

GEORGE SHAW WILLIAMS

(My maternal Grandfather's brother)

1878 – 1916

A MILITARY RESUME

Prepared by Ivor DAVIES ©

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**BRIGHOUSE
Update October 2008**

GEORGE SHAW WILLIAMS

Born 21 August 1878 Hanley

Parents George WILLIAMS 1843 – 1921
Mary Ann HARGREAVES 1848 – 1884

Married 1 November 1902 Hanley (Holy Trinity)
Charlotte BASSETT 1880 -- 1966

Children William 22 May 1904 – 6 April 1941
James Henry 26 October 1906 – 29 May 1941
Royal Artillery 1927 – 1930 Army Reserve 1930 – 1939
Royal Artillery 1939 – 29 May 1941, KIA Crete, no known grave
Annie 14 June 1908 – 13 Jan 1961
Arthur 4 June 1910 – 15 Aug 1980
Lawrence 18 July 1914 – 16 Sept 1915

Died 28 September 1916 KIA near Thiepval on the Somme

MILITARY “RESUME”

29th January 1897

Signed on, (attested) at HANLEY 29th January 1897 into the North Staffordshire Regiment. He committed to five years with the colours and then seven years in the Army reserve. His service number was NS 5217. At this time he was serving as a volunteer with the 3rd Battalion Staffordshire Regiment, local Militia.

He was a Collier, height 5 Foot 4.25 Inches, weight 130 lbs (9 Stone 4), Chest 35 /37, fresh complexion, grey hair and brown eyes. He had a tattoo on his left forearm. Crossed Flags and a cross, also a white patch lower right side of his body

30th January 1897

Passed a Medical Inspection at LICHFIELD (Depot the North Staffordshire Regt)

1st February 1897

Passed Certificate of Primary Military Examination

1st February 1897

Commenced Basic Training at the North Staffordshire Depot, LICHFIELD

10th July 1897

Posted to the 2nd Bn. North Staffordshire Regiment

1st May 1898

Accepted new Army Messing Rules

December 1899

North Staffs in Newly, moved to Aldershot to mobilise just before Christmas

14th January 1900

Sailed to South Africa, Capetown (The Second Boer War)

The 2nd North Staffordshire, 2nd South Wales Borderers, 2nd Cheshire and the 1st East Lancashire Regiments formed the Fifteenth Brigade of the Seventh Division. This Division embarked at Southampton on 13th Jan 1900

The 1050 members of the 2nd Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment sailed on SS AURANIA a 7269-ton vessel owned by the Cunard Steamship Company built on the Clyde in 1882/3, scrapped in Genoa in 1905. At departure the regimental band played as the soldiers threw their cap badges onto the quay into the watching crowd

3rd February 1900

The 2nd Battalion North Staffs disembarked at Cape Town

The battalion received immediate orders to “proceed up country”. Each man being issued with three hundred rounds of ammunition

The British Commander, Roberts, was collecting large numbers of reinforcements along the railway line between the Orange River and Modder River. His plan was to outflank the Boer left and pass his cavalry around them so as to relieve the Boer siege of Kimberly, whilst his infantry secured vital fords behind them.

Roberts had two infantry divisions (the 6th and 7th, which included the 2nd N Staffs.) and a mounted division of three brigades, under Major General John French. (In this mounted division there was a mounted infantry company provided by the North Staffs, within the 8th Mounted Infantry Battalion)

The North Staffs spent the next few days as follows

Two days via train to De Aar then, marched to Belmont where they spent two days

Perhaps about 11th February 1900

From Gras Pan marched thirteen miles in very hot sun. Each man carried all his kit but only one bottle of water and a biscuit. That night was spent sleeping in the rain or on outpost duty.

The following day marched a further 19 miles to Piet River, where they found water. Letters home later published by the Staffordshire Sentinel, mention men collapsing and dying of thirst. One letter even states that one man blew out his brains. *Clearly a hard time*

The next day they marched to within three miles of Jacobsdal the main encampment of Cronje’s Boer Forces.

15th February 1900.

Cronje’s Forces began to retire. They were weakened by a lack of grazing for their horses and also the presence of large numbers of non-combatants (their families) with their slow moving ox-drawn wagons. But they had no other option as Roberts had out manoeuvred them.

The North Staffs were assigned the right flank for the attack on Jacobsdal

(Private N Ball wrote the following to his wife, published by the Staffordshire Sentinel, April 3rd)

The next day we had orders to take the place, so we formed up in battle formation and advanced. We were in the firing line and when we were about a mile off they opened fire upon us. We all dropped down under cover and let them fire at nothing for a while. Our Colonel then gave orders to advance, and we did, and all of us started to fire upon the town, and we had to keep running and then fire and then run again to get under cover.

We kept getting closer to them and the bullets kept whistling over our heads. And we kept straight on until we got within 500 yards of them and then the artillery started. They could not stand that and got on their horses and galloped off.

