

WILLIAM EDWARD TAYLOR WW1 WAR DETAILS
AND PERSONAL HISTORY



PERSONAL DETAILS

NAME : WILLIAM EDWARD TAYLOR

DOB: 18th December 1891

Died: 7th May 1979 aged 87

AGE AT OUTBREAK OF WAR: 22

NUMBER: 2684 1ST/1ST BATTALION HERTS REGIMENT

Then 265603 which is confirmed by a postcard found in wallet which is from cousin Ethel dated 1st June 1917 and postmarked from Clapham SW London. This gives his unit as No 4 Company 16 Platoon

RANK: Private promoted to Lance Corporal – early 1917. Then at some stage to Corporal by end of WW1.

ROLE : Initially a full time Medic/Stretchers Bearer then around 1917 attached to a Lewis Gun section.

DECORATIONS:

MILITARY MEDAL & BAR

Awarded on 22nd December 1916 for actions on 13th November 1916.

Bar Awarded 27th September 1917 for action on 31st July 1917.

MONS STAR – awarded to those on active service before 22nd Nov 1914 and therefore could call themselves “The Old Contemptibles”

WAR MEDAL

VICTORY MEDAL

INJURIES: A photograph of Cprl W E Taylor, which was taken I think towards the end of WW1 shows him with 2 wound stripes on his left forearm of his uniform.

W E Taylor was also awarded the Defence Medal as he was a member of the Civil Defence during WW2.



Origin of “The Old Contemptibles”

The name comes from a command given by Kaiser Wilhelm to his military commander on the 19th August 1914 which reads as follows :-

“It is my Royal and Imperial Command that you concentrate your energies for the immediate present upon one single purpose, and that is, that you address all your skill and all the valour of my soldiers to exterminate the treacherous English and walk over General French’s contemptible little army”

HERTFORDSHIRE REGIMENT COMPANYS

Herts Regiment 1st Battalion formed in 1908 following separation from the 1st & 2nd Volunteer Battalions of The Bedfordshire Regiment.

A Company	Hertford, Watton & Lt Berkhamstead.
B Company	St. Albans
C Company	Bishops Stortford, Sawbridgeworth, Ware & Widford.
D Company	Watford
E Company	Welwyn, Hatfield & Stevenage.
F Company	Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamstead, Tring & Ivinghoe.
G Company	Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock, Royston & Ashwell
H Company	Waltham Cross, Hoddesdon, Wormley & Cheshunt.
Machine Gun Section	Stevenage
Corps of Drums	Ware

Mobilised 4/8/1914 – Herts Territorials were at their annual camp at Ashridge when war declared. Then moved to Rougham in Suffolk for a little over 2 months where they were billeted in polo pony stables.



See Reg Burch War Memories book for details of his war. The picture of group at Rougham includes WE Taylor (back row 3rd from left) and Reg Burch (front right).

Due to severe losses within the regular army the territorial's were sent over to replace them. On the morning of November 5th they entrained at Bury St Edmunds en route for Southampton. They sailed on a cattle boat named the City of Chester in the early hours of November 6th.

Known as the "Herts Terriers" or "Herts Greyhounds".

Territorial Unit join the BEF in France. Arrived at Le Harve 5/11/1914

As the 1st Battalion arrived in a war active area before 22/11/1914 all soldiers entitled to the 1914 Star medal “Mons Star” and could call themselves “The Old Contemptibles”.

First Battle of Ypres – first under fire 11/11/1914 – Nonne Bosschen (3 miles east of Ypres), which was near the small hamlet of Westhoek.

After 2 days retired to kilometre 3 on Ypres-Menin Road. Returned to the front line at Zillebeke.

20/11/1914 – joined 4 Guards Brigade of 2nd Infantry Battalion for a months training at Meteren SW of Ypres.

22/12/1914 – 1st Battalion left Meteren and marched 19 miles to the outskirts of Bethune accompanied by the Prince of Wales. (See Mercury report below). Bethune over the course of the next few year was to become the Herts Regiments ‘home from home’ as they spent many weeks billeted around the town.

They went into the front line on Christmas Eve at Dead Cow Farm in front of Richebourg.

William Taylor would have been issued with the Queen Mary tins filled with chocolate and cigarettes. Although common belief is that there was a ‘truce’ on Xmas Day in fact there was fighting involving the Herts Regiment and 2 men were killed.



In 1966 the Hertfordshire Mercury reported the following:-

Christmas Day in the Ypres sector trenches in 1914 – the first Christmas Day of World War 1. Germans were singing carols in their trenches to the tunes of “O Come All Ye Faithfull” and “Silent Night” and the British Expeditionary Forces shouted greeting across to them.

This was one of the memories recalled at the Hertford and District Old Contemptible Association Dinner by 76 year old Mr Willian Hills of Musley Hill, Ware. Said Mr Hills: “ It was a very cold, frosty day and very quiet – there was hardly any firing at all.”

