



WILLIAM NEILSON, Rutherglen, 8 caps, cap number 25

William Neilson was born on 13th December 1879 at Ashley Park, Fallside, Bothwell. He was the first child of Hugh Neilson and his wife Agnes (nee Steel). The Neilson family were well known Ironmasters in the 19th Century. Hugh Neilson and his brother Walter founded the Clydebridge Steel Company in 1887.

William was educated at Dollar Academy where he played in the rugby 1st XV in season 1895-96 and in the 1st cricket XI in 1896. He left school in 1896 to work in the family firm. His father had died in 1890 and his mother had remarried. Her 2nd husband was John Cowan, the General Manager of Clydebridge Steel. In the 1901 Census, William is living with his mother, stepfather and siblings at Cumberland House, Rutherglen.

William Neilson married Rosalie Margaret Thomson on 12th June 1907 at Offerton, Rutherglen. They appear to have had one son Hugh Cowan Neilson born in 1914.

Neilson is cap No 25 on the Scottish Hockey Heritage List. He received his first cap on 11th February 1905. The match was against Wales at Llandudno and ended in a 1-1 draw. Neilson was to remain a fixture at right back for the next four seasons. Only missing out due to injury or unavailability due to travelling abroad with work. His last cap was in Belfast on 7th March 1908 against a strong Irish side, the home side ran out comfortable 6-0 winners after being 5-0 up at the half.

Although William didn't win any more caps, his younger brother H.E.B. Neilson won 5 caps between 1908 and 1913, including an Olympic Bronze Medal. The Neilsons were part of a dominant Rutherglen team which were Scottish Champions in three successive seasons 1905-06, 1906-07 and 1907-08.

Neilson was gazetted as a 2nd Lieutenant and temporary Lieutenant in the 7th Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) on 7th June 1915. The 7th Cameronians at that time were already on their way to Gallipoli and didn't return to the Western Front until 1918. Neilson was attached to 10th Battalion Kings Royal Rifle Corp.

Gallantry awards are only awarded for bravery in face of enemy actions. Captain Neilson's heroism took place out of the line so he was nominated for and awarded the Albert Medal.

Albert Medal Citation

On the 24th February, 1917, Captain Neilson was superintending men of his company at grenade-throwing at a Brigade Grenade School in France. A man threw a grenade from a trench while Captain Neilson was standing out of the trench behind him. The man slipped in the mud, and the grenade fell in the trench, in which several other men were standing. Captain Neilson jumped down, picked up the grenade out of the mud, and threw it over the parapet. The grenade exploded just after leaving his hand, and wounded him slightly in several places. By his promptitude and courage he undoubtedly saved his men from injury. Captain Neilson died of wounds in November, 1917.

On the 21st November 1917, William Neilson was killed while leading his men during the Battle of Cambrai. His grave is unknown and he is commemorated on the Cambrai Memorial to the Missing. He is also remembered at Dollar Academy and the family grave at Bothwell Park Cemetery. William's death was a second blow to the family as his younger brother John Steel Neilson had been killed on 2nd June 1917 while serving with the 11th Cameronians in Salonika.

Acknowledgements:

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Sources:

Scotland's People

British Newspaper Archive

Ancestry

Scottish Hockey Records

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

National Archive