We took about 50 prisoners. We had only 13 wounded and one killed; so we were very lucky considering the position we had to shift the Boers out of. In concluding his letter to his wife he stated, I have had no pay at all since I left England, nor meat only a biscuit or two

(An un-named Private also wrote, as follows, concerning this action, published by the Sentinel on 29th May)

At about 1500 yards a bullet was heard to fly over our heads, which was followed by a perfect shower of bullets from the Boers, who were not to be seen. Then the regiment was extended into skirmishing order. Up to this the regiment had not fired a single shot, for the order was given out, "no firing" but, of course, the order was cancelled after this took place, the regiment being led by Colonel Bradley. If the Boers had been anything like good shots, the whole of the regiment would have perished

Every "Boer War History" states the Boers were in fact good shots. Therefore my thought is that upon this occasion they made a major mistake by opening fire too soon

The 2nd North Staffs Regiment was the first to enter the town, followed by a few of the C L V (City of London Volunteers) In conclusion this un-named Private complains of being charged full ration money while only receiving quarter rations, and protests at being charged 2s for tobacco instead of 8d. *(Three times the normal price)*

16th February to about 8th March 1900

The North Staffs remained in Jacobsdal and were not involved in the battle of Paardeberg, where the Boer General Cronje surrendered; but they took part in the subsequent advance on Bloemfontein, the Free State Capital, which they were among the first troops to occupy.

14th March 1900

George Shaw Williams was charged that, whilst on active service in South Africa that he had eaten his emergency rations without permission. *(I presume during the advance upon Bloemfontein)*

17th March 1900

He was sentenced to 21 days punishment, 7 were remitted. As a result he lost 17 days pension entitlement, 14 the sentence plus 3 days whilst awaiting trial. As the sentencing Officer was i/c D Company, I presume he was then in D Company.

28th March 1900

The seventh Division moved out from Bloemfontein to cross the Modder river north of that place at Glen, in order to attack the Boers eight miles further north at Karree Siding so as to cover the construction of the Glen railway bridge.

29th March 1900

The attack was launched and was completely successful, at a cost of only 200 casualties to the whole Division.

(Private G Tunstall wrote on 21st April the following, published by the Staffordshire Sentinel on 29th May)

We had a very stiff fight on the 29th of last month taking this position. It lasted six hours. There is no mistake the Boers are downright curs. They haven't as much pluck as a rabbit. They can fight as long as they are lying behind rocks, etc, but as soon as we get a bit close and fix our bayonets, off they go on their horses like deer. We had about 170 casualties in the division. Our regiment was in reserve, so we were out of the worst of it for once. (But the Times, 30 April 1900, stated that the North Staffs were on the left of the Brigade)

(Private S Gibson also wrote from Karee Siding on 25th April the following, published by the Sentinel on 24th May)

I have only been in two fights one at Jacodsdal and one at Karee. We have only lost one officer, four men and about seven wounded, and ten died of fever. It was a very hard sight to see the killed and wounded at Karee.

We are just having what they call a rest in the Army. We are on fatigue all day and we have to go to the trenches at night. What with the stones etc., we don't get much sleep. I have not been undressed since 3rd February – since we left the boat, and I don't know when I will get a decent nap. We can only wash about once a week. I have been a fortnight and never had a wash.

2nd May 1900

The North Staffs left Karee

(Private W Bough wrote to his parents the following, published by the Sentinel on 23rd June)

We left Karee on May 2nd and took Brandfort after six hours fighting. We did not go into the town as we were on the right flank. We camped about two miles out of the town that night and all next day, and we started to march again. The General told us we would have to do 22 miles, as he wanted to catch the Boers before they could cross the Vet River, but we did not get there in time. We were forced to stop at the Vet River, as the Boers had blown up the railway bridge.

We had to help the Engineers at another branch line across the river, but we only stopped two days when we had to start on the march again. We were attached to the Guards Brigade. We were left behind again at the Zand River to look after the convoy, (*Supply Column*), as it took such a long time to cross the river. This is where we did the longest march in the country, breaking the record.

We started from the Zand River at half past five at night, and marched till two o'clock in the morning, when we got two hours rest, and then started again for Kroonstad. This is the place where the Boers were expected to make a big stand, but when we got about eight miles from the town we heard that the Boers had left and the town had surrendered. Lord Roberts had us marching past him and complimented us on our march of 38 miles in 21 hours

17th May 1900

The North Staffs were in Kroonstad

(From here on this date Corporal Thomas Pennell wrote the following to his brother, published by the Sentinel June 23rd)

Just a few lines to let you know that we have arrived at the Orange Free State Capital (*Bloemfontein*) after suffering great hardships. Our regiment was complimented on a great march from a place they call Vet River to here, a distance of 72 miles, which we covered in three days, and the last 38 miles was done in 20 hours, and we were fairly knocked up.

