravery that will have given her some solace. For the family and for other readers today they provide a small and very personal insight into the story of two friends brought together in war by coincidence and separated by accident.