

Harold Keegan

Harold Charles Vernon Keegan was one of the hundreds of Tilbury men who laid down their lives for their country in World War One.



Harold was born in Stratford in 1896 to Charles and Jennie Keegan.

Harold moved to Tilbury with his parents as a young child, where his five brothers and sisters were born, after his father got a job in the town.

Harold joined the Royal Field Artillery (RFA) as a fitter in February 1916, after he finished an engineering apprenticeship with the PLA in Tilbury.

The RFA provided artillery support for the army and was responsible for medium calibre guns and howitzers backing forces close to the front line. It was organised in batteries and brigades - Harold was posted to Battery 'B' 70th Brigade and sent to France.

During the following months as he served in France he wrote home to his parents, Charles and Jennie, whenever he could and sent them mementoes, including beautifully embroidered postcards which were very popular as souvenirs with the forces - and a lace trimmed handkerchief.

He was just 21 when he was killed in action in northern France. Harold is buried in the British Cemetery in Tilloy-les-Mofflaines near Calais which is kept in immaculate condition by the Commission.

Story provided by Harold's nephew, Derek Webb.



Derek, now in his 80s, said "We are very proud of Harold. He was prepared to die fighting for his country."

Mr Webb is proud of his collection of souvenirs of his uncle's bravery.

Derek also has documents relating to his uncle's short but heroic war service which include a tribute from the War Graves Commission saying Harold "died for freedom and honour." It was sent to Harold's parents.

Among them is a copy of a large book, simply called The Great War, produced by the PLA, containing details of all its 3,629 employees who fought in that terrible conflict.

It lists those who died in a Roll of Honour, those who were commended for their bravery and those fortunate to return home.

Derek also has Harold's Bible, which was presented to him at Emmanuel Hall Sunday School, Tilbury when he was just seven years old.

"It was a tragedy for my uncle to die so young, but like so many other men of his age he was prepared to die for what he believed in - freedom," Derek said.