It's alright to get honours but how did we get them? All we got to eat was a biscuit and a pint of water each man. And sleep? We never knew a nights sleep as we kept on marching till sundown, and then drop where we stop, with only a blanket and an overcoat to cover you with.

I suppose you saw it in the papers Lord Roberts and Kitchener saying that our regiment has done the greatest march that has been done in South Africa in so short a time, with the loss of only 17 men. (*i.e. 17 men dropped out*) Nearly all have turned up, but I want no more marching like that. We expect to be in Pretoria by the time you get this.

31st May 1900

2nd Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment arrive in Johannesburg

The fifteenth brigade from the seventh division then became the garrison of Johannesburg and the North Staffs remained there for the next eight months, which gave them an easier time than many other units in South Africa. The North Staffs were mainly employed on Police Duties. Johannesburg contained the main concentration of non-Boers known in the Transvaal as Uitlanders and one of the big problems was to prevent looting by the mine employees.

Towards the later stages of their stay the Boers still fighting became more active and three times during August and September the North Staffs took part in columns sent out to deal with concentrations of the enemy.

Their main action was in the Klip River Area, when they bumped into the hidden enemy in thick mist. However the Boers decamped as soon as the mist lifted.

The Sentinel published a long letter written on 24th December, at the end of their time in Johannesburg, on 5th February 1901. It was stated that for obvious reasons the names have been omitted, but they appear in the original

A small portion of this letter, two from four cases mentioned, follows

On the 6th December 1900, whilst employed on the Johannesburg Military Police, I fell into the misfortune of being confined to the guardroom for being drunk. At the same time that I got confined a lance corporal of the name of , was confined for exactly the same crime. On the 10th we both went before our commanding officer. The lance corporal got a severe reprimand, which to Mr Atkins' point of view means nothing. I myself for exactly the same offence got put back to be tried by district court-martial. I was tried by the district court-martial and was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment.

Sir I wish to refer to another unjust case, another reservist like myself with eleven years and ten months serviceHe has just been sentenced to two years imprisonment for quitting his post and returning drunk

We are all men who have marched all the way up the country and we are entitled to the honours that the regiment is entitled to and we think it rather hard after all the hardships we have had to go through to fall into such severe punishment ...

Letter signed by four men of the 2nd North Staffs

PS Hoping dear Editor you'll advise Stoke to buck up; if not, I think they will be in the Second League next season.

January 1901

The North Staffs left Johannesburg, receiving high praise from the civil authorities to join Brigadier-General Dartnell's mobile column, one of five sweeping the area of the Eastern Transvaal, between the two railways running respectively to Delegeo Bay and Natal

25th January 1901

According to the Diary of Private Ernest Hulme, a recalled reservist, when he re-joined the regiment (that day) they were at Boxburg. Our column was part of number one column, under General Dartnell.

His diary is interesting in that large parts of his entries "agree virtually word for word" with letters written by Corporal R Cope published by the Staffordshire Sentinel on the 6th April 1901. This leads me to believe that Private Hulmes' diary was in fact written up after the war

Continuing therefore using the Sentinel articles, according to Corporal Cope

25th January 1901

The battalion was ready, having mobilised at Springs

26th January 1901

We started on 28th January and between then and the 30th we had several skirmishes with the enemy.

30th January 1901

Reveille sounded at 2.30am, and we were on the tramp again, and came in touch with the enemy rearguard about 6.15am and drove them into their main body who had taken up a strong position on some small Kopies (*Hills*), with a Spruit (*stream*) running at their base.

We opened fire with our artillery, but the Boers did not return our fire. We commenced the advance about 9.30am, with the 4.7 naval guns which did some good work. A party of Lord Kitcheners bodyguard got surrounded in some Kraals (*Fenced Areas*) but held out until relieved by the mounted rifles and the Durham Mounted Infantry who were acting as scouts, together with the 10th Hussars. We gained the position about 11.30 am with the loss of six killed and fifteen wounded.

From there we marched to Riet Hill completing 50 miles in three days, all under the burning sun. Next morning we passed through Dewskop and Vlaklaagte in pursuit of the Boers Convoy. It is wonderful how our men being lumbered with equipment and 150 rounds of ammunition keep*next few lines illegible, but probably "keep up with the Boers who are mounted"*

At 6pm that night we got to Paard Kop. During the same night the camp was attacked by a large body of Boers, we were out in a moment, and after a duel of about two hours the Boers retired. We had four of Gough's mounted infantry wounded. Next day we crossed the Vaal River at Boeinder (?) Drift (*ford*) and the marched through Driefontain, Cras Kop, till we came to Amerspoort, a place of about 800 people, where we stayed until our convoy (*Supplies*) came out from Volkrust. We had got down to quarter rations

11th February 1901

The convoy (*supplies*) arrived at 6.30

We are clearing the country of everything – men, women, beasts, wagons and supplies. We collect everything, and then burn the farms and bring the families along with the columns, and send them to a town garrisoned by our troops until the war shall be over. We have collected in this way *thousands of oxen, sheep*, horses and large supplies of grain, and leave no chance to the enemy of replenishing their stores from the country through which we pass.

