Joseph Edward Wilson Crabtree



Rank: - Private

Number: - 3/2186

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 2nd Battalion

Killed in Action: - 7th May 1915 aged 40 years

Memorial: - Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium Panel 47

Family Details

Joseph Edward Wilson Crabtree was born in Hull in c.1875 the son of Sarah Ann Crabtree nee Oldroyd formerly Ineson. Sarah Ann Oldroyd married Thomas Ineson in Batley in 1858, she then married William Crabtree in Hull in 1864, returned to Batley and married Joseph Hill at Hanging Heaton in 1882.

His mother, Sarah Ann came from Batley but her children Minnie 1859, John 1865, Hannah 1868, and Joseph were born in Hull but moved to Skelton before the birth of Frank who was deaf and dumb in 1879.

In 1881 he was living at Back Belgrave Street, Dewsbury with his family.

In 1891 he was living with his mother and three siblings at 5, Heaton's Yard, Commercial Street, Batley and although only 15 years old was working as a coal miner.

In 1911 he was living with his "wife" Mary Casey who was born in County Limerick, Ireland and his five-year-old son Joseph Edward in a one roomed home at 5, Back Jacob Street, Woodwell, Batley. He was working as a willier in a woollen mill. John William born January 1904 sadly died in November 1904 aged 10 months, Frank born September 1907 sadly died in October 1908, William was born in 1911 and George born 1912 died aged 5 months in 1913.

The family moved to live at 2, Spa Yard, Batley Carr.

Service Details

Joseph Edward Wilson enlisted at Huddersfield and disembarked in France on the 17th February 1915.

At the outbreak of the war the 2nd Battalion was in Dublin and part of 13th Brigade in 5th Division. They returned to England and landed at Le Havre on the 16th August 1914.

In 1915 they took part in the Second Battle of Ypres (22nd April-25 May).

On 22 April 1915 at about 5:00 p.m., the German Army released 168 long tons (171 t) of chlorine gas over a 6.5 km (4.0 mi) front between the hamlets

of Langemark (50°55’N 02°55’E) and Gravenstafel (50.891°N 2.979°E) on the Allied line held by French Territorial and Moroccan and Algerian troops of the French 45th and 87th divisions. The French troops in the path of the gas cloud sustained about 6,000 casualties. Many died within ten minutes and others were blinded. Chlorine gas reacts with water to form hypochlorous acid, destroying moist tissue such as the lungs and eyes. The survivors fled their poisoned trenches despite heavy enemy fire.

There was a 4-mile (6.4 km) gap in the French front. German infantry followed well behind the cloud, breathing through cotton pads soaked with sodium thiosulfate solution. As ordered, they occupied the villages of Langemark and Pilken, where they dug-in, even though they might have occupied Ypres almost unopposed. They had taken 2,000 prisoners and 51 guns. Canadian troops defending the flank of the break-in identified chlorine because it smelled like their drinking water. The Germans released more chlorine gas at them the following day. Casualties were especially heavy for the 13th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), which was enveloped on three sides and had over-extended its left flank after the Algerian Division broke.

Joseph was killed on the 7th May 1915. Military records show that in his effects he was not married to his “wife” Mary Casey to whom he had two children but a grant was paid from the Patriotic Fund.

He was awarded the 1915 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour on Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group