Charles Fenton





Rank: - Private

Number: - 6984

Battalion: - 20th Hussars "B" Squadron

Missing, presumed killed in action: - 30th October 1914 aged 22

Memorial: - Ypres (Menin Gate), West-Vlaanderen, Belgium. Panel 5

Batley News, 12 Feb 1916 (photo)

Family Details.

Charles was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1892 the son of Batley born Charles Dyson Fenton (Spedding) and his wife Emma (nee Simpson) who came from Horbury. Charles Dyson appears to be the son of Jane Spedding and William Fenton who she married a few months after his birth.

Clara Spedding (1884) was born in Batley before the family left for Australia. Agnes (1888) and William George (1889) were born in Yarraville, Victoria, Australia and Charles born in Footscray near Melbourne. The family changed the name to Fenton when they left Batley.

The family returned to Batley and the four children were baptised at Christ Church, Staincliffe on Wednesday, 23rd February 1898 Charles was aged 7 years. His father's occupation was given as a card cleaner and the address was given as St. Andrew's Terrace, Purlwell Lane, Batley.

In 1901 the family were living at 158, Purlwell Lane and Charles Dyson stated that he was living on his own means.

The 1911 census shows they had moved to 11, Oxford Street, Charles Dyson was still living by private means but it also shows two children had been born alive but had died in infancy. Charles brother William played football for Batley.

Charles attended Purlwell Council School and also the Mount Pleasant Gospel Hall. After leaving school he worked as a piecener at Messrs. Simon Cooper's, Bradford Road, Batley.

His father died in May 1912.

Charles joined the army around 1910 and went to the Front shortly after the outbreak of war. At the time of his death the family lived at 73, Denison Street, Batley.

Service Details.

Charles joined the 20th Hussars who were in Ireland garrisoned at Curragh from 1908 until 1911 when they moved to Colchester. They were in the 5th Cavalry Brigade with the Scots Greys and 12th Lancers and it was from here that received orders to mobilize on 4th August 1914.

The regiment crossed to France on 17th August 1914 with strength of 24 officers and 519 rank and files. The 20th Hussars formed part of the British Cavalry that covered the gap between the British Expeditionary Force and the French 5th Army.

The regiment arguably took part in the first cavalry action of the First World War. The retreat from Mons 23-24 August which was the first battle of the war when the British had to retreat with around 1.600 casualties. They then took part in the Battle of Marne (5-12th September) which was a victory for the Allies before the Battle of Aisne (12-15 September) followed by the First Battle of Ypres (19 October - 22 November).

On the 27th October the battalion spent a very unpleasant day in the trenches S.W. of Oosttaverne being shelled and sniped at all day.

On the 28th October the War Diaries say that "the enemy shelled us vigorously just before dusk ".

At 4.30 am the next morning the enemy opened a fairly hot fire on their trenches but they did not come on. A tremendous battle continued all day on their left between the enemy and I Army Corps. At 4 pm they were ordered to open fire on the enemy to try to pin them down, if possible, in order to help the attack being made by the troops on their left.

The 30th was a quiet night but there was a lot of movement with the enemy's transport and it was thought they were moving away, but at first light the patrols reported that they were being replaced by Infantry. The big guns started to shell the trenches at 7.30 am and the enemy broke through the line where the Lancers were and left the 20th Hussars exposed and they retired.

Charles was reported to have been last seen on the 27th October although official reports state 30th October 1914.

His last letter home said he was in the trenches and quite well but an official letter said that he was posted missing. Extensive enquiries were made for several months, hoping to obtain news about him, but his mother eventually received official notification from the German Government that he was not on their list of British prisoners.

A communication from the Cavalry Records Office at York reads: --

"Dear *Madam, It is my painful duty to inform you that no further news having been received relating to No 6984 Private C. Fenton, 20th Hussars, who has been missing since 30-10-14 the Army Council have regretfully been constrained to conclude that he is dead, and that his death took place on or since 30-10-14.I am to express to you the sympathy of the Army Council with you in your loss."*

The notification assured the relatives that articles of private property would be sent, when available, and an accompanying note signed by Lord Kitchener expressed the sympathy of the King and Queen.

His brother, a Batley footballer, was in the K.O.Y.L.I. and was seriously injured in an accident in February 1916 at Clipstone Camp. William was an instructor in bombing and an accident happened where he was seriously injured, and his mother received a telegram to go to see him.

Charles was awarded the 1914Star+ clasp, British War Medal and Victory Medal.

Charles is remembered with Honour at Batley War Memorial, St. Andrew's and the Menin Gate Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group