Daniel Firth





Rank: - Private

Number: - 4911

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 1/4th Battalion

Killed in Action: - 01/07/1916 Age: 23 years

Memorial: - Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France Pier and Face 11 C and 12 A.

Batley News, 5 Aug 1916 (photo)

Family Details

Daniel was born in 1892 in Pontefract the son of Daniel and Annie Firth nee Madden. The couple had married at All Saints Church, Whitwood Mere, Castleford on 14th July 1884.

Daniel (snr) who was a miner had previously married Selina Hinchliffe at Birstall St. Peter's Church in January 1875 and John Thomas was born in 1876. Selina sadly died in August 1882.

Martha was born in 1886 followed by, Mary 1888, George 1889, Mary (Pontefract) 1894, Amelia in Castleford in 1897, Annie 1899, Elizabeth in East Ardsley in 1901 and the family was living at Army Yard, East Ardsley when she was 3 months old.

His parents had moved to Morley to live at 7, Sheldrake Place, Morley with the addition of Willie born 1903 before the 1911 census was taken. The census shows that the couple had 12 children but 4 had died in infancy.

Three of them would have been Mary born 1888, Annie 1899, James 1896-1896.

In 1911 Dan was a boarder at the home of Ellen Asquith who was a widow of 8, Jowett Place, Morley. Dan was a miner working underground. In 1911 he married her daughter Hannah Elizabeth Asquith.

Harry was born on 17th January 1912 followed by Winifred in 1915. His family moved to Batley to live at 38, Oaks Road, Soothill, Batley. Before enlisting he worked at Topcliffe Pits of the Yorkshire Iron and Coal Company at Tingley.

Daniel, his father, died in 1915 in Morley and his brother George was killed on the 24th January 1915 serving with the 2nd Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in Belgium.

Service Details.

Dan enlisted in June 1915 and went to France in January 1916. The 1/4th KOYLI Regiment served in the 148th Brigade, 49th (West Riding) Division.

In May and June the 1/4th KOYLI Battalion was occupied by working on the Candas-Achieux railway project, providing working parties for the 36th Ulster and

32nd Divisions in and around Aveluy Wood plus training sessions. All this work was in preparation for the "Big Push" which was to be made on the 1st July 1916.

The 49th Division was in corps reserve and were to follow once 32nd and 36th Divisions had captured their objectives. They were to move into Aveluy Woods before daybreak.

"*At 7.30 am buglers in the front trenches sounded the advance and the assaulting lines rose and moved forward at a steady pace with the precision of a parade movement. The scene with the mist clearing off and the morning sun glistening in the long rows of bayonets was brilliant and striking enough."*

As the morning wore on German resistance increased, especially where there had been limited British gains. German machine-gun and artillery fire continued and British casualties mounted on an unprecedented scale. The question of how best to use the 49th Division became a crucial one.

The two KOYLI battalions had assembled in Aveluy Woods at 3 am and they waited listening to the battle and then they saw the steady stream of wounded returning plus some prisoners. The Division was split with some going to support different units.

It was decided that the 148th Brigade was to be placed at the disposal of the 96th Brigade. At 6pm both the 1/4th and 1/5th KOYLI received orders to leave Aveluy Woods with the intention of crossing the Ancre by Black Horse Bridge south of Authuille. The 1/4th actually reached North Bluff before they were told their orders had been cancelled. The change of plan was that the Officers had decided to reinforce the 36th Division with them and the 146th Brigade.

The day was a disaster mainly because of the lack of knowledge of some officers in charge. Some battalions had pushed up close to the enemy before zero hour and those who found the bombardment had destroyed the German wire were successful in capturing the first line of the enemy trenches. Those who had to cover 100-150 yards or were faced with uncut wire suffered heavy casualties. They also had not appreciated the deep dug outs where the Germans sheltered.

Communications posed huge problems at all levels of command and seriously affected some of the decision making. Initially commanders of X Corps were forbidden to leave battle HQ until their men had arrived at their first objective.

This resulted in “runners” who had to cross and re-cross No Man’s Land. Most methods were useless once the battle had begun.

Later Major L.M.E. Dent 49th Division wrote: -

“I saw these huge dug-outs (in the Leipzig Salient) which consisted of very deep ones with huge number of steps down to them and we had never been told a word about these dugouts--. It has never been clearly stated that the really dominant fact of the whole situations was these deep dugouts. “

Dan was killed on the first day of this battle. His body was not found.

He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at Thiepval Memorial, St. Paul’s Church, Hanging Heaton, Hanging Heaton War Memorial and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group