Peter Gavaghan (3.11.1916)





Rank: - Private
Regiment: - 1/4th King's Own (Yorkshire Light Infantry)
Number: - 3539
Date of Death: - 3 November 1916
Cemetery: - Warlincourt Halte, British Cemetery, Saulty, Pas-de-Calais, France

Peter was born in Batley on 13 October1889, the son of Thomas and Mary Jane Gavaghan (formerly Render). The couple had married at St. Mary's Church, Batley on 18 February 1884.
In total the couple had 14 children, 11 of whom were still living at the time of the 1911 census. John was born in 1883 Joseph (1886), Edward (1887), Mary Elizabeth (1891), William (1892), James (1895), George (born and died within one hour in 1896), George (1897, died 1900), Ann (1899), Catherine (1900), another George (1903) and Ellen (1904).
The family lived in the Woodwell area of town, with their address in 1901 recorded as Woodwell Street, but by 1911 they were in Jacob Street, which was the family address at the time of Peter's death.

Peter attended St. Mary's School and when he left, like his father and brothers, went to work at the pit. At first, he was a hurrier but before enlisting in the early months of the war he was a bye-worker at Messrs Crawshaw and Warburton's Shaw Cross Colliery. