

From his Medal Roll we can see that William then joined the 7th Battalion the Royal Fusiliers and arrived in France on 2nd January 1918. From the extract below it can be seen that William arrived at the front at a very difficult time for the 7th Battalion. The Battle of Cambrai had taken place in November and December the previous year. The objective was to capture the important town of Cambrai to disrupt the German supply lines as well as advancing the front line. Although initially successful in gaining a significant amount of ground the Allies never actually reached Cambrai and the Germans eventually counter attacked in March 1918 and won back a lot of ground. Even after the main fighting had finished the Germans continued to counter attack. It was winter and obviously cold with snow on the ground.

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<p>(March 9th) a divisional wire was received : " The Corps Commander wishes to congratulate the division, and especially the two battalions concerned, for their successful defence in last night's attack." Lieut.-Colonel Waters and Captain Bainbridge received the D.S.O., Captain Tanner and Second Lieutenant Edington the M.C., and Captain Penfold a bar to the M.C., for these operations, with the congratulations of the Corps, Divisional and Brigade Commanders.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">* * * *</p> <p>The 7th Battalion on December 21st performed an exploit which seems almost incredible. They were resting and refitting in the north when Lieut.-Colonel C. Playfair succumbed to the stress and strain of the Ypres operations and had to go to hospital. Major A. E. Gallagher, D.S.O., took over command on the 2nd until two days later, when Major E. G. L'Estrange Malone rejoined from divisional headquarters. On December 9th they left the area and a week later relieved the 9th Royal Irish Fusiliers on Welsh Ridge, in the salient south of Marcoing. On the 21st a message was received from brigade headquarters asking that every endeavour should be made to secure a prisoner for identification purposes. It was a bright moonlight night ; there was a white frost on the ground, and for 300 yards one could see clearly. It was therefore the very last kind of night for patrol activity. But Lance-Corporal T. Norris took out a patrol, and, discovering that the enemy were also desirous of securing a prisoner, decoyed them into the hands of a standing patrol under Corporal G. Collins. A prisoner was thus captured within three and a half hours of the request being received from the brigade. The Divisional and Brigade Commanders congratulated the battalion on their promptitude, which was surely unique, and Lance-Corporal Norris secured the Military Medal.</p> <p>The battalion spent Christmas out of the trenches, but on December 27th they went back to the front line in time to receive a heavy German attack. The position was</p>	<p>almost untenable. The trench was the former Hindenburg support trench, and the wire was still standing <i>westward</i>. There were no communication trenches leading back to the support line, and the right of the line formed a sharp salient with a sap at one point to the German trench blocked by a pile of sandbags. At 8 a.m. on the morning of December 30th the Germans opened a furious barrage, chiefly enfilade, and then attacked over the snow in white suits. B, C and D Companies suffered heavily. D in the salient lost all their officers and most of the men either killed or captured. The men could not retire, even if they had wished to do so, because of the lack of communication trenches. The wire precluded a retirement over the open. Captain Davidson, the medical officer, and the whole of the aid post in D Company headquarters were captured. A counter-attack was delivered, and, though it failed, the Germans were held and the position was consolidated. On the following day the enemy put down a heavy barrage, and between twenty and thirty Germans were seen approaching the line. A sharp burst of Lewis-gun fire dispersed them, and the battalion were relieved later in the day. They had lost 9 officers (6 missing) and 244 other ranks. The bulk of the latter were missing. The 7th were now reduced to a trench strength of 11 officers and 167 other ranks, and when Lieut.-Colonel Malone returned from leave on January 13th he found his battalion amalgamated, temporarily, with the Artists Rifles.</p> <p>The 1st and 12th Royal Fusiliers had left the Ypres area in the third week of September ; and on the 25th found themselves at Vadencourt, near the Omignon River. On October 28th—29th both battalions were in the front line when a patrol of the 1st were caught by a much heavier German patrol who attempted to surround them. But the Fusiliers retired behind their wire and inflicted heavy casualties. It was apparently the same German patrol which, a few hours later, ran into the " Day Posts " of the 12th Battalion in Somerville Wood. They were driven off, leaving behind a German officer who provided</p> <p style="text-align: center;">F. 9</p>

Record of 7th Battalion Royal Fusiliers on 21 December 1917
Extract from 'Royal Fusiliers in the Great War' by H. C. O'Neill

So William joined the severely depleted 7th Battalion in a period when the main fighting had died down and prior to the next major German offensive in March. However, there was obviously still fighting going on because on 10th January William was wounded by shrapnel in his left arm.

