

Individual Summary

24 December 2011

Name: Francis HIGGINS
Sex: Male
Father: Roland HIGGINS (1850-1930)
Mother: Johanna MICKLEWRIGHT (1852-1935)
The youngest of eight children

Individual Facts

Birth	22 July 1889	Childs Ercall, Shropshire, England ¹
Residence	1891 (age 2)	Childs Ercall, Shropshire, England ²
Residence	1901 (age 12)	Childs Ercall, Shropshire, England ³
Residence	1911 (age 22)	Pigman/Groom on farm, a boarder with the Timmins family. Head of the household was Mr. Josiah Timmins a cowman on farm aged 62; 2 Apley Farm Cottage Norton, Shifnal, Shropshire
Death	7 July 1917 (age 27)	France and Flanders



Death (7 July 1917):

Frank or Francis Higgins was the youngest child of Joanna (Johanna) nee Micklewright and Roland (Rowland) Higgins of Stoke Heath. He had been born at Childs Ercall Shropshire on 22 July 1889.

Though Frank lived largely at home till he went to the First World War he was known to go missing for long spells,⁴ who knows where?

In The First World War Frank enlisted 1st Btn. Kings Shropshire Light Infantry at Bridgenorth. He was Private 19879. His Regimental number shows he enlisted as a regular soldier and was not conscripted.

He was killed in action in France on 7th July 1917 aged 27 and is buried at the Philosophe British Cemetery Mazingarbe, grave II S 3,⁵ above left. On the foot of the stone is engraved the somewhat enigmatic words 'Lift thou the veil'. The engraving (but not the stone) would have been chosen and paid for by his family.

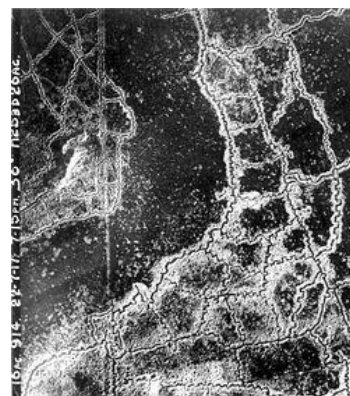
He was killed only three weeks after his eldest brother, Charles.

Frank's service records do not survive but there are records from which the circumstances of his death can be constructed.

The History of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry in the Great War 1914-1918' gives details of the incident at the trenches at Hulluch on 7 July 1917 in which Francis, it is virtually certain, was killed.

The History was compiled in 1925 by Major W. de B. Wood who served with KSLI. His history is broken down into the events affecting the various Battalions of the K.S.L.I. and compiled from the Regimental diaries. In the forward of his book de B. Wood acknowledges its faults and shortcomings and points out that the diaries were written in extreme circumstances.

However despite de B. Wood's apology and modesty the diaries are a detailed and comprehensive account of the Regiment.



The Loos Hulluch trenches in July 1917

The diary recounts:-

'In the period up to 7th July 1917 the 1st Btn was billeted at Mazingarbe and Foquieres between periods of duty at the [Loos Hulluch] trenches. On 29 June it relieved the 1st Buffs.

On July 7th 1917 at 2.55 am a strong enemy raid was made on the sector held by 1st KSLI. After a severe bombardment, lasting for a quarter of an hour, a party of the enemy about 60 strong attempted to enter D Company's trenches. The raid was repulsed by rapid rifle fire and the assistance of two Lewis guns; the losses however were severe, amounting to 20 killed and 15 wounded.'

The aerial photograph, above right, of the trenches and no-man's land between Loos and Hulluch was taken on the 22 July 1917. The German trenches are on the right and bottom of the picture. The British trenches are in the top left. The vertical line passing through the photo is what remains of a road.

Several awards for gallantry were made in recognition of D Company's gallant manner of holding the line. One MM bar was awarded, 4 MMs and an MC. The Battalion was relieved that night returning to Mazingarbe but came back to the trenches on 12 July.

The 19 other men killed in the same engagement as Frank are all buried in the cemetery extension in Mazingarbe.⁶

Medals Francis was awarded:⁷

British War Medal

The British War Medal 1914-1920, authorised in 1919, was awarded to eligible service personnel and civilians alike. Qualification for the award varied slightly according to service. The basic requirement for army personnel and civilians was that they either entered a theatre of war, or rendered approved service overseas between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918. Service in Russia in 1919 and 1920 also qualified for the award.

Victory Medal

The Victory Medal 1914-1919 was also authorised in 1919 and was awarded to all eligible personnel who served on the establishment of a unit in an operational theatre. WW1 medals had the soldiers name and number engraved on the rim,

The 'Dead Mens' Penny

These commemorative medals were presented to the next-of-kin of the men and women who died in action in the Great War (1914-18). Many families refused to accept the 'Dead Mens' Penny'. The plaque was designed by Edward Carter Preston (1885-1965), a medalist/sculptor of Liverpool, who won a national competition to design the memorial plaque.

Most of the medals were manufactured at Woolwich Arsenal (London). In addition to this plaque or medal, families of the deceased would also have received an illuminated scroll in full colour and a printed letter from Buckingham Palace bearing the signature of the King.



Memorials

Frank lived an ordinary life but died an extraordinary death due to historic events. Had it not been for the First World War and the fact that he died during the course of it his life would probably not have been worthy of any particular mention. There is no known existing photograph of him.

Not only does he have a grave in France but he is named on the First World War Memorial at Cheswardine, Shropshire Church. Additionally his name is on the panel, above left, together with that of his brother Charles, at Hodnet Church. Also on the panel is the name of Frank and Charles' cousin, Jim Micklewright Shotton who died in service without ever leaving Shropshire or firing a shot, of pneumonia in 1918 aged 18.

Preparer: Christine Wibberley for *Trace Your Ancestry*

¹ Higgins Family Bible. GRO Index of Births Marriages and deaths

² 1891 England RG12; Piece: 2129; Folio 86; Page 11; GSU roll: 6097239.

³ 1901 England Census RG13; Piece: 2560; Folio: 75; Page: 10.

⁴ Reminiscence of Frank's Great Nephew Roland Higgins

⁵ www.cwgc.org

⁶ www.cwgc.org

⁷ *British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920 National Archives WO 372*