

SERJEANT ALBERT GILL V.C.

The Church of England Cemetery (Warstone Lane)
Recorded on GILL Family Memorial Grave 1822 Section 1



http://krrcassociation.com/archives/sergeant_a_j_gill_vc.

TALES OF THE V.C.

Extracted from the documents of Captain James Price Lloyd of the Welsh Regiment who served with Military Intelligence during WW1

Serjeant 2815 ALBERT GILL 1st K.R.R.C.

“The struggle for DELVILLE WOOD on the Somme began at dawn on the 15th of July 1916. During the previous day, the British had captured the whole of the German second line system on a front of three miles, from Bazentin-le-Petit to Longueval. The taking of Delville Wood was entrusted to the South African Brigade, under Gen. Lukin.

The task that confronted them was indeed a formidable one. Delville Wood had been a broad expanse of woodland, through which ran pleasant rides, from North to South and East to West. It was now but a tangled wilderness, littered with prone tree-trunks and pitted with shell-holes. At its' South-West corner stood the crazy ruins of the village of Longueval. Along its' Western edge, between devastated orchards, a road climbed the low ridge Northwards towards Flers.

Before noon the South Africans had driven every German out of Delville Wood, but they could not hold it. The whole of Longueval was not yet in British hands and the Germans counter attacking from the Northern end of the village, forced the South Africans back.

On the 16th and again on the 17th, the latter made gallant efforts to retake the wood, but could not prevail. On the 20th they still clung desperately to its' South-Western edge.

Seven days later, on Thursday the 27th of July, the 2nd Division was more fortunate, but its' battalions suffered severely before they achieved success. It was perilous work to push forward into this intricate labyrinth, where often a man could not see more than twenty yards in front of him. Snipers lurked behind every splintered tree and the rides were swept by a deadly machine gun fire.

It was during the course of this grim assault that Serjt. Gill of the 1st K.R.R.C., performed the action which cost him his life, but was for him undying glory. The men of his platoon were positioned along a shallow trench, which ran across the wood. Choked with fallen boughs and the debris of battle, it was scarcely more than a yard deep at any point. Suddenly the enemy counter-attacked. Without warning, Germans came pouring through the wood towards the trench. A small bombing post in front of it was overwhelmed at once. Yet the enemy failed to reach the trench. Swept by a relentless fire from its' defenders, the Germans withdrew. But it was only for a moment. They soon came back, dodging from tree to tree, or crawling by twos and threes through the dense undergrowth.

The enemy's snipers were within twenty yards and it was dangerous to lift one's head above the parapet even for a few seconds, but Serjt. Gill, seeing that the position was in danger of being surrounded, stood up waist high in the shallow trench, that he might the better direct his men's fire and give them confidence. He knew that to do so meant almost certain death, but he stood there, with bullets whistling all around him, as calmly as if he were at target practice on some range at home. Death came quickly to him, but not before he had shown his men exactly where the Germans were. The attackers could not face the storm of lead that searched their hiding places, and the counter-attack broke down. Serjt. Gill had not died in vain.

Before evening the whole of Delville Wood, with the exception of a few stubborn strongholds on its' Eastern fringe, was in British hands."

<http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/en/contributions/5428>

Extract from VC's of the First World War - Somme 1916
By Gerald Giddon

Three weeks after Gill had been killed, his Company Commander wrote to Mrs Rosetta Gill in a letter dated 16 August 1916:

"The Adjutant has handed me your letter of 8 August, as I was your late husband's company commander. I am afraid that it is quite true that your husband was killed in action on 27 July. He was shot through the head and must have died at once. He could not have known nothing about it. I would have written to you before had I known your address, as your husband was one of the most valued men in my company and a man who anyone would be proud to call a friend. He was killed when rallying his men under terrible fire and had he lived would certainly have got the DCM. I was quite close to him, despite the trying circumstances. The battalion had just taken a Wood and the Germans were counter-attacking heavily. I am glad to say that we drove them back, and we have since received the thanks of everyone, from Sir Douglas Haig down. It was entirely owing to the heroic example and self-sacrifice of men like your husband that we did so well. He was loved by his platoon, of which I am sorry to say only four or five men remain. That day's work will always remain fixed in my memory as the one in which I lost so many gallant comrades. I lost all the officers and serjeants in my own company and very many of the men. You should be justly proud of your husband in his life and death. He had one of the finest natures I have ever

known. No words of mine can express my sympathy with you in your terrible sorrow. May the memory of his heroic end support you”.

