

WALTER W ELY

Walter William Ely was born in Partney in 1888. He was baptised on 31st May 1891 in St Nicholas Church, the son of George, a labourer, and Lucy Ann.

He was living in Partney at the 1891 and 1901 censuses. By 1911 Walter had moved to work as a blacksmith for the Marshall family at The Three Horseshoes In at Leverton, near Boston.

Walter enlisted on 24th July 1915 at Bury St Edmunds. He was 27 years and 8 months old. He was a shoeing smith and therefore appointed to the Army Veterinary Corps. His Regimental Number was 84770. He stood 5'9" tall with a 36" chest. He was of good physical development.

His brother John Thomas Ely also served, and died, in the First World War.

During the First World War thousands of horses, mules, camels, donkeys and oxen served with British forces. They were used to carry supplies and ammunition, transport the wounded and pull guns. Cavalry regiments also used thousands of horses. The trenches and barbed wire defences of the Western Front proved inhospitable to cavalry so large-scale operations were rarely carried out after 1914. In the Middle East and Africa, where the war was more mobile, the cavalry played a more important part. Thousands of animals were killed or wounded, while others succumbed to fatigue and disease. While the Army Veterinary Corps tried to save as many as possible, thousands had to be destroyed.

A lot of the men in the Army Veterinary Corps were farm workers, ostlers, blacksmiths, slaughterhouse workers, and others used to dealing with animals. There would only be a few vets per unit, just like a medical officer and his crew in a regular service battalion.

Walter suffered a number of stays in hospital in Huntingdon during his period in the army. He spent a week there from 17th April 1916 suffering from influenza, a week in August that year with dyspepsia and three days in November 1916 with constipation. In January 1917 he spent a further 6 days in hospital with eczema followed a year later by a 4 week stay with a lacerated hand.

Perhaps because of his injured hand, Walter was found absent from work on 7th April 1918 and made to parade behind the guard for 7 days as punishment. A week later he was back in hospital for, on 22nd April 1918, he was readmitted to Huntingdon hospital with a septic hand and stayed until 10th June 1918. A week after his discharge from hospital he was found absent off guard and lost 1 days pay.

Walter was discharged from service on 27th March 1919. He is believed to have worked as a blacksmith in Partney after the war.