

Private Mark Monaghan

Military Medal and Bar

Mark was born in Hinckley, Leicestershire, on 3rd February 1892 and baptised a month later in the parish church as Mark Monaghan Whately, taking his mother Mary's surname. Mary originated from Birmingham; her mother died in the year she was born and her father just a few years later. Afterwards she and her two siblings were brought up in separate households, with Mary, aged 8, a boarder with a family in Mancetter, Warwickshire. By 1891 she was in service in Coventry before moving to Hinckley where Mark was born the following year. In 1895 she married Walter Henry Blunt at Foleshill near Coventry, where they both resided, and where a daughter, Kate, was born in 1896. The family still lived in Foleshill in 1901, having been joined by Ida Gladys Horton, a baby described in the Census as being "in care", and two young men who were boarders.

By 1911 Mark had moved to Long Eaton, Derbyshire, and was working as an engine cleaner. He boarded with his aunt Lucy (his mother's sister) and Lucy's husband and family, and he had now taken Monaghan as his surname. His mother, step-father and Kate were resident at 78 Asylum Street in Walter Blunt's home town of Leicester. Ida Horton had moved to live with an uncle and aunt in London.

When war broke out in 1914 Mark enlisted in Leicester on 24th August joining the 6th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment, the first of the New Army Battalions, with service number 10314 and recording his occupation as 'labourer'. His attestation papers indicate that he had previously joined the 3rd (Special Reserve) Battalion but had purchased his discharge in 1910. By May 1915 he had transferred to the Signals Depot, Royal Engineers, and was specialising as a Line Telegraphist. He had been employed by the General Post Office (GPO) in civilian life and had skills the army could use in this field. With this transfer he became Sapper 36305.

Mark's army record indicates that he was serving in France from 24th May 1915 and so at the end of the war qualified for the 1914-15 Star, as well as the British War and Victory Medals. He had received his Certificate of Trade Proficiency on 4th May 1915 from the Signal Depot at Fenny Stratford and was then quickly sent overseas.

There are only glimpses of his time on active duty. During August 1915 he was unwell and in hospital with pneumonia, rejoining his unit the following month. In October 1916 he was promoted to a higher skill level in his trade and in June 1917 promoted to Lance Corporal. On 16th August that year his award of the Military Medal was published in the *London Gazette*.¹ This honour was given for "acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire" but the specific details of Mark's actions are not known. In April 1918 at his own request he reverted to the rank of Sapper. On 11th December 1918 the *London Gazette* announced the award of a Bar to his Military Medal and the presentation was made by the Mayor of Leicester at an event there on 18th July 1919 when a group of other demobilised soldiers also received their decorations.²

In late February 1919 Mark was granted his 28 days' leave prior to demobilisation on 22nd March and in the Absent Voters register he is recorded as then living at 78 Asylum Street, the home of his mother and step-father. On 10th July that year he was the victim of a street robbery in Leicester and had a watch, silver chain and wallet containing military papers stolen from him. Amongst these papers was perhaps

his Protection Certificate and Certificate of Identity, an important document issued to a soldier after discharge from the army as proof of his status and enabling him to access support for which he may have been eligible. This document recorded that he had last been serving in Germany.

With over 300 Club members, including the other seven men who had won medals, Mark 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.³ In the photograph Mark is the one soldier not in uniform since, it was later recorded, "it had literally fallen to pieces through extended wear".⁴

In 1921 Mark was still living in Asylum Street with his mother Mary, sister Kate and an adopted brother, Jack Henry Springthorpe aged 10, whose mother had died. Mark described himself in the Census return as a skilled workman, employed by the GPO engineering department. In the summer of 1921 he married Beatrice Alice Hill from Leicester, and they lived initially with Mark's family. By 1924 they resided in Spinner Street and from about 1930 in Curzon Street. They went on to have a family of five children.

Mark continued to work for the GPO until his retirement on health grounds in the Spring of 1940. In August 1942 he was presented with the Imperial Service Medal in recognition of his work with the department since 1913, an award given to civil servants who had completed at least 25 years of meritorious service. The ceremony took place at Telephone House in Leicester, the presentation being made by Mr GF Findley, telephone manager.⁵

In 1939 Mark was living at 28 Bartholomew Street, but by the end of his life he had moved to number 16 where he died on 5th February 1969. His funeral took place at Gilroes Crematorium on 10th February.⁶

¹ Supplement to the *London Gazette*, 16th August 1917, p8423.

² *Leicester Daily Post* 19th July 1919, p3.

³ See *Leicester Evening Mail*, 12 November 1919, p2, and *Leicester Daily Post*, Weds 12 November 1919, p2.

⁴ *Leicester Mercury*, 7th November 2009, p?.

⁵ *Leicester Mercury*, 4th August 1942, p6.

⁶ *Leicester Mercury*, 6th February 1969, p22.