Another memory recalled was that by Mr Bill Taylor, 74 of Hertford. “On a march to Bethune I shared my rations with a stranger wearing a large trench coat. It was not until later I heard he was the Prince of Wales.”

About 25 Old Contempitibles referred to in the association as “Chums” were at the annual dinner at the White Hart Hotel, Salisbury Square, Hertford.

Battalion reorganised in New Year – C&D Company became No. 3 Company assume A Company became No. 1 Company. Jan 1915 spent in the Flanders mud with the rest of the Guards Brigade. Affectionately know as the “Herts Guards” as they were with the Coldstream, Grenadier and Irish Guards.

First intensive offensive action 6/2/1915 at Cruinchy Brickstachs east of Bethune, near Givenchy and Essars on the Pont Fix Road. Although not in the thickest of the fighting on 6th Feb – gruesome task of burying the dead. On the 7th they found themselves in and exposed position and were heavily shelled.

At the end of Feb 1915 moved into the Reserve Corp at Bethune moving out occasionally to dig trenches at Givenchy.

May 1915 – Battle of Festubert – first large-scale casualties. They then moved back into the front line with the Irish Guards at Le Touret. This was the first time they had gone “over the top” and suffered major casualties. Although the battle started on 9th May the Herts guards did not take part in the initial phases of the battle. The 4th Guards were in the south and were allotted the section between Rue de Marais and Violaines. On the 17th May they moved up in support of the Irish Guards, some ¾ mile to the east of Rue de Lepinette. At 4.30 am on 18th May Irish Guards supported by No 1 Company (Hertford?) launched their attack. Irish guards suffered very heavy losses. They dug in that night and the next day shells constantly dropping. Relieved on the next day and returned to their billets at Le Touret before marching back to Bethune the next day before going on to Labeuvriere the following day.

The battalion returned to their billets at Bethune on the 19th May to reform. During the course of WW1 the Herts Regiment spent significant time on and off in the Bethune area.

Throughout June they were in and out of the line with the Grenadier Guards in the vicinity of Vermelles. Until mid August they spent spells in the line in the Cuinchy area with breaks at the Montmorcey Barracks. On the 15th August 1st Battalion marched back from the Front to billets at Beuvry. On 19th August the Guards left the area.

August 1915 – 1/1 Battalion replaced in 4 Guards Brigade and transferred to 6 Infantry Brigade still within 2nd Infantry Division. The 27th August saw them digging a new communications trench from Pont Fix and Windy Corner road to the junction of Whitehall and Hatfield Road. On 4th September they marched to Cambrin, where they were in and out of the line, before returning to Bethune.

On the 17th September the battalion moved from Bethune to Gonnechen and a few days later to the Annequin-Cambrin area.

25/9/1915 – Battle of Loos lasted 10 days then 9 months of inactivity. Their division was on the northern fringe of the action with the main fighting taking place some 5 miles to the south.

From the 27th December until the 15th January the battalion trained at Ham en Artois. On the 16th Jan 1916 they marched back to Bethune and the following day into the support area at Givenchy where they settled into the line at Richebourg St Vaast.

Further spells in the line followed in the Festubert area until the 28th Feb when the battalion was allotted to the GHQ Troops area. During which time they were transferred from 6 Brigade to 118 Brigade of 39th Infantry Division. Following inspections by the “Top Brass” the battalion joined moved near to Sercus on the 8th March before moving back to the Festubert area. Two months of in and out of the lines in the Festubert and Givenchy sectors followed before the 1st Battalion was pulled back for a spell of rest and recuperation at Ferme du Roi near Bethune on the 28th May. Their respite was short-lived and they were soon back to the normal trench routine in the Givenchy sector.

The following picture was taken at the Battle of Loos at what looks like a casualty station in the trenches. A number of soldiers are wearing SB arm bands. William Taylor is the soldier kneeling down in the bottom right hand corner.



On the 1st July the battalion was back in the line at Jeunne du Bois where they remained for 3 days before marching back to the Givenchy-Cuinchy sector. They stayed here until the 24th with both sides raiding each others trenches but neither gaining any success. When the battalion came out of the line they marched back to Goore where they spent a couple of nights before marching on to Bethune and were billeted in a local school, the Ecole des Jeunes Filles. They probably returned to the lines on the 30th July.

Battles of the Somme began 1 July 1916 – not involved early on. In August they moved from east of Bethune to west of Thiepval. On the 10th August the battalion came out of the line and returned to Bethune. The next day they marched at the head of the 118th Brigade on their way to Gustieville by way of Cauchy a la Tour and Mouchy Breton. They were destined for “pastures new” on the Somme.