William Silas Woodhams – 7th Battalion Royal Fusiliers

First Name:	W
Surname:	Woodhams
Index Number of Admission:	518
Rank:	Private
Service Number:	71749
Ailment:	Shrapnel wound, left arm. W.
Date of Admission for Original Ailment:	10/01/1918
Date Transferred to Other Hospitals:	10/01/1918
Notes written in the Observations Column:	Casualty Clearing Station, Ytres.
Notes written by FWR when Transcribing:	W written in Disease column = Wounded, can be put forward as an eligible candidate to be awarded a wound stripe. 500 Units Anti-Tetanus Serum given.
Regiment:	Royal Fusiliers (London Regiment)
Battalion:	7 th (Extra Reserve) Battalion (Why is this important?)
Archive Reference:	MH106/251 MH106/251 can be found at The National Archives in Kew, and contains First World War Representative Medical Records of Servicemen from 149 th Field Ambulance

At the time morale was relatively low and the war diaries are not particularly detailed. So it's not possible to understand in any detail how William was wounded. In fact it's possible that, although William is recorded as arriving in France on 2nd January, he didn't reach the 7th Battalion until the 10th because the 7th Battalion war diary states that "*Draft of 218 O/Ranks joined Battalion from 'J' Dépôt on 10th inst & proceeded up the line with the battalion.*"

In the same entry it is recorded that "*Battalion joined with 1st Artists Rifles to form composite battalion under command of O/C 1st Artists Rifles & relieved the Hood Battalion in the Counter Attack Area*". The Counter Attack Area was an area on a hill just north of the village of Villers Plouich, behind the front line, from which presumably it was intended to launch an attack to counter the German attack in which the 7th Battalion had suffered so badly a few days previously. As such it is likely to have been subjected to shelling by the Germans although there is no specific mention of this in the war diaries of either the Artists Rifles or the Royal Fusiliers. At that time there had been so many casualties that maybe it just became 'normal'. I can only assume that it was shelling of this nature that led to William's wounding.

He obviously spent a few days at the casualty clearing station in Ytres (not Ypres), just behind the front lines, and possibly in a field hospital because he didn't arrive back in England until 14th January. There he was transferred to the Abbey Manor Hospital near Evesham in Worcestershire. This extract from the BBC website describes the set up there.

Abbey Manor Hospital

Abbey Manor, Evesham, was one of the first grand houses across Britain to open as a voluntary aid detachment (VAD) hospital during the war.

The family home of the formidable Florence Rudge and her son, the house had long been used as a venue for local fundraising and charitable events. One of these was the creation of a Voluntary Auxiliary Detachment of the Worcestershire branch of the Red Cross Society in the late 19th Century and Abbey Manor was used to host first aid and nursing classes for the local men and women. After the death of her husband Edward in 1909, Florence continued the family's business, political and charitable work across Evesham and she was repeatedly praised for her energy, organisational skills and sense of duty.

By 1913, Florence had already begun to plan for the possible conflict. She started preparing the house and her local band of volunteers and on 28 July 1914, she started the conversion of Abbey Manor into a hospital. By 10 August the first orders were given for furniture and equipment to be installed and by 24 September the Abbey Manor Voluntary Auxiliary Hospital had 25 beds ready to receive patients. Mrs Florence Rudge was confirmed as the hospital commandant.

For the first few months Mrs Rudge met all of the costs herself but eventually the War Office made an allowance of 2 shillings per patient per day rising to 3 shillings and three pence by the end of the war.

The first 18 soldiers arrived at Abbey Manor on 24 May 1915 and were all discharged within a month. The second group of 17 men were more seriously wounded and came from a diverse range of regiments and included soldiers from New Zealand and India.

As the war continued, rooms in the house were made into surgical wards and the grand Inner Hall became an extra medical ward with the house now containing 50 beds. By 1916, Abbey Manor was accommodating 100 patients at a time so extra wards were created in the Palm House and accommodation and catering tents were put up across the gardens and grounds. A fully equipped operating theatre and dressings ward was built in the conservatory.

Florence herself found happiness during the war. In January 1916, she married 2nd Lieutenant Leonard Haynes of nearby [Badsey](#). He changed his name by deed poll to Haynes-Rudge two weeks before the wedding.

By the [Spring](#) of 1918 the need for beds was so great that Florence Rudge took on the tenancy of the nearby [Chadbury](#) House and converted it into an annexe to Abbey Manor containing an extra 45 beds. Throughout 1918, all 145 beds in Evesham were fully occupied and Abbey Manor Hospital continued to treat and receive patients until 22 May 1919.

During its time as a hospital, Abbey Manor had not closed for a single day and had received 3,612 soldiers from every part of the Commonwealth and the United States. Remarkably, not one single death occurred at the hospital.

Florence Haynes-Rudge was made Commander of the Order of The British Empire (CBE) and was decorated by the King at Buckingham Palace in March 1919. Florence died in 1934 and was interred in the Rudge family vault under the east window of St Laurence Church in Evesham.

Extracted from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02b164s>

William Silas Woodhams – 7th Battalion Royal Fusiliers

We know that William was treated at Abbey Manor partly because he mentioned being in a big country house near Evesham but also photos in his possession match photos of the building on the BBC website. I believe William is the sixth from the left in the back row.



Staff & Patients, Abbey Manor Hospital, Evesham 1918

Initially I assumed that William recuperated at Abbey Manor and was then discharged from the army but his Medal Roll record indicates that this is quite wrong. Because on 16th June 1918 he is back in active service with the 24th Battalion the Royal Fusiliers.