Walter Donnelly



Rank: - L/Sergeant

Number: - 7939988

Regiment: - Royal Armoured Corps, 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars

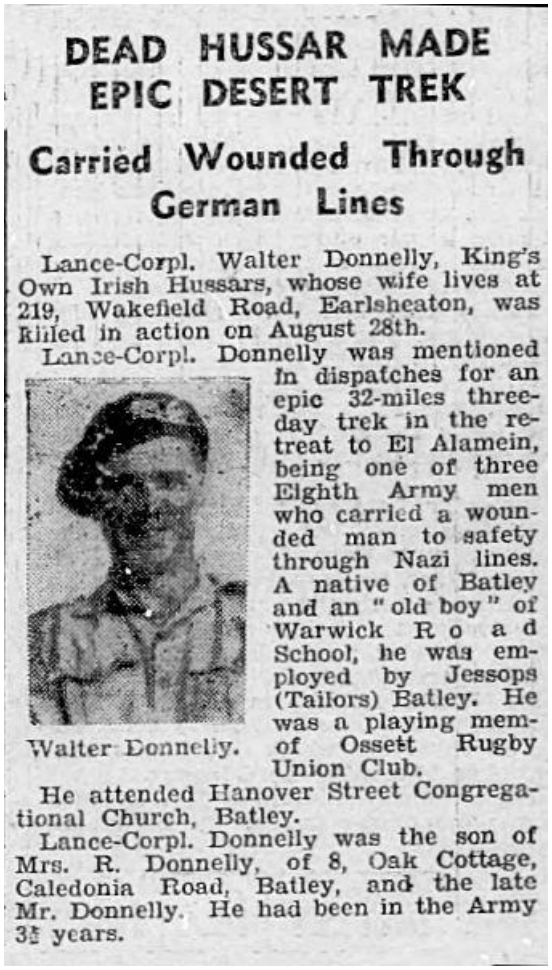
Died: - Died of Wounds 27/08/1944 Age: 36 years

Cemetery: - Bouquetot Churchyard, Eure, France. Single war grave to the rear of churchyard.

Batley News, 23 Sep 1944 (photo)

Walter was born in Batley on 27 December 1907 the son of Richard and Harriet Alice Donnelly (nee Firth, m. 1891). Elizabeth was born later that year but survived for only 11 hours, Mary Ann was born in 1894 followed by Alice 1896, Edith 1897, Annie 1899-1904, Richard 1901, Edward 1903, Clara 1905, Walter and Irene 1915. In 1911 the family was living at Beaumont Street, Mount Pleasant, Batley. Richard, his father, died in March 1942 when he lived at 67, Talbot Street, Batley and his mother lived at 8, Oak Cottage, Caledonia Road in 1944. Walter attended Warwick Road School and Hanover Street Congregational Church, Batley.

In 1937 Walter married Betsy Allott and in 1939 they were living at Fairfield Avenue, Batley. She was employed as a tailoress and he was working as a tailor, final passer at Jessops (tailors), Batley. He was also in the First Aid Service. They later moved to live at Wakefield Road, Ossett and he was a playing member of Ossett Rugby Union Club.



DEAD HUSSAR MADE EPIC DESERT TREK

Carried Wounded Through German Lines

Lance-Corpl. Walter Donnelly, King's Own Irish Hussars, whose wife lives at 219, Wakefield Road, Earlsheaton, was killed in action on August 28th.

Lance-Corpl. Donnelly was mentioned in dispatches for an epic 32-miles three-day trek in the retreat to El Alamein, being one of three Eighth Army men who carried a wounded man to safety through Nazi lines. A native of Batley and an "old boy" of Warwick Road School, he was employed by Jessops (Tailors) Batley. He was a playing member of Ossett Rugby Union Club.

Walter Donnelly.

He attended Hanover Street Congregational Church, Batley.

Lance-Corpl. Donnelly was the son of Mrs. R. Donnelly, of 8, Oak Cottage, Caledonia Road, Batley, and the late Mr. Donnelly. He had been in the Army 3½ years.