This strategy associated with the Blockhouse and Fence, see later, defeated the remaining Boer Units by 1902. A similar strategy defeated the CTs (Communist Terrorists) in the Malaya Emergency 1948 – 1958 by denying them food

13th February 1901

The column left Amesfort and marched to Wakkerstroom. From here we went through the mountains which are very high. We had little sun but plenty of rain and mist. It took us four days to cross the mountains. We then passed over the Assegie River, and moved to a little town called Derby. The next day we were on our way to the Boer's strong hold, Piet Reteif, where the prisoners told us that General Botha was going to make a big stand, but he did not. We captured their laager and released a large number of Boer prisoners from the gaol, about 64 men, who had been put in prison for refusing to take up arms after having taken the oath of neutrality.

Our next march was to Lumberg, and then to Paul- Petersburg, crossing the river Pongola. Then we moved to Waterval, and over the river Bevaan

3rd March 1901

Corporal Cope wrote from here

Since we left Manathal nothing of interest has occurred except that we captured Lucas Mayer's Laager. It has been raining here for 14 days and we have not a dry stitch on us. Our convoy (*supplies*) from Newcastle could not cross the drift (*ford*) the water having risen so. A Sergeant Major, three men, with a wagon and team of mules were drowned. We have been living on nothing but mealies and meat, no sugar, coffee or tea, and the convoy only eight miles from camp, but the river running at 12 miles an hour.

A general order has been published in the camp from General French, congratulating the troops for the way they have done their work under such trying circumstances

Late April 1900

At the end of April the Staffords were established at Wakkersstroom, a township in that part of the Transvaal which runs down towards the Natal border and at Volkrust on the railway twenty miles away

It had now been decided to divide the country into sectors by lines of blockhouse. The initial lines were built along the railways, and these were completed around July 1901. The cross-country lines then started. One covering the forty-three miles from Wakkersstroom northeast to Derby near the Swaziland border was finished by October and the gap westwards to Volkrust had been filled by February 1902. Needless to say the task of constructing these lines fell upon the hard worked infantry

The walls of the standard blockhouse were constructed with double sheets of corrugated iron, the space between the sheets being filled with shingle. They were sited at 1000 yards intervals and connected by barbed wire fences, which were hung with tin cans so as to give warning of intruders. The normal garrison of a blockhouse was seven men

It was never possible to prevent the odd Boer from crossing the lines, but at least in the Wakkerstroom area no large bodies were able to get through. One of the main problems was to try to ensure that over a long period the men had enough nights in bed. The lines were not intended to commit the troops to purely static defence, but to act as a firm base from which mobile columns could operate.

May 1902

By 1902 the blockhouse policy was having its effect and peace was finally signed

September 1902

From Durban the Staffords embarked for England

George Shaw WILLIAMS returned on the GALEKA (13 officers and 436 men) arriving at Southampton on the 8th October. A further 8 officers and 140 men sailed on the RIPPINGHAM GRANGE on the 14th September. This vessel arrived at Southampton on the 13th October

The GALEKA 6772 tons of the Union Steamship Company was built by Harland & Wolff at Belfast in 1899. She was used as a troopship again in 1914 and later as a hospital ship in 1915 when she hit a mine off Le Havre and became a total loss

9th October 1902

George Shaw WILLIAMS, 2nd Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment arrived back in the UK

George Shaw WILLIAMS was awarded the South Africa Medal

His Military History sheet shows one entry against "medals decorations and annuities." A maximum of two campaign medals were awarded. First the QUEEN'S SOUTH AFRICA MEDAL

A second medal, the KING'S SOUTH AFRICA MEDAL could also be awarded to holders of the QSA. The qualification for this was, those serving in South Africa on or after 1st January 1902 providing that they had completed 18 months war service by that date or by 1st June 1902. George Shaw WILLIAMS therefore also qualified for this award (see also page 17)

20th October 1902. 11.30am

A service was held at Lichfield Cathedral when the battalion received back their Colours from the Dean and Chapter. After the Dean had addressed the Regiment, he restored the Colours to the escort, with these words

"I now restore to the 2nd Battalion Prince of Wales North Staffordshire Regiment these Colours which were left by it two years ago, in the safe custody of the Dean and Chapter"

1st November 1902

George Shaw WILLIAMS married Charlotte BASSETT in HANLEY

Between 13th Dec 1902 and 31st March 1902

There are various entries difficult to decipher on his Army records perhaps with regard to the award and forfeiture of entitlement to G C Pay, (Good Conduct Pay?)

7th May 1903

Awarded an M I certificate in MANCHESTER (Medical Inspection?)

