Fred Clarkson





Rank: - Private

Number: - PO/1057 (S)

Regiment: - Royal Marine Light Infantry 2nd R.M. Battalion R.N. Division

Missing, presumed killed in action: - 28th April 1917 aged 20

Memorial: - Arras Memorial, France Bay 1

Batley Reporter, 8 Jun 1917 (photo) Batley News, 16 Jun 1917

Family Details

Fred was born on the 13th September 1895 in Batley Carr the son of Edward and Elizabeth Clarkson (nee Ellis). The couple had married at Holy Innocents, Thornhill Lees on 31st October 1885.

Edward came from Thornhill and Elizabeth from Whitley and in 1901 the family was living at 6, Top of Carr, Batley Carr. James had been born in Thornhill in 1887 followed by John 1888, Edward 1892 and Fred. Edward and James were working as shoemakers and thirteen-year-old John was an errand boy.

In 1911 when the census was taken the family was still in the two roomed home but John had left. The census shows that Fred was working as a news boy and Edward and James were working for the Co-operative Society as boot repairers. Edward (jnr.) was working as a joiner.

Fred attended the Church Day and Sunday school at Batley Carr and before joining the Forces was apprenticed as a plumber to Strickland Waller's, Batley Carr.

Service Details

Fred enlisted in the Royal Marines and went at first to Salonika moving to France in June 1916. He was last home for Christmas 1915.

He was in hospital with a skin disease but had returned to his unit.

The 23rd April saw the Royal Naval Division take its first steps in the Battle of Arras and captured the village of Gavrelle., the 189th and the 190th Brigades took part in this assault. The 189th Brigade was successful in their part of the plan in actually taking the Village, the 190th attack failed to the north of the village with quite heavy losses, mostly caused by a single strong point which ironically would cause such grief to the Royal Marines.

The taking of the village created a salient into the German lines but any advance forward couldn't take place as the high ground to the north east of the village on which a windmill stood was still in German hands. The capture of Gavrelle must go down as one of the great feats of arms by the RND yet most anonymous, but the official history puts the record straight "Full *justice has not been done to the 63rd Division, because the details of the street fighting in which it showed great skill and determination are too intricate for description. Actually, if they could have seized the windmill on the high ground to the north east they would have improved their*

position. It is now known that the enemy regarded this point as of more importance than even the village itself. ”

On the 28th April the southern flank was entrusted to the 2nd Battalion Royal Marines commencing at 4.25 am with them attacking. The wire was found to be cut only in one place and A, C and D companies of the Royal Marines poured through. At around 5 am the C Company of Anson followed but found difficulty virtually immediately because there was a strongpoint which was resisting with Machine gun fire and rifle fire near the Gavrelle-Fresnes road. It was overcome by the Royal Marines and at 7 am it was reported from a wounded man that the Windmill and first trench offensives had been taken and the final objective was under attack. At 7.25 am it was reported they had taken all their objectives but had received many casualties and was then being subjected to machine gun fire from both flanks and there was no sign of 1st Battalion R M on their left. Anyone who moved including stretcher bearers were machine gunned or sniped at. Other battalions had not secured their positions and eventually they had to withdraw. Six officers were killed in action 3 taken prisoner.

155 other ranks were killed 157 wounded (5 of who died of wounds) 173 taken prisoner but also there had been 30 casualties on the run up to the attack.

Two weeks before the news of him being missing his parents had received notification that his cousin, Lance Corporal John H.C. Driver, whom they had looked after from infancy and taken into their home when his mother died, had been killed. Less than four months on, his brother James, was killed in action.

Fred was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal and is remembered with Honour at Batley War Memorial, Arras Memorial and Holy Trinity Church, Batley Carr.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group