Thomas Curley





Rank: - Private

Number: - 3/1578

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 8th Battalion

Died of Wounds: - 28th October 1916 aged 19 years

Cemetery: - St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen, Seine-Maritime, France 0.1.0.2

Family Details

Anthony Curley and Mary Rush originated from County Mayo but married locally in 1895.Anthony is shown from various records working as a labourer, Mary's employment when mentioned was a rag sorter.

Thomas was born on the 28th July 1896 and baptised at St. Mary's Church, Batley less than a fortnight later. It is not clear if he was born in Batley or Heckmondwike but some sources indicate a Batley birthplace. The family had moved to Heckmondwike before the 1901 census.

John was born 12th January 1898, Anthony 8th August 1899 and Willie 8th August 1904 and as they were not baptised at St. Mary's it is likely the family moved to the neighbouring town before John's birth. By 1911 the family had returned to Batley, living at what would be their home for life, 25, Villiers Street, which was in the well-known Skelsey Row vicinity of town, popular with the Irish Catholic community. This census indicates Anthony and Mary had another child who died at an early age. The couple's sixth child, James, was born on the 26th July 1911. No further children are recorded. Fourteen year old Thomas was working as a coal mine hurrier but this all changed with the declaration of war.

Service Details

Thomas enlisted in Dewsbury as a Private with the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. His Service Number, 3/1578, indicates he joined the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion, a depot/training unit. They were based at Pontefract at the outbreak of war, subsequently moving to Hull. Although his service records have not survived, his number indicates he enlisted around mid-point of August 1914.

His disembarkation date in France was 26th January 1915 although technically he was under age. He was with the 2nd Battalion K.O.Y.L.I. and at the end of January 1915 was based at Bailleul on the French/ Belgium border.

Newspapers printed lists of the dead, wounded and missing on a daily basis and Thomas was reported wounded in the 4th October 1915 lists. The Unit War Diary is scant on casualty details and around this time the men rotated their time in trenches, or supplying digging and mining parties around the Bray and Carnoy areas of the Somme. Thomas returned to action possibly with the 8th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire light Infantry. There is no report in any of the newspapers

as to how and when Thomas was injured. In terms of major action, the nearest time-wise to when he died was the Somme Battle of Le Transloy, which took place between 1-18th October 1916. The 23rd Division which included the 8th KOYLI, assisted in the capture of Le Sars.

On 1 October, when in trenches near Matinpuich, the 8th KOYLI were tasked with the capture of two lines of German-held trenches. The diary account reads:

Battalion took up its position in assembly trenches behind DESTREMONT FARM just before dawn. The attack was timed for 3.15pm and the objective was two lines of German trenches over a frontage of 300 yards in front of LE SARS. The advance was across 600 yards of open ground. At dawn our position was revealed and the assembly trenches were shelled continuously. About 25% of strength were then lost in casualties before the attack. At 3.15 pm our artillery put up an intensive barrage and A and D Companies left their trenches clearly followed by C Company in support and B remained in reserve. The objective was gained easily despite a counter barrage by German artillery and work of consolidation on the two lines began. The objective was held all night against small counter attacks and at 2 am B Company reinforced. At 4 am two companies came up from Brigade Reserve and took over O.G.2 while the remainder of the 8th KOYLI were withdrawn to O.G.1.

By the time the O.G.1 contingent was relieved on the following day the battalion's casualties stood at 1 Officer killed, 2 missing, 8 wounded along with 248 Other Rank casualties.

* 8th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry Unit War Diary, 1 August 1915-31October 1917, TNA Reference WO 95/2187/2

Despite this the operation was deemed a success. Major General Babington, the General Officer Commanding the Division sent his personal congratulations and a number of officers and men of the 8th KOYLI collected gallantry awards for the part they played.

Wherever his injuries were sustained they were serious enough for him to be moved down the line to Rouen. The southern part of the city had a number of military camps and hospitals. These included eight general, five stationary, one British Red Cross, one labour and one No.2 Convalescent Depot. The great

majority of those who died in these hospitals were buried in the cemetery at St. Sever and in September 1916 it was necessary to build an extension.

Thomas was awarded the 1914/15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at St. Mary's Church and Batley War Memorial.

Thanks to Jane Roberts pasttopresentgenealogy for her research.

