Willie Firth





Rank: - Private

Number: - 42280

Regiment: - South Staffordshire Regiment 2/6th Battalion

Missing, presumed Killed in Action: - 21/03/1918 Age: 19 years

Memorial: - Arras Memorial, Pas de Calais, France Bay 6

Batley News, 29 Jun 1918 (photo)

Family Details

Willie was born in Dewsbury in c.1899 the son of James and Emma Firth nee Senior who had married on the 7th February 1885 at St. Peter's Church, Earlsheaton.

His siblings were Mary Elizabeth was born in 1885, Laura 1891, Henry 1894, Herbert 1901 but the 1911 census states that another two children had died in infancy.

In 1911 the family was living in a three roomed home at 21, Victoria Street, Batley Carr. James was working as a drayman for the Great Central Railway and Willie was at school. He attended Upper Road Council Schools and later worked for Mr Crompton's Art Gallery, Northgate, Dewsbury and attended Batley Carr Primitive Methodist Chapel.

Service Details

Willie enlisted at Dewsbury. The 2/6th Battalion was formed in 1914 as a home service ("second line") unit. It moved to Ireland in April 1916 to quell disturbances. Moving in January 1917 to Fovant and landed at Le Havre 25th February 1917. They fought in 1917 but it is not known when Willie joined them.

After a long period of rest and training, the Division took over the front line at Bullecourt on 11 February 1918, with HQ being established at Behagnies. Much work was done of strengthening the line for defence against expected enemy attack.

The Battle of St Quentin (21-23 March)

After suffering heavy casualties from German shellfire on 21 March, the enemy infantry succeeded in breaking through the Division's position where it met that of 6th Division in the valley of the River Hirondelle. Parties held on and continued to resist but were gradually destroyed and "mopped up". Fewer than 100 men of the 176th and 178th Brigades which had been holding the front line before the attack were assembled at roll call.

Two battalion commanding officers were. killed in action. At 7pm, the Division was officially relieved but 177th Brigade and various parties of ancillary units remained to take part in the continued defence.

Willie went missing on the first day of this battle.

At this time hs brother Henry had served for two years in Mesopotamia.

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

He is remembered with Honour at Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group