3rd October 1903 or 1st Dec 1903

Posted to the 1st Battalion or the Depot? (In 1903 the 2nd Battalion sailed for India)

28th January 1904

Transferred to the Army Reserve on completion of seven years service

28th January 1909

Discharged on completion of five years on the Army Reserve

25th August 1914

George Shaw WILLIAMS re enlisted at Durham

With his previous military experience being noted as "time served" he was a volunteer and was assigned to the 6th (Service) Battalion Yorkshire Regt (Green Howards) He committed to three years with the colours if however war was over in less than the three years he would be discharged with all convenient speed

Initially he was given a new service number of 18764. This was later changed to 39098. I believe this was due to the fact that the first number was assigned by the DLI (Durham Light Infantry) at attestation but in fact he joined the Yorkshire Regiment who discovered that they had already used this number. Service numbers at that time being unique within regiments or Corps i.e. not as now, unique to the Army as a whole

He was half an inch taller and weighed 3 lbs less than he had done in 1897

25th August 1914

Battalion Formation at Ripon followed by Initial Training at Belton Camp Grantham

26th December 1914

Charged with breaking out of camp and being absent for 67 hours also with neglect of duty when an officers servant. (Confined to camp for 10 days and lost 4 days pay)

7th February 1915

Charged with over staying his pass for 50 hours. (Confined to camp for 10 days and lost 3 days pay)

5th April 1915

Battalion marched to Rugby via Thussington and Whetstone

8th April 1915

Battalion arrived at Rugby

9th April 1915

Battalion entrained for Witley Camp Godalming

1st July 1915

Battalion left Witney for Liverpool docks and the following day embarked on HMTS Aquitania, sailed 3rd July, 1330 hours
(*The 32nd Brigade and two additional battalions, approximately 7000 men?*)

11th July 1915

Battalion disembarked, at Mudros Bay on Lemnos. (An advanced base for the Dardanelles Campaign)

20th July 1915

Battalion embarked on Happy and Savage at 0530hrs and moved to Imbros, to Bivouac two miles from Kephalos harbour

24th July 1915

Battalion inspected by the GOC General Sir Ian Hamilton G C B

6th August 1915

Battalion embarked for Gallipoli, Sulva Bay, 25 officers and 750 men. A and B Companies landed at B Beach, south west of Nibrunesi Point at 2300 hours and commenced the attack on Lala Baba. It was recorded that this was the first attack to be made by a new army unit. C Company landed and advanced on the Turkish Positions at Nibrunesi Point. D Company moved towards Salt Lake and set a piquet Line. A and B Companies advanced to the top of the hill in the dark. C Company Cleared the enemy from Nibrunesi Point and then advanced on Lala Baba Hill. The Enemy were driven northeast to Hill 10. Casualties were 16 officers and 250 men

(No loading, rounds in the breech, just bayonet only – instructions during the night – No prisoners to be taken – all to be killed)

The Sulva Bay landing was intended to facilitate a break though as the initial landings in the Dardanelles campaign on 25 April 1915 at Helles had been held

General Ian Hamilton mentions the 6th Bn Yorkshire Regiment and their part in the success of the Lala Baba in his final despatch written after the campaign (The Times)

7th August 1915

Battalion took the enemy outpost position on Hill 10 at 1200hrs

8th August 1915

Battalion advanced to a line between Chocolate Hill and Sulajik at 1000 hrs

9th August 1915

Battalion was in action a mile to the north of Scimitar Hill. Withdrew to Hill 10 at 0400 hrs. Ordered forward again at 1200hrs and came under heavy rifle fire

11th August 1915

Battalion withdrew to Lala Baba

12th August 1915

Battalion moved forward to fire trenches on the eastern slopes of Hill 50

13th August 1915

**George Shaw WILLIAMS was promoted paid Lance Corporal
(No doubt replacing a casualty)**

18th August 1915

Battalion withdrew to reserve positions on the beach

20th August 1915

Battalion took over the fire trenches south of Hill 50

21st August 1915

Battalion attack on Ismail Oglu Tepe. Advanced at 1530 hrs under heavy shrapnel fire. Enemy's machine guns recorded as having a clear target. Heavy officer casualties, about 100 men entered the Turkish Line and held it until the following day

22nd August 1915

Withdrawn to the beach. Battalion strength was 285 and then formed into a composite Battalion with the 8th West Yorkshire Regt.

26th August 1915

Took over the trenches on the extreme left of the line. Positions on the western slope of Kiretch Tepe running down to the beach

4th September 1915

Relieved and to reserve dugouts

8th September 1915

A draft of 2 officers and 491 other ranks arrived

12th September 1915

To dugouts south west of the summit of Karakhol Dagh

18th September 1915

To firing line at Jephson's Post

29th September 1915

A further draft of 2 officers and 297 other ranks joined. Relieved and to reserve positions on the beach northeast of Karakhol Dagh

19th October 1915

To reserve dugouts at Oxford Circus near Karakhol Dagh

20th October 1915

Machine gun section to fire trench near Jephson's Post. **Perhaps at this time this included George Shaw WILLIAMS?**

27th October 1915

A Company moved forward to front line, one platoon at Jephson's Post the remainder in support trenches

3rd November 1915

Battalion relieved the 8th Duke of Wellington's Battalion in the front line at Jephson's Post, Green Lane. Tours of the front line and the reserve line through out the month in this sector.