Serjeant Albert GILL was awarded the Victoria Cross for his brave action.
The announcement was made in the SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE

War Office
26th October 1916

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to award the Victoria Cross to the undermentioned Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and men:-

Serjeant 2815 Albert Gill, late King's Royal Rifle Corps.

For most conspicuous bravery. The enemy made a very strong counter-attack on the right flank of the battalion, and rushed the bombing post after killing all the company bombers. Serjeant Gill at once rallied the remnants of his platoon, none of whom were skilled bombers, and reorganised his defences, a most difficult and dangerous task, the trench being very shallow and much damaged. Soon afterwards the enemy nearly surrounded his men by creeping up through the thick undergrowth, and commenced sniping at about twenty yards range. Although it was almost certain death, Serjeant Gill stood boldly up in order to direct the fire of his men. He was killed almost at once, but not before he had shown his men where the enemy were, and thus enabled them to hold up their advance.

By his supreme devotion to duty and self-sacrifice he saved a very dangerous situation.

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29802/supplement/10395>

Birmingham Mail - Saturday 28th October 1916

BIRMINGHAM'S LATEST V.C.
LORD MAYOR'S LETTER TO MRS. GILL

Mrs. Gill, the widow of Serjeant Albert Gill, late of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, a Birmingham man, who lived at 2, back of 40, Cope Street, Spring Hill, and who, as announced yesterday, was awarded the Victoria Cross, has received the following letter from the Lord Mayor:-

Lord Mayor's Parlour, Council House,
October 27th 1916

Dear Madam,- It is with great gratification that I have heard of the award of the Victoria Cross to your late husband for the heroic deed which is described in the papers to-day. I deeply regret that your husband lost his life in the performance of his duty, but his memory will be held in the greatest honour by his fellow-citizens, and will serve as an example to those who come after him.- I am, yours faithfully,

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, Lord Mayor

An article published in the Birmingham Gazette, Thursday 30 November 1916 described the return of Mrs. Gill to her home after receiving the Cross at the hands of the King at Buckingham Palace.

There was no ceremony at New Street Station, Mrs. Gill being met by her father, Mr.J.Smith of Harborne and two friends, Mr.& Mrs.Jones.

News was circulated that Mrs. Gill was in possession of the V.C. and she was surrounded by a number of Railway Employees and passengers, lingering to get a glimpse of the V.C. Mrs. Gill described the ceremony at Buckingham Palace and when the King asked her about her family, she informed him that both her children were dead.

www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

Birmingham Daily Post - Wednesday 6th December 1916

BIRMINGHAM MEN'S WAR HONOURS
References at City Council Meeting
SERJEANT GILL V.C.

The Lord Mayor said that on more than one occasion, the Council had passed a resolution expressing pride and satisfaction at the deeds of citizens of Birmingham on whom had been bestowed that great distinction, the V.C. They had previously done that three times, and since then the V.C. had once more been bestowed upon a citizen, but, unhappily, in that case, the brave and gallant man did not survive the occasion on which he displayed such courage and self-sacrifice. His Lordship thought, however, that the Council would desire to follow the example of his Majesty the King, and pay no less honour to the gallant man than they did to those who were more fortunate in surviving their own deeds. After reading the record of the brave act of Serjeant Gill, the Lord Mayor proposed "That the Council record it's profound admiration of the gallantry and self-sacrifice displayed by the late Serjeant Albert Gill, V.C., a citizen of Birmingham, who gave his life for his comrades and by his death showed a great example to others; and that a copy of this resolution be engrossed and framed and handed to Mrs. Gill, his widow, with an expression of the sympathy of the Council with her in her bereavement." (Hear, hear.)

Alderman Sir William Bowater seconded the resolution, which was carried amid applause.



The Hall of Memory Centenary Square Birmingham

www.hallofmemory.co.uk/gallery

There are other memorials to Serjeant Albert Gill V.C.