Oct/Nov 1916 Battle for Ancre Heights – the Herts Regiment was the right flank battalion who advanced down across this field starting from the Schwarben Redoubt in the distance, towards a German machine gun position from where the picture was taken.



On Nov 13 1916 the following action took place – extract from Herts Regiment War Diary 1916

12 and 13-11-16. In the evening the battalion left billets and marched in light fighting order to the SCHWABEN REDOUBT where it formed up in assembly positions in four lines. At 5.45am on the 13th just before dawn and in a thick mist the guns opened fire, the Bn went forward, the Cambridgeshires on the left and the East Lancs (19th Division) on the right. Direction was kept and the Bn had very soon taken all its objectives, capturing the whole of the HANSA line and advancing to a depth of 1,600 yards. Over 250 prisoners were captured and many Germans were killed. The new line was consolidated and the Bn held the new position till the night of the 14th/15th. During the period the Germans made three small raids against the bombing post on our left but these were successfully driven back. In all these operations 9 machine guns were captured. The Bn was relieved on the night of 14th/15th by the Kings Own and marched back to huts near AVELUY, its last platoon leaving the trenches at 5.0am.

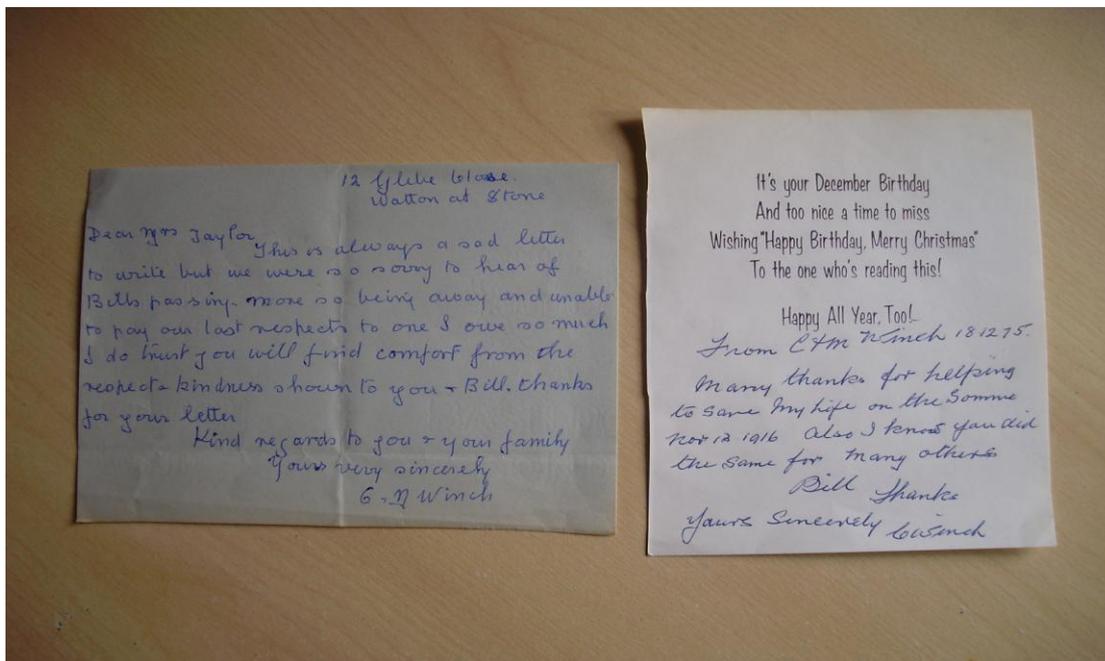
During the period our casualties were; 7 Officers wounded, 20 OR killed, 5 OR missing, and 115 OR wounded. The Officers were Captain F. PAWLE, Lieut. F.R. HART, 2/Lieut. G. McMULLEN, 2/Lieut. R.W. FRITH, 2/Lieut. J.R. KEMBLE, 2/Lieut. F. JONES and 2/Lieut. J.R. JOHNSTONE – the latter remaining at duty.



The above picture was taken on the slopes leading down to the River Ancre near St Pierre Divion and is the battlefield where 2584 Cprl Bill Taylor actions on 13/11/16 resulted in the award of a Military Medal.

A note inside a birthday card from Mr Cecil Winch dated Dec 18 1975 says the following

'Many thanks for helping to save my life on the Somme Nov 13 1916. Also I know you did the same for many others'.



As far as we know Mr C Winch was wounded and lying in no mans land. Cprl Taylor went out and rescued him and saved his life. The Casualty list for this date lists a C Winch receiving severe facial wounds which left him hospitalised for 7 months. Mr Winch lived at Watton at Stone near Hertford. Mr Winch also worked at shop in Byde Street, Hertford and passed by WE Taylor's house every day on his way to and from his shop.