15th December 1915

Battalion repulsed an attack on Green Lane

18th December 1915

The first party of 5 officers and 491 men moved to the beach for evacuation to Imbros

20th December 1915

The battalion rear guard left their positions, the last man leaving the trench by 0530 hrs later this day all the Battalion were back at Imbros

NB1 Based on the assumption that George Shaw WILLIAMS was a machine gunner at this time then he left the trenches the previous night with Second-Lieutenant L A GORDON and thirteen other machine gunners. The crew of two machine guns?

NB2 the Commonwealth War Graves Website has numerous Gordon's, but L A Gordon is not amongst them. As he is not on the battalion officers photograph taken May 1915 prior to embarkation he was probably a replacement officer.

NB3 the evacuation of Sulva, night of 19 / 20 December. On the last night every gun, trench mortar, cart and animal was withdrawn, and the 11th Division suffered no casualties to its personnel during this final evacuation

3rd February 1916

Battalion embarked from Imbros on the Empress of Britain, and sailed the next day

The EMPRESS of GREAT BRITAIN was a Canadian Pacific Steamship, 14189 tons with a maximum speed of 18 knots, the first of three to be given this name. She was built in 1906 and scrapped in 1930.

7th February 1916

Battalion disembarked in Egypt at Alexandria

13th March 1916

The 11th Division took over "A" section of the Suez Canal Defences. The Divisional HQ being at El – Ferdan on the canal north of Ismailia

16th March 1916

George Shaw WILLIAMS when at EL-Ferdan was transferred to the Brigade Machine Gun Corps (32nd Company MGC)

NB "Official formation date" according to the unit's War Diary was "April" 1916

16th June 1916

George Shaw WILLIAMS embarked at Alexandria for the BEF (British Army In France) on HT Kingstonion, 5564 tons

Later when the Kingstonian was en route from Limassol to the UK it was torpedoed, 23rd April 1918 and beached in Carloforte Bay, San Pietro Channel, Sardinia. Two tugs were sent to assist the Moose and Dalkieth. At 0540 on 29th April 1918 a torpedo passed under the Moose and Dalkieth this hit the Kingstonion, which split in two the back half sinking. This explosion also sunk the Dalkieth

2nd July 1916

George Shaw WILLIAMS disembarked at Marseilles. 32 Co MGC entrained for Northern France

9th July 1916

In billets at Busnes

16th July 1916

To billets at Liermont. Later moved into the line and took over from the 166th Co MGC at Dainville. Guns firing as ordered up to the 19th August

19th August 1916

Relieved and to billets at Dainville

20th August 1916

Moved to Izel les Hameau

3rd September 1916

Moved to Frevent and entrained for Acheux. Marched to billets at Rainchevel

7th September 1916

Moved into the trenches. Quiet apart from some shelling

14th September 1916

32nd Brigade attacks the Wonder Work and trenches in R31 B and C. All guns in action. Enemy barrage very heavy

15th September 1916

Hostile attack beaten off

16th September 1916

Relieved and to Bouzincourt. Cleaning up and rest

21st September 1916

Moved from Bouzincourt to canvas huts at Mailly-Maillet

22nd September 1916

Moved into the trenches

24th September 1916

One battalion of 32nd Brigade attacked Moquet Farm but was bombed out

25th September 1916

Busy building gun emplacements in Sulphur Avenue. 10 guns remained here whilst 6 went back to Bouzincourt. Guns in the line providing indirect fire on Zollern Trench and Stuff Redoubt, supporting attack by the 11th Division. 3 guns sent to Stuff Redoubt and 2 to Zollern trench

28th September 1916

6 more guns moved up to the Cemetery at Pozieres and 2 to Moquet Farm

28th September 1916

George Shaw WILLIAMS was reported missing in the field, presumed killed, in This battle for Thiepval Ridge, by the OC (Officer Commanding) 32 Co MGC, (Report dated 1 Oct 1916)

29th September 1916

2 guns sent up to support attack on Hessian Trench. Had great difficulty getting into position because of the intense enemy barrage. In the late afternoon the remaining two guns went up to Moquet Farm

30th September 1916

32nd MGC relieved by the 75th MGC

1 Oct 1916

**George Shaw was granted a Class 1 pay increase
With effect from 1 July 1916 to 28 Sept 1916**

If we look at the War Diary of the 6th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment then

27 September 1916

11.20 pm D Company moved up to ZOLLERN (trench) Of the Officers, one was killed, three wounded, two missing. Many Other Ranks would also have been casualties.

