Peter Gavaghan



Rank: - Private

Regiment: - 7/8th Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers

Number: - 21115

Date of Death: - 23 July 1918

Cemetery: - Buzancy Military Cemetery, Aisne, France

Peter was born in Batley on 26 April 1897, son of James and Catherine Gavaghan nee Lynch. Both his parents came from Charlestown, in County Mayo and married at St. Mary of the Angels in June 1883 and went on to have eight children, five of whom were alive in the 1911 census. James was born in 1883-1916, Mary 1890, Thomas 1893-1915, John 1895 and Peter. Another son, John was born and died in 1887.

In 1891 the family address was Churchfield Terrace, Batley, but subsequent censuses saw them living in Ambler Street and this was the address at the time of Peter's death.

Peter's father, James, worked as a willeyer, according to the 1891 and 1911 censuses. His mother, Catherine's occupation, according to the 1891 and 1901 censuses, was a rag sorter. Peter, along with his brothers Thomas and John, worked as pieceners in the textile industry according to the 1911 census.

Peter enlisted in Batley after the outbreak of war, serving with the King's Own Scottish Borderers. This was the same regiment as his brother John, the only one of the four Gavaghan brothers to return home.

Peter arrived in France on 19 December 1915. Later that month he joined the 7th King's Own Scottish Borderers, who were based in billets at Berbure in the Pas-de-Calais region in northern France. This was an area used for rest and training periods for troops who had been fighting in the Loos area. The Battalion had lost about two thirds of its strength during the Battle of Loos that autumn.

Within days of his arrival his brother, Thomas, was killed in Belgium and his brother James the following August.

It was not until Christmas1916 that Pater managed to get back to England, after action during the Battle of the Somme at Martinpuich. By now he was a Private with the 7/8th KOSB, created in May 1916 from a merger between the Regiment's 7th and 8th Battalions.

Peter returned to his battalion, fighting amongst other places at Arras in the great push of 1917, at Pilckem during Third Ypres (better known as Passchendaele), again at Arras during the great German Spring Offensive of 1918, and finally on the Marne in the summer of 1918 with the French and Americans. It was here, on 23 July 1918, that Pater was involved in the Battle of the Soissonnais and of the Oureq. During the battle, after an advance begun on 18 July 1918, the French village of Buzancy was reached (though not held) by the 1st American Division, on 21 July 1918. On the evening of 22 July, the 7/8th KOSB's, part of the 15th Scottish Division, relieved part of the 1st American Division in the line. They were due to continue the attack in conjunction with the French with Zero Hour being set at 4.55 am the following morning.

Detailed orders for the attack were not issued until 11.30 pm. Getting these orders to the Company Commanders caused further problems, with the runners tasked with their delivery being unfamiliar with the weedy, marshy ground, which was also under cover of darkness. The barrage, which commenced at 4.10am, failed to eliminate a large number of concealed enemy machine guns, which were then able to fire on the attacking men. This resulted in heavy casualties.

At 10 am on 23 July, orders were received that the French would attack Buzancy and the 7/8th KOSB's were amongst those designated to defend their flank. Throughout the day the attack was continuously postponed, and the following day the Battalion was withdrawn to Brigade reserve- Buzancy was not taken until 28 July. It had been a heavy cost for the KOSB's. For one day's action on 23 July the Unit War Diary records 3 Officers killed, 1 missing, and 10 wounded: along with 32 Other Ranks killed, 61 missing, 2 wounded and missing, 214 wounded.

Initially Peter was amongst those posted missing. Weeks dragged on and the family made enquiries to the Red Cross as late as 20 November 1918.It was eventually concluded that he had been killed in action on 23 July 1918.

His body was recovered, and he is buried in Buzancy Military Cemetery, where his headstone incorrectly has his date of death inscribed as 5 August 1918.

Peter was awarded the 1914-15 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal. He is remembered at St. Mary's of the Angels, Batley War Memorial and on the Scottish National War Memorial, within the walls of Edinburgh Castle.



Thanks to Jane Roberts.
For more information and references see pasttopresentgenealogy.co.uk