Thomas Dolan





Rank: - Private

Number: -19459

Regiment: - Leicestershire Regiment (Formerly 25292 KOYLI until Dec 1915) 2nd Battalion

Died of Wounds, Mesopotamia: - 29th January 1917

Cemetery: - Amara War Cemetery, Iraq XXI. A. 17.

Batley Reporter, 9 Feb 1917 (photo)

Thomas Dolan was John William and Mary Ellen's third child. Known as Tommy, he was born in Batley on 20 November 1894 and baptised at St Mary's of the Angels the following month.

Both John William and Mary Ellen were Batley-born, and married at St Mary's church on 14 April 1890. The couple, who spent the early years of married life at 3 Hume Street, had typical Batley jobs – he being a coal miner, she working as a rag sorter. Their first child Ellen (Nellie) was born the following March. John was born in October 1892 but died in April 1896.

After Tommy's birth and John's death, Albert was born in November 1896. Their remaining six children were girls. Catherine, known as Kitty, arrived in September 1899, followed by Ann in 1902. Mary was born in July 1904, Agnes in April 1906, Margaret in September 1907, and finally Theresa in September 1910. Both Ann and Agnes died in 1906, whilst Theresa survived for only seven weeks. The family in 1911, had moved to a four-roomed house on Cobden Street. This was in the same Catholic community-favoured area as Hume Street (they are also recorded living at nearby Peel Street in 1910), which lay to the side of the library and market area. Tommy now worked as a hurrier in a coal mine, after finishing his education at St Mary's.

Whilst at school, he was one of those listed as taking part in the 1907 Batley Hospital school's pageant, when St Mary's pupils represented Ireland – a move which attracted criticism in some quarters. Along with his friend, James Rush, he was amongst the boys representing fishermen, part of the Queen of the Rivers tableaux, the boys dressed in dark blue smocks, red capes with tassels, and carrying a fishing net.

Tommy was well known in the district through his various interests and activities. Besides being associated with St Mary's church, he was also a member of the Batley United Irish League Club. He also had social links beyond the Batley Irish Catholic community, playing football in the Westborough Junior League.

By the beginning of 1915 the Dolan family had moved to Upton Street, Cross Bank. Later that year, on around 11 August, Tommy and his friend James Rush both enlisted, initially assigned to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI). This was a training unit based in Hull, and Tommy spent his first months here as a Private, Service Number 25292.

At Christmas time 1915, both Tommy and James were transferred to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment, based at Patrington near Hull. This was the preliminary to deployment overseas. In mid-January 1916 they left Britain, bound for Mesopotamia to reinforce the regiment's 2nd Battalion. As a result of the transfer, Tommy received a new service number, 19459.

It was also around this time, on 16 January 1916, that he penned his will in his Army Service Pay Book, indicating that in the event of his death all of his property and effects were to be left to his mother.

Mesopotamia equates roughly to modern Iraq, but in this period, it was a Turkish-controlled province, part of their vast Ottoman Empire. Turkey allied itself with Germany during the war, and this posed a specific threat to British interests in the area. For Britain had oil rights in Persia (modern day Iran), and this supply was now vulnerable to the Turks. In an effort to secure a resource vital to Britain's war effort, with its oil-powered Royal Navy ships, in November 1914 Britain launched their offensive in the region, spearheaded by Indian troops. It would be a harsh, bitter campaign in inhospitable terrain.

The 2nd Leicestershire were part of the 28th Indian Infantry Brigade, 7th (Meerut) Division of the Indian Army. They arrived in Mesopotamia at the end of 1915. Within weeks they were already urgently needing reinforcements after incurring heavy casualties in action against Ottoman forces, during the first attempt in early January 1916 to relieve besieged British troops in the garrison town of Kut. By early March, Tommy and James had joined their new Battalion in the field, with the Kut relief attempts still ongoing.

The campaign in Mesopotamia is notorious for its appalling conditions. The extreme heat, combined with poor medical facilities, a lack of clean water, flies, mosquitoes and vermin, resulted in shocking sickness levels and death. Those wounded in battle were particularly susceptible. A region of few roads meant reliance on water transport, which in turn led to lengthy delays in transporting injured men to hospital. In march 1916, as efforts to relieve the beleaguered British troops at Kut, Tommy was wounded, and then went down with a fever. Hospitalised, it meant that he was not in action on 6 April 1916 when his friend James Rush was killed in action as the Kut efforts dragged on.

The reprieve for Tommy proved only temporary. December 1916 newspaper reports about his brother, Albert, being invalided home for hospital treatment for a gunshot wound, included a reference to him being wounded in Mesopotamia. It is unclear whether this was a fresh incident, or if the papers were noting his wounds from earlier in the year.

What is clear though, is on 29 January 1917 22-year-old Tommy Dolan died of wounds. His parents received official War Office notification of his death in early

February 1917. Following his death, his mother was awarded a weekly War Pension of 7s.

Tommy was awarded the Victory and War Medals.

He is remembered with Honour at St. Mary's of the Angels and Batley War Memorial.



Thanks to Jane Roberts, and for more information please see pasttopresentgenealogy.co.uk