Walter joined the Army in the spring of 1941. In July 1941, the 8th Hussars, in Stuart tanks, were part of the4th Armoured Brigade for Operation Crusader. During the three-day Battle of Sidi Rezegh Airfield, the regiment had formed a box leaguer for the night-time lull in fighting with the rest of the brigade on 22 November (as neither side had night vision aids, battle normally ceased at dusk). The leaguer was discovered by the 15th Panzer Division during the night and in the ensuing engagement left the Irish Hussars with just four Stuart tanks fit for battle; 35 having been captured or destroyed. The regiment was issued 32 new Stuarts at Cairo and, under the command of Major Sandbach the regiment returned to the battle. On 1 December, to assist ANZAC forces, the regiment charged "cavalry style" again at Sidi Rezegh and although the action was successful, Major Sandbach was killed. Command then fell to Major Phillips. After a re-fit and influx of recruits at Beni Yusef, the 8th Hussars were temporarily converted to armoured cars but before seeing action in them were issued with new tanks. A & B Squadrons with the Grant and C Squadron in Stuarts, all under the command of Lt Col Gerald "Smash" Kilkelly. Once again part of the 4th Armoured Brigade with which it served during the Gazala battles of May and June 1942, suffering heavy losses at the Battle of Knightsbridge in which Major Hackett was severely burnt and

Colonel Kilkelly captured, and also battles at Bardia and Bir Hacheim. The 8th fought hard as a composite unit with the 4th City of London Yeomanry (casualties having reduced the size of both regiments) before having to withdraw with the rest of the British Eighth Army to El Alamein. In June, the remnants of the regiment under command of Lieutenant Colonel "Cuthie" Goulbourn detached one squadron to their future partners, the 4th Queen's Own Hussars, to form a temporary regiment called the 4th/8th Hussars. The brigade, including the 8th and the 4th/8th faced the massive enemy onslaught at Alam Halfa, defeating the enemy. They helped breach the minefields at the Second Battle of El Alamein and then joined the pursuit for three weeks. The regiment then enjoyed a short tour in Cyprus before returning to England.

Walter was mentioned in dispatches for an epic 32 miles three-day trek in the retreat from El Alamein being one of three Eighth Army men who carried a wounded man through enemy lines.

On its return from North Africa, the regiment was re-equipped with Cromwell tanks and retrained at West Tofts Camp near Thetford in Norfolk. In November 1943, the regiment became the Armoured Reconnaissance regiment of the 7th Armoured Division. On 9 June 1944, they were aboard a convoy leaving Bumper Quay in Gosport at 11am, bound for the Normandy beaches. Having been delayed several days by bad weather, they landed at Le Hamel on Gold Beach and leaguered up at Sommervieu near Bayeux. Going into action almost immediately they began taking casualties at Granville Crossroads, Livry in the fighting around Villers-Bocage. From 11–30 June, the 8th was involved in the advance through the Bocage with the 22nd Armoured Brigade. They were involved in action against the 2nd Panzer Division, with the 8th leading their division out of the bridgehead. On 30 June, they handed over their positions to tanks from the Us 2nd Armoured Division and withdrew for a rest and a refit of the tanks. They also fought heavily around Briquessard and took a full part in Operation Greenwood and a number of other smaller engagements. The 8th pushed German forces further and further back, taking part in the actions to close the Falaise pocket (12-21 August) suffering more casualties of men and tanks. This was the decisive engagement of the Battle of Normandy in the Second World War. Reinforced by a squadron from the Northamptonshire Yeomanry, they pushed back through France.

General Eisenhower recorded that:

The battlefield at Falaise was unquestionably one of the greatest "killing fields" of any of the war areas. Forty-eight hours after the closing of the gap I was conducted through it on foot, to encounter scenes that could be described only by Dante. It was literally possible to walk for hundreds of yards at a time, stepping on nothing but dead and decaying flesh.

— Dwight Eisenhower

Walter died of wounds on 28 August 1944 about 66 miles east of Falaise and is the only Commonwealth War Grave in the churchyard at Eure. He was awarded the 1939-45 Star; 1939-1945 War Medal.

Walter is remembered with Honour at The British Normandy Memorial, Column 327 and Batley War Memorial.

HE HAS OUT-SOARED THE SHADOW OF OUR NIGHT; ENVY AND CALUMNY AND HATE AND PAIN



Thanks to Wikipedia.