28 September 1916

12.30am Report received that we had twice got to 87 but could not hold it owing to heavy shell and machine gun fire. At dawn attack made on 38 failed. 5.00am one Company 8th West Riding Regt sent to ZOLLERN and D Company to STUFF REDOUBT. (*This can be followed on the trench map*)

Orders received that an attack would be made at 6 pm task allotted to troops in STUFF REDOUBT was to bomb round enemy flanks Attack was postponed but message did not get through to STUFF REDOUBT. Troops there attacked at 7.42pm and gained 38 and 87 but could not hold it owing to lack of ammunition and bombs at 9.28pm Message received that the Germans would probably make a strong attack. This did not come off.

George Shaw Williams has no known grave

He is commemorated on the THIEPVAL memorial, Pier and face 5 // C and 12c

He is also commemorated on the MIDDRIDGE Memorial Co DURHAM

**ADDITIONAL GENEALOGY INFORMATION FROM
George Shaw WILLIAMS ARMY RECORDS**

Letter dated 20th September 1915 received 21st September

Letter from the Registrar at Bishop Auckland, was attached to the copy death certificate of his son Lawrence, requesting the Army to refund his expenses which “appear” to be 2/7d (say 13p in today’s money)

Memo dated 16th October 1917. War Office to Officer i/c MGC Records

Requests that any of G S WILLIAMS personal property and medals in his possession be sent to

Mrs Charlotte Williams
16 Roseburn *Mistake here should be 17 Riseburn*
New Shildon Co Durham

MGC Medal request / entitlement lists

Proof of entitlement of GSW to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal

NOTE The MGC did not consider George Shaw WILLIAMS previous active service in Gallipoli in 1915. They did not “authorise” the award of the 1914/15 Star. This would have been the responsibility of the Yorkshire Regiment

George Shaw’s medal list would have been as follows

- 1 The Queens South Africa Medal (QSA) *
- 2 The Kings South Africa Medal, with 1901 and 1902 clasps
- 3 The 1914 /15 Star
- 4 The British War Medal
- 5 The Victory Medal

* The clasps he would have been awarded with this medal were probably three

Orange Free State – Transvaal and Johannesburg

This is based upon the 4th Revised Edition of Gordon’s. (British Battles & Medals by Major L L Gordon. The medal collector’s bible.) The 2nd Battalion North Staffordshires are documented in this book as the 98th Foot (their pre 1881 identity)

NOTE In all there were 26 possible clasps. The actual maximum number awarded to any one person was Army 9, Navy 8

Medal Receipt Acknowledgment dated. ? March 1922

Mrs C WILLIAMS of 17 Riseburn, New Shildon received GSW's War and Victory Medals

January 1917 Allotment of Pay Enquiry

Mrs C WILLIAMS was then living at 25 Riseburn, New Shildon etc
GSW had an allotment of pay of 3/6d and a separation allowance of 21/6d, total of 25/- (£1.25) payable weekly to Charlotte. This document states the final date this will be paid, I cannot read this date, but see the following

April 1917 Statement of GSW's Pension Award

A weekly pension of 28/9d (£1.43) for his wife (*) and four children, to be payable with effect from 7th May 1917

(*) GSW was still considered to be missing at this time

There are also various army documents, as follows, from which "no" information can be ascertained

August 1917 Authority to now presume the death of GSW

April / May 1918 Four memos attempting to resolve confusion over the Transfer (Date) of GSW to the MGC

12th April 1919 Declaration from Charlotte concerning GSW's living relatives and his children, concerning preparation by the government of a commemoration Plaque and Scroll (*In October 2007 I was contacted by the current owner of GSW's Death Plaque a collector of WWI memorabilia*)

1919 A memo / query concerning the movements of GSW

Various documents, some of unknown purpose, not with any confirmatory or new information

Two un-readable memos and a probable "clerical instruction" on or attached to a file cover

PRINCIPAL SOURCES USED IN PREPARING THIS DOCUMENT

- 1 George Shaw WILIAMS Army Records
- 2 Marriage Certificate George Shaw Williams and Charlotte Bassett
- 3 Various documents, the STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT Museum Archive
Courtesy of Colour Sergeant Turner
- 4 War Diary 6th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment
Courtesy of Paul Cooper the GREEN HOWARDS REGIMENT Museum
- 5 Archive of the Times Newspaper
- 6 War Diary 32nd Company the Machine Gun Corps (MGC)
National Archives Kew File Reference WO95/1809 transcribed by Mark Offord
- 7 Archive of the MGC OCA History Group courtesy of Graham Sacker
- 8 The Commonwealth War Graves Commission web site (www.cwgc.org)

POTENTIAL APPENDIX

S S AURANIA (1883 – 1905)

A photograph

S S GALEKA (1899 – 1915)

It's History and some Statistics

2nd BATTALION NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT PHOTOGRAPHS

Battalion aboard the SS Aurania
Battalion (Mounted Company) in Johannesburg
Battalion Machine Gun Team South Africa