The award of the Military Medal is recorded in the Herts Regiment War Diary as follows :-

22-12-16. It appeared in Divisional Routine Orders that the GOC II Corps had awarded the Military Medal to the undermentioned NCO's and men:

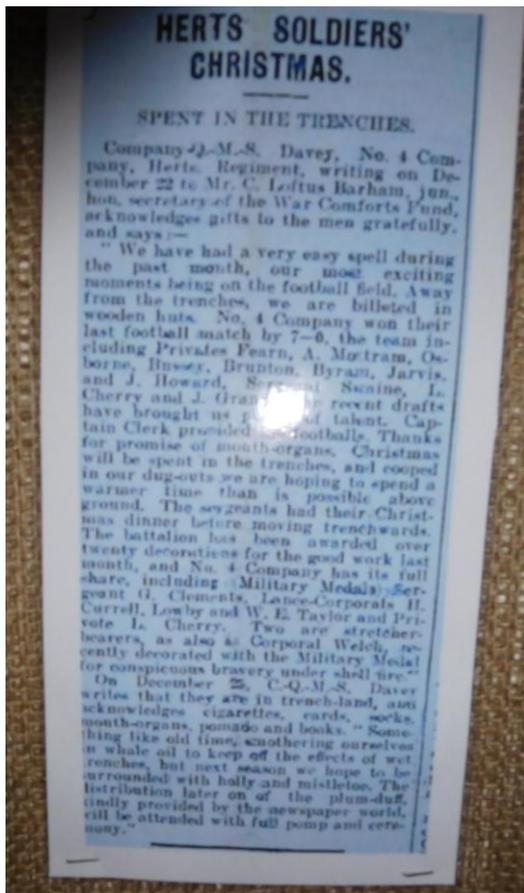
2584 Pte TAYLOR W.

The citation which appeared in Regimental records reads as follows:

2684 Pte. W. E. Taylor and 2208 Pte. L. Cherry, both of No 4 Coy - These two men who were Stretcher Bearers of No 4, Coy worked for 48 hours, practically without rest, evacuating our wounded as well as those of other Battalions, and wounded prisoners. After the new Front Line had been dug, both these Stretcher Bearers showed conspicuous gallantry in attending to the wounded in full view of the enemy under shell fire, where the trench was being blown in.

End of Nov 1916 – 39th Division moved back to Ypres sector. Next 7 months uneventful.

The picture below is a press cutting from a local Herts newspaper describing the Herts Reg Xmas of 1916 which was in the trenches at Canal Bank which was north of Ypres. The article describes a football match, preparations for Xmas in the trenches and a list of recent decorations. Pte W E Taylor is mentioned as a Military Medal recipient along with Pte Cherry.



Sometime between December 1916 and July 1917 Pte Taylor is promoted to Cpl. His Army No: also changes to 265603

By June 1917 the Hertfordshire Regiment had been pulled back from their positions to train for the upcoming summer offensive, the third battle of Ypres. During this period the men of the Hertfordshire Regiment trained on scale models of the ground they were to attack, with each man learning his task in an attempt to increase the chances of success. By this time Bill had ceased to act as a Stretcher Bearer and was now operating a 'Lewis' Light Machine Gun.

By 30th July 1917 the 1st Herts had completed their training and made their way up to the front-lines north of Ypres, to the west of the village of St Julien (Sint Juliaan), the final objective of the day. The Herts Regiment were located where the site of New Irish Farm cemetery now stands before heading up to the front line. It would be here that the wounded and dead would be brought back to the casualty station at New Irish Farm. Many Herts Regiment soldiers are buried here and many other never found remain in the fields near St Julian.

Whilst the Somme is infamous for the 'mud' and shell holes the landscape on 31st July 1917 was not too muddy and there had only been heavy rain in the last couple of days. The landscape which they attacked across was fairly flat with crops growing and very few craters.

At 3.50 am on 31st July 1917 the 'Battle of Pilkem' commenced, with troops advancing under cover of an effective artillery barrage. Within two hours the leading troops had captured both the 1st and 2nd German lines and met relatively little resistance, greatly helped by accurate artillery fire and tanks. At this time Bill and his comrades were in support but their turn was soon to come. After capturing the German second line the Herts were moved forward to lead the attack on 3rd and final objective of the day, the German 'Langemarck Line'. Unbeknownst to them, the first two lines had been left only lightly defended in favour of reinforcing this third objective.

From around 9am the Herts settled down astride the banks of the Steenbeek River just to the north of St Julien, with Bill Taylor and No 4 Company holding the left part of the line alongside troops of the 4/5th Black Watch, awaiting the order to attack.



The above picture shows the field across which the Herts Regiment advanced from the banks of the Steenbeek (towards the trees in distance).

