

Company Sergeant Major George Henry Antliff

Distinguished Conduct Medal

On the Belgrave Working Men's Club and Institute Roll of Honour CSM Antliff's name has been mis-transcribed as Antcliffe.

George Henry Antliff was born on 27th October 1886 in Norwell, Nottinghamshire, not far from Southwell. His parents, Samuel John Antliff and Ann Sarah Barker Antliff (née Godfrey) were both from the neighbouring parish of Cauntton and married there in 1878. Samuel worked as an agricultural labourer. Their first three children were born and baptised in Cauntton whilst George, the fourth child in their family of nine, and his younger brother Fred were both born and baptised in Norwell. Around 1890 the family moved to Leicester where Samuel now worked in the shoe trade. Four more children were all born there. By the time of the 1891 Census the family were living in Crane Street and in 1901 in Thomas Street. By 1906 they had moved to Marston Street.

In March 1901, now aged 14, George was employed as a shoe finisher. Three years later he signed with the Volunteer Militia, joining the 3rd Battalion Leicestershire Regiment on 15th March 1904, with service number 8829. He gave his address as Thomas Street and his occupation as shoe hand, employed by Pickard and Co of Framland Street. He fulfilled his annual drill attendance requirements and on 11th June 1906 was promoted to the rank of corporal. In the same year, immediately after his 20th birthday, he enlisted for a short service term with the Cheshire Regiment, signing on 1st November to serve 7 years with the colours, followed by 5 years in the Reserve. His service number was 8312. George gave his parents' address as 10 Marston Street and his place of birth was recorded as Southwell, rather than Norwell. In February 1907 he was posted to the 1st Battalion and the following year was passed fit for service in India, although during his term the 1st Battalion was stationed in Ireland whilst the 2nd Battalion undertook overseas duties.

Army life seemingly suited George: after 6 months' service and a gymnastics course his height had increased, he was awarded two good conduct badges, in 1908 and 1911, and two Certificates of Education. He was promoted to Lance Corporal in August 1909, to Corporal in November 1910 and to Sergeant in May 1913. His record said he was "intelligent, hardworking and reliable" and "a good lance corporal"; he was also a first class shot. On his transfer to the Reserve in October 1913 his military character was described as "exemplary" and in his civil character he was "a sober, reliable, honest and trustworthy NCO".

George's personal circumstances changed during this period. On 25th December 1912 at St Peter's Church in Leicester he married Ada Smith, aged 23. Ada's father was a shoe finisher, but no occupation was entered in the marriage register for George's father. These were hard times in the shoe trade and perhaps this was one motivation for George deciding to join the army in 1906. His brother William Henry and sister Annie Mary were witnesses at the wedding. George and Ada went on to have two surviving children and whilst George was serving in the army Ada and their first baby lived at 60 Spalding Street, New Errington.

With the outbreak of war in 1914 George, as a Reservist, was immediately recalled. Mobilised at Chester on 5th August, he was posted to the 8th (Service) Battalion, part of General Kitchener's New Army. The Battalion was initially stationed in Wiltshire before moving in February 1915 to Pirbright in Surrey. In June they embarked for Egypt and from there went to Gallipoli where, as part of the 13th (Western)

Division, the Battalion took part in several actions. In January 1916 the Division returned to Egypt where it was involved in holding the Suez Canal defences.¹

In February 1916 the *Leicester Daily Post* published a letter from George, now a Company Quartermaster Sergeant. It was one of many letters thanking the paper for its distribution of Christmas parcels to the troops:

“I am now having a well-earned rest at Port Said, after spending from July to January on the Gallipoli Peninsular, and going through hardships that had better be left unrecorded. I went through the big flood on the Peninsular, and the withdrawal from Helles without mishap, although I have had some very narrow escapes. I have had to leave a good number of my dear old pals behind.”²

On 12th February the Division had begun moving to Mesopotamia, where it remained for the rest of the war and, amongst many other actions, was instrumental in securing Baghdad and consolidating hard-won territory in extremely inhospitable conditions. On 8th June George was promoted to Company Sergeant Major (Warrant Officer Class II) and it was whilst serving in this theatre that he won the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM), announced on 23rd August 1918. The citation read:

“For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He has invariably performed his duties with conspicuous zeal and ability, displaying the highest courage and gallantry under fire, and setting a splendid example of devotion to duty to all ranks with him.”³

George returned to England late in 1918 and was demobilised on 17th February 1919. He was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

With over 300 Club members, including the other seven men who had won medals, George was present at the Belgrave Working Men’s Club and Institute on the evening of Tuesday 11th November 1919 at a supper and entertainment to welcome back all those members who had served in the war and to commemorate those who did not return. The Club’s magnificent Roll of Honour was unveiled and each medal winner was presented with a framed photograph of the eight of them together.⁴

After the war George returned to his former life in Leicester, living with Ada and their children at 111 Upper Kent Street, Highfield. When joining the army in 1906 he had given his occupation as ‘labourer’ and on his marriage in 1912 as ‘engine cleaner’; since he was not a career soldier this probably indicated the work he was intending to return to in civilian life a few months later. From his letter in the newspaper in 1916 we learn that he was an employee of Messrs T Roberts and Sons, Shoe Manufacturers, at the Portland Works, and on his retirement he had worked for them for 44 years, which suggests he entered their employment when he left the army in 1913. In 1921 George was an assistant stoker and by the time the Second World War began in 1939 he had become a stoker and engineer, as well as serving in the works’ fire brigade and as an Air Raid Precautions (ARP) warden.

George continued to work at Portland Shoes, eventually becoming their Chief Engineer, until he retired on 31st August 1957. George and Ada were not destined to enjoy retirement together since just a few days after finishing work he was taken ill and died in hospital on 3rd September. His funeral was held at Gilroes Cemetery on 6th September. He left behind his widow Ada, who died in 1975, their two children and their spouses, and three grandchildren. He was remembered by them as a devoted husband, a beloved father and a dear granddad.⁵

*CSM George Antliff is also remembered on the staff Roll of Honour of Messrs T Roberts and Sons, (Portland Shoes), Leicester.*⁶

¹ Battalion movements are described at <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk>

² *Leicester Daily Post*, 23rd February 1916, p5.

³ Supplement to *The London Gazette*, 21st October 1918, p12393 <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/>

⁴ See *Leicester Evening Mail*, 12 November 1919, p2 and *Leicester Daily Post*, Weds 12 November 1919, p2

⁵ *Leicester Mercury*, 4th September 1957, p12; *Leicester Evening Mail*, 4th September 1957, p8.

⁶ <https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/50900>