R M S AQUITANIA (1914 – 1950)

It's History and some Statistics

BY THE GULF OF SAROS – A poem written by GSW and published in the Northern Gazette on the 8th January 1916

*Here by the Gulf of Saros I sit in the dim twilight
'Mid the graves of comrades who went in the last big fight*

EMPRESS OF BRITAIN (1906 – 1930)

A photograph

TRENCH MAP BATTLE OF THIEPVAL RIDGE 26 – 27 September 1916

Battle for Thiepval Ridge, the Battle of Fliers-Courcelette, during the sixth phase of the Battle of the Somme 1916

The following contribution is from the pen of a "Tommy" in the fighting line:-

BY THE GULF OF SAROS

Here by the Gulf of Saros I sit in the dim twilight,
'Mid the graves of fallen comrades who went in the last big fight;
Went to a calmer region, to a better land we guess;
So the wise are always guessing, and the unlearned answering, yes

In the gulley our lights are blinking 'mid the shadowy forms of men,
'Neath the watchful eye of a sniper away beyond the glen;
And a wailing cry of anguish goes up from somewhere down below;
As the marksman claims his victims, so our comrades are laid low

So the intermittent fighting goes on from day to day,
Each sunset bringing nearer the peace that's far away;
So we hear refreshing music of an oft sung melody,
By someone in the trenches where forms are shadowy

I don't mean the mystic regions away beyond the sky,
I mean the turning grey lines that here beneath me lie;
Where my comrades peep through the loopholes away to where danger lurks,
Concealed by every conceived device of the crafty, cunning Turk

The Turk is a first class fighter, with his back against the wall,
And he isn't afraid to use his guns, and he isn't afraid to fall;
Some, we know are brutal, but that's true of every clan,
But taken all round as a soldier, he is a first class fighting man (**)

Here's honour then to Johnny Turk, and luck to shrapnel shell,
That does not burst, not one in ten, that is which does not burst well;
But I don't like his high explosive, and I don't like his noiseless gun,
And I don't the way he pounds shells in, when he is out for a mad hour's fun

It's good to watch our gunboats come out from Sulva Bay,
The spray sweeping o'er their low decks' their f'o'sle clearing the way;
Their guns timed and trained exactly, the flash, the scream and the crash;
The uplifted rock and the sandbags, the whirl and resounding smash

We get high explosive, and we know the Turks get it too,
And where high explosive bursts amongst men there's a scene that's sad to view;
Describe it? I don't really care to; it's quite bad enough to see,
Sickened like a woman, I turn from such scenes, believe me
I turn to a lad at the dyke side with a bullet in his head,
Who struggling hard for breath, "mother, Oh, mother" he said;
Once more I'm bending o'er him, once more he whispers to me,

“Mother where is Mary? I cannot hear or see”

Then I turn to Lalla Baba, where forty-three in one grave,
I am there amongst many crosses made out of common wood;
Roughly made in a hurried way and sometimes stained with blood,
But honoured, honoured is every one, honoured each simple cross,
They tell old England’s glory, and alas, they denote our loss

Here in the gloaming, here ‘neath a darkening sky,
Do you wonder that I sit musing while bullets go harmlessly high;
Do you wonder I see a white legion marching up, up the clouds steep,
To a realm where there’s no war confusion, where their eternal watch keep

It’s all in the magic and mystery and irony of life,
It’s all in the glamour and glory and woe of a world in strife;
By our blunders minute and colossal, perhaps we shall see the light,
With which world’s affairs may be corrected, and wrongs made right

So we, with our brave Allies stand definitely firm and fight,
Determined to win and conquer for liberty, freedom and right;
And when it’s assured we’ll turn once more towards the briny foam,
With one wish uppermost in our minds, the wish for home, sweet home

George Shaw WILLIAMS Born HANLEY Stoke on Trent 21st
August 1878
Died THEIPVAL RIDGE (The Somme) 26th
September 1916

Enlisted into the 2nd Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment 29th January 1897
Served with 2 NS in South Africa (2nd Boer War) Jan 1900 – Sept
1902
Army Reserve Jan 1904 – Jan
1909

Volunteer, 6th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment (Green Howards) 25th August 1914
Landed at Sulva Bay, Gallipoli during the night of 6/7th August 1915
Promoted Lance Corporal 13th August 1915
At El- Fernan, Egypt transferred to the Machine Gun Corps 16th March
1916
Landed Marseilles, France with 32nd Company MGC 2nd July
1916
Killed in Action on Thiepval Ridge 26th September
1916
Commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, Face 5C & 12c

(**) GSW had probably read Kipling and was influenced by him
The phrase a first class fightin’ man, see Kipling’s *Fuzzy-Wuzzy*

Also do not forget James Henry WILLIAMS Royal Artillery, son of George Shaw

Killed in Action in Crete
1941
Commemorated on the Athens Memorial

29th May