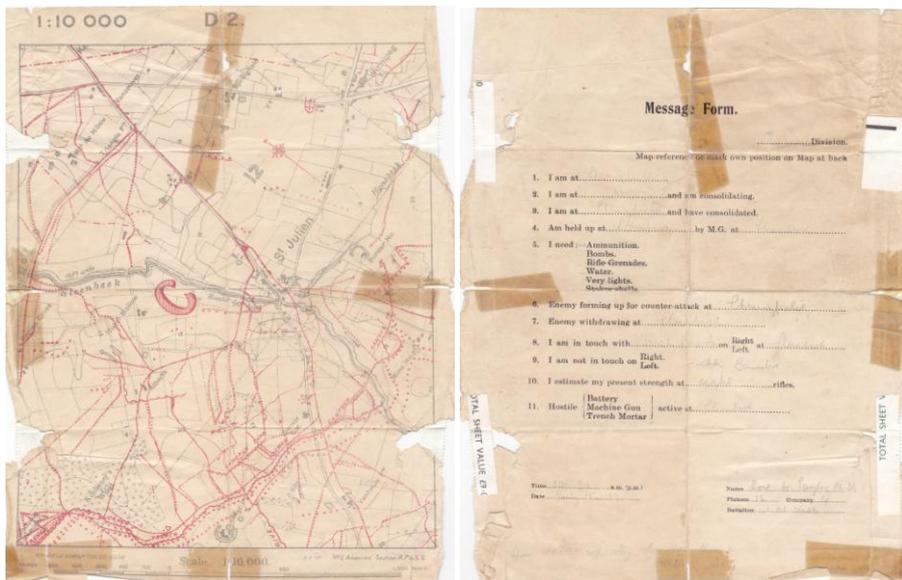
During this pause in the fighting, the allied plan was to bring forward artillery batteries to bombard the 3rd German line but tragically, due to the state of the heavily shelled and waterlogged ground, the guns were unable to move and so the attacking troops faced a heavily occupied and almost completely untouched defensive system. Despite this information being known and sent back to Divisional command, the order to continue the advance was given.

At 10.10am the men of the 1st Herts left the relatively safety of the river bank and advanced eastwards towards their objective, some 600 yards distant. Almost immediately they came under heavy shell fire, losing their Commanding Officer within yards of leaving the Steenbeek. Adding insult to injury is the fact that the two tanks detailed to support the advance both became bogged down immediately, leaving only infantry to attack the enemy positions.

As Bill and his men made their way up the gentle slope leading from the river, they came under a withering attack from enemy machine gun and rifle fire which reportedly 'shattered the line' as men were struck and forced the Battalion to go ground. Despite the odds, the Battalion soon continued its advance and managed to gain a further advance of some 200 yards or so, losing men all the time. During this period Bill Taylor was busily involved in employing the firepower of his Lewis Gun against enemy strongpoints.

As the Battalion continued their advance, the last of the twenty officers that had started the advance fell, leaving command to the seriously wounded Regimental Sergeant Major. It was during this last stage of advance that Bill was struck by a piece of shrapnel, hitting him in the chest. In an incredible stroke of luck, the shell fragment lodged in his thick leather wallet stacked with family photographs, piercing all but the last photograph.

The Message Form (see photo below) found in wallet which is dated July 15 1917 places Cpl Taylor near St.Julien, which is in Belgium. He is 16 Platoon of 4 Company in 1st Herts Battalion as part of the 39th Division. The faint pencil writing makes it difficult to place his exact location on the map. The message is saying that he is held up Ph???field near the Steenbeek by a German machine gun. He needs ammunition and bombs.



Further to a discussion with Dan Hill and Paul Johnson of the Herts at War project their opinion is that the message form was used during a training exercise in days leading up to the first day of action (31st July). This would account for it still being in his wallet.

The Message Form which names the platoon that William was in is also the same platoon that Private Percy Buck was in. Percy Buck's story, also remembered in detail by the HAW project is that on the 31st July 1917 he was mortally wounded within yards of where William Taylor would also have been. His dying wish was that a photo be returned to his family which was carried out by a German soldier who found his body.



The wallet and its contents of photos of family and fellow soldiers in fact saved William Taylor's life presumably around this time as the message form and the photos show damage from a shrapnel or bullet which went through his breast pocket and then was stopped by the wallet and its contents.

Despite a broken rib and serious pain, Bill continued the advance. It soon transpired that the few men who had crossed no man's land had reached an impenetrable belt of barbed wire, 10 yards deep and covered by heavy machine guns, blocking any further advance to the enemy trenches. Any time a man attempted to approach the wire he immediately became a casualty.

The Battalion War Diary reported the events several days later:

“The remainder of the Battalion, being unable to get through the wire and suffering severe casualties from enfilade MG fire & the Germans making a strong counter attack from our left flank about this time, had to fall back having suffered exceptionally heavy casualties”.