The Victoria Cross Commemorative Paving Stone, Walk of Heroes, Hall of Memory, Centenary Square, Birmingham.

Serjeant Gill V.C. is remembered along with those who fought and died in the First World War on the Royal Mail - Hockley Branch Office War Memorial Plaque.
Royal Mail Delivery Office, 23-27 Hockley Hill, B18 5AP.
<http://www.royalmailmemorials.com>

The War memorial of St. Peter's Church, Springhill. The church is now closed but the memorial has been moved to St. John's and St. Peter's Church, Darnley Road, Ladywood, Birmingham. Currently believed to stand in The Bell Tower

Serjeant GILL was buried, after exhumation, at Delville Wood Cemetery, Longueval, now known as Delville Wood Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery. This is in the Somme battlefield area. His grave reference is Plot 4, Row 3, Grave 3
<http://www.cwgc.org>



Photos with kind permission of Mick McCann www.britishwargraves.co.uk

Serjeant Albert Gill's widow was Rosetta FURZE.

Albert had married Rosetta, a 27 year old spinster, on the 4th April 1910 at St. Peter's Church, in the Parish of Birmingham.
Albert was 30 years old, a bachelor, son of Henry GILL. His occupation was given as a Tube Drawer, probably in a Bedstead works as in the 1911 census.
Rosetta was a Servant giving her father's name as Richard FURZE, a Builder.
They gave their address as 62 Steward Street.
The witnesses were Harry GILL and Elizabeth BATE.
[GRO Q2 1910 Birmingham 06d 145](#)

It would appear that Albert and Rosetta had two children, both deceased by 29th November 1916, the day Rosetta received her husband's V.C. from King George V. I believe the children were:-

Albert John Harry GILL born 28 April 1911, 1/17 Aberdeen Street, baptised on 4th June 1911 at St. Cuthberts, Winson Green. His death was registered in Birmingham 1915 Q2 6D 184 aged 3 years and a burial recorded at Witton Cemetery on section 9 in Grave 3292.

Henry GILL possible birth registered Birmingham 1914 Q1 6D 322. Possible death registered 1915 Aston Q1 6D 645 aged 1 year and a 1915 burial recorded at Witton Cemetery.

Albert Gill was born on the 8th September 1879 at 83 Hospital Street, in the district of St. George, Birmingham to Harry Gill and his wife Sophia Ashton.

Sophia was born in 1861, at Gaolford, St. Lawrence, Ludlow, Shropshire.

[GRO Birmingham 1879 Q4 6D 142](#) [Shropshire Baptism Archive P176/A/2/4](#)

Sophia died in 1899 aged 38 years; the same year their youngest son Samuel died aged 10 years.

[GRO Birmingham 1899 Q3 6D 153](#) [GRO Birmingham 1899 Q3 6D 160](#)

Albert had several siblings. All except Harry died in childhood.

Harry 1878-1947; Richard 1882-1886; Edwin 1884-1885; Samuel 1889-1899;
Apparent twins Emily and Jane 1891-1891 and Beatrice 1897-1902.

Using details given on census returns, Albert was working in Industrial Birmingham as a Tube Drawer, seemingly in a Bedstead Works. He joined the British Post Office in March of 1914 before joining the Kings Royal Rifle Company, qualifying date 9th November 1914.

Albert Gill was 36 years old when he was killed during the battle for Delville Wood, Somme, France, during World War One.

His widow Rosetta went on to marry Walter Curtis Christopher REED on 6th August 1917. Walter died on 16th March 1919. He is buried in Warstone Lane Cemetery, Birmingham - Burial number 84006 Vault J3.

Walter's parents, Walter John George REED and Emma, formerly PITTAWAY are both buried at Warstone Lane Cemetery.

Rosetta then married Robert Price on 14th February 1920. Robert died on the 15th April 1934. His death was registered by his sister-in-law Edith Anne Price. It appears Rosetta and Robert had separated as he is registered at the same address as a Jessie Louisa Weaver on the Electoral registers of 1927 and 1930.

They had a son "R" Price, who registered Rosetta's death on 31st March 1941, when they were living at 171 Camp Hill Birmingham 12.