As the enemy counter attack and threatened to envelope and annihilate the shattered remnants of the Battalion, they had no choice but to conduct a bitter fighting-withdrawal, returning to the Steenbeek River some two hours after they had left, minus every one of their officers and 75% of their 620 men, killed, wounded and missing. Bill was one of the fortunate ones to return. It was during this fighting withdrawal that Bill and his Lewis gun played a pivotal role, setting up a makeshift line of defence to hold off the enemy counter-attack whilst his comrades withdrew across no-man's-land.

The picture below is the field in which Cpl Taylor and Private John Goodwin fought a rearguard fighting retreat back towards the point where the picture was taken from. Laying down covering fire they managed to hold up the German counter attack to allow those who were able to retreat back to the Steenbeek. Unfortunately for Private Goodwin he was mortally wounded during this courageous act and is buried in Bedford Road Cemetery, south of Ypres. Somehow although wounded earlier in the day Cpl Bill Taylor survived.



Testament to the devastation suffered that day are the words of Company Quartermaster Sergeant Gordon Fisher, the CQMS of Bill's own No 4 Company. Fisher had been left behind during the attack with orders to bring up rations for the men after the fight. After searching without success, he met the Brigadier General commanding 118th Brigade in a German dugout just outside St Julien:

I said to the General, “Sir I am looking for the Hertfordshire Regiment, can you tell me where they are?” He looked at me blankly for a moment, the whole pillbox rocking as if we were aboard a ship. Finally, he said, “I’m sorry Quarters, there is no Hertfordshire Regiment”.

After the dust had settled, Bill Taylor was singled out once again for his coolness and courage under fire. He was awarded the Bar (second award) to the Military Medal, the first man in the Regiment to achieve the distinction. In fact only 5,700 soldiers during WW1 received a MM and Bar.

The following extract from the Herts Regiment War Diary explains the events of July 31 1917.

31-7-17. About 3.50am the Bn moved forward in 4 lines behind the 116th & 117th Inf. Bdes. east of the river STEENBEEK. Up till this time the casualties had been very slight indeed but as the Bn advanced from the STEENBEEK toward the LANGEMARCK line (the Bn objective) casualties grew heavier from sniper and machine gun fire. However the Bn continued advancing. About half way to the objective some of No.3 Coy came upon a German strong point which they gallantly charged, capturing or killing most of the garrison and sending the remainder back as prisoners. On reaching the enemy wire this was found to be practically undamaged (except in one place) & very thick. **2/Lieut MARCHINGTON** & a handful of men of No.3 Coy got through the only gap and got into the enemy trench & killed a lot of Germans. The remainder of the Bn, being unable to get through the wire and suffering severe casualties from enfilade MG fire & the Germans making a strong counter attack from our left flank about this time, had to fall back having suffered exceptionally heavy casualties. The remnants of the battalion subsequently dug themselves in in line with the 1st Cambes Regt. on the west side of the STEENBEEK.

Casualties to Officers were:

Lt. Col. F. PAGE D.S.O., Captain S.H. LOWRY M.C., Captain A.R. MILNE, 2/Lts GALLO, SECRETAN, SCOTT & MACINTOSH killed. [Comment; **Lt. Col. Frank PAGE D.S.O., Captain Sidney Henry LOWRY M.C., Captain Alexandra Richard MILNE, 2/Lts Antonio Marie GALLO, Reginald Herbert SECRETAN, Cecil SCOTT & Eric MACINTOSH**]

Lt LAKE, 2/Lts WALTHOW, THOMPSON & KING missing. [Comment; **Lt Frank Gilbert LAKE, 2/Lt Wilfred John THOMPSON** and **2/Lt Sydney KING** all found to be killed in action that day]

Lt HEAD & 2/Lts HARDY & FRANCIS wounded & missing. [Comment; **Lt Basil William HEAD** found to have been killed in action] **Captain FISHER, Captain C. CHARLES RAMC, & 2/Lts MARCHINGTON, EDWARDS, GILBEY & RITCHIE** wounded.

Estimated casualties to the other ranks were 29 killed, 5 missing believed killed, 132 missing, 68 wounded & missing, 223 wounded & 2 died of wounds, making a total of 459 casualties to other ranks.

Died of wounds; Officers 2, OR's 6.

Missing; Officers 9, OR's 120.

Wounded; Officers 8, OR's 180.

A latter entry shows that on this day L/Cpl Taylor was awarded a bar to his Military Medal.

The following decorations were awarded for gallantry & devotion to duty on 31st July (39 Div. R.O. No. 1061, 1039).

Bar to Military Medal:

265603 L/Cpl W.E. TAYLOR

Dan Hill of Herts at War has confirmed that 4 Company were on the left side of the map once across the Steenbeek. They then got held up by the machine gun at Triangle Farm. Most casualties arose in the fields between Triangle Farm and Springfield. This action and the following days are now better known as Pashcendale. This was the largest loss of life that the Herts Regiment suffered in a single day during WW1.

20/9/1917 – Battle of Menin Road.

Jan 1918 – left Ypres sector moved to east of Amiens.

21/3/1918 – heavily engaged in the recapture of Epehy & St.Emile north west of St Quentin.

21/3/18 was also the start of the German Spring Offensive. The Herts Reg was part of the British 5th Army and they were holding trenches on the outskirts of Villiers Faucon. This was the start of the German Spring Offensive and they had identified this area as a weak point. The Herts Reg was being held in reserve digging back defensive trenches until they were called upon around 16:00. They defended desperately against by far the largest and most effective German attack of WW1.

The picture below shows the village of Villiers Faucon which the Herts Regiment tried to defend.



23/3/1918 – on the march again and put up stubborn resistance in the retreat towards the village of Clery where they dug in and defended a line of trenches behind the village running down the River Somme.

24/3/1918 – after intense bombardment Germans attacked in large numbers forcing retreat to west of Fevillers and on to Maricourt where the entire 2 Company of the battalion was surrounded and taken prisoner.

25/3/1918 – Battalion marched from Maricourt and crossed the Somme at Cappy. By crossing the Somme this provided a natural barrier to the advancing Germans and provided some respite from the relentless attacks allowing a safer and more organised retreat. The picture below shows the bridge at Cappy over which the Herts Guards retreated.



31/3/1918 - a few days of fighting a rearguard action arrive at village of Longevieux on the outskirts of Amiens. After 10 days of continual fighting Herts Guards to re-gather and count their considerable loses. During this period the men of the Herts retreated 44 miles, losing 20 of their officers and 75% of their fighting strength in the process.

31/3/1918 – From Guignemicourt the remainder of the Herts Guards travelled to billets at St Marin-au-Laert, near St. Omer and then back to the Ypres battlefield. Joined up with the remnants of the 11th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment. Moved to Otago Camp near Hooge before going into the Voormezele sector to strengthen the support lines. The purpose of this move north was that the Herts Reg had suffered severe losses and needed a quiet sector to rest and strengthen. Unfortunately this did not happen as the next phase of the German Spring Offensive was to start in the Herts sector.

The Third Battle of Lys – April 1918.

25/4/1918 – At Wytchaete relatively quiet but then heavy bombardment and attack which was repulsed. Remained under heavy fire until 28th when they were relieved and marched back to Devonshire Camp where they rested after 14 days in trenches.

9/5/1918 – Back on the Somme at Candas.

11/5/1918 – Returning to the front line as they marched through the village of Fonquevillers subjected to a heavy gas attack in which only 2 of 600 men not affected. The development of new gas mixes meant that the gas masks issued could not deal with the particular version used that day. The Herts Battalion was virtually wiped out and was no longer a fighting unit for the next few weeks. This would be the end for many of the original Herts men who had survived so far. Some did recover in a few days or weeks but for others this was

the end as they failed the medicals as a result of the lasting effects of the gas. Very few of the original Herts Guards are now left.

As far as our family is aware Bill never spoke about being gassed, especially at Fonquevillers. The probability is that if he was with the Herts Reg he was gassed as only 2 men not affected. Many of the Herts Reg were seriously affected by the gas and it was the end of the war for many of them. We can only assume that Bill may have only had minor effects and was back in service within a few days. During his later life he never showed any long-term effects of being gassed.

They then spent next few weeks training replacements at Vauchelles south west of Doullens. As a result of the losses the Herts Reg were having to accept men from all over. Men from Beds 6th Battalion just changed their cap badges! The situation was that very few of the original Herts Guards still remained.

25/6/1918 – back in reserve trenches near Fonquevillers.

July 1918 was spent in the lines at Pigeon Wood until it was relieved by 1st Battalion Essex Reg on 16/7/18 and then moved to camp at Squastre.

8/8/1918 – Allies start their Somme offensive where initially held in reserve in the Pigeon Wood area, which was presumably around Squastre and Bucquoy.

23/8/1918 – took part in the attack against a railway cutting in front of Achiet le Grand, which was taken and broke through the Hindenburg Line.

Most of September spent attacking enemy lines near Warlincourt before moving back into the trenches at “Dead Mans Corner” near Gouzeaucourt where they had started their long retreat under the weight of the German Spring Offensive the previous March.

It was on 18/9/18 between Havrincourt and Trescault that Nos 3 & 4 Company after an intense barrage the enemy attacked at 5:15am and after hard fighting gained a footing in our advanced posts. These were trenches that had previously been dug and used in earlier actions. The enemy was later driven back to his own lines. It was mainly due to the exploits of 2/Lt Frank Edward Young that this was achieved. He was in No3 company, possibly fighting along side Bill Taylor in No4 company.

The picture below shows the view looking across no-mans land from the Herts trenches across which the Germans advanced on 18/9/18. The grave of Frank Young in Hermies cemetery is also shown below.



8/10/1918 – involved in the battle to recapture Cambrai crossing the Selle River and advanced towards Caudry and the villages of Gaissignes.

4/11/1818 – The Battalion launches its final attack and successfully captured the villages of Chissignes and Louvignes and pushed forward to the village of Lolimetz. This was the furthest advance by the Herts Reg in the final days of WW1. Unfortunately 8 soldiers lost there lives and are buried in the local cemetery at Ghissignes. They then came out of the lines for the last time and withdrew to Ghissignes. During the HAW tour in August 2018 we visited

11/11/1918 – Armistice Day, found the 1st Battalion Herts Regiment on the march. The Bn marched back to BETHENCOURT and remained there in training until Dec 1st '18. During a HAW visit to Bethencourt in August 2018 the actual buildings where the Herts Reg were billeted were visited. The farmhouse and adjoining barn are pictured below. The farm fields behind was where the tents were erected.



The Herts Reg then marched to Bry where they remained until mid December. The Battalion left Bry on 14/12/1918 and marched to Ransart, north east of Charleroi. This was to be home until the end of Feb 1919. Here gradual demobilisation took place

Bill Taylor remained in the Hertfordshire Regiment throughout the Great War, taking part in many major battles, receiving 3 wounds in total. On 11th November 1918, his war finally came to an end, four years and five days after arriving on the Western Front.



On 24th March 1919 Cpl William Taylor was awarded a buttonhole badge no 55 by the 1st Hertfordshire Regiment, British Expeditionary Force. This was on account of and in recognition of his services overseas. (Certificate attached)

During WW2 William Taylor was a warden in the Civil Defence Organisation in Hertford. (Certificates attached)

On 9th June 1969 William Taylor was a guest at the unveiling of the plaque commemorating the colours of the 1st Battalion The Hertfordshire Regiment when they were laid up in All Saints Church, Hertford. The services was attended by the Colonel in Chief of the Royal Anglian Regiment Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother. (Order of Service attached)

On 12th July 1974 William Taylor attended the Corporation of London luncheon at the Mansion House in celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of the Old Contemptibles.

On the 23rd July 1974 Mr & Mrs William Taylor were invited to a garden party at Buckingham Palace.

On the 4th August 1974 William Taylor attended the last National Service of the Old Contemptibles Association held at the Royal Garrison Church in Aldershot. (Copy of speech by Her Majesty attached)

PERSONAL BACKGROUND INFO

William Taylor came from a family who have resided in Hertford for many generations. He was the 2nd oldest of 7 children (3 boys and 4 girls).

William Taylor's occupation was as a gardener and he worked at Westfield House in West Street, Hertford. The owner was a Miss McMullen was a close relative of the brewing family based in Hertford. He worked for them as a gardener until he retired in the 60's. There were members of the McMullen family in the Herts Regiment and there must be a possibility that William Taylor was known to them.

William Taylor married Gladys Burgess in 1928 and they had twins William and Lilla in 1930 but unfortunately Gladys passed away 3 days after their birth following post delivery complications. William Taylor with the help of his close family and friends brought up his children. He married for a second time in 1943 to Joyce Watts.

William Taylor past away in May 1979 after a short illness. He is buried in North Road Cemetery, Hertford. He is survived by his children William & Lilla. William had 2 boys David and Graham whilst Lilla had 3 girls Jane, Ruth & Sarah

Like many of the old soldiers who fought and survived WW1 William Taylor did not talk much about his experiences to his family. They were aware that he must have done some heroic deeds to be awarded the MM and Bar and they knew he had rescued Private Winch from No Mans Land. They were also aware that his wallet containing family photos had saved his life at some stage during WW1. However they were unaware of his actions at St Julian or the full extent of the numerous rescues he made from No Mans land on the Somme.

Many people have wondered why the old soldiers did not talk about there experiences. Max Arthur, a military historian, interviewed many of them in the later stages of there lives, has suggested that they did not want to contaminate the minds of their family and friends with the horrors that they had witnessed. It would have been difficult to talk to them about events that they had not gone through themselves. This is where the Old Contemptibles Association acted as a self help group to overcome what we would now call post traumatic stress. There may also have been a sense of guilt coming back home and facing the distraught families of local comrades who they had seen killed and could not do anything to save them because of the training they had received. Many of the old soldiers only 'opened up' during their final days as some sort of release from the horrible memories that they had bottled up over the years. In fact following the interviews Max Arthur had with the 21 men, 9 passed away within 2 weeks of their interview. It was if they could finally rest in peace.

BBC 3CR – Video Links

360 – Final Summing up.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlePIwsj8ig>

Battle of Ancre – MM Citation Moment

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75oZeUrM_ZY

Mr Winch

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=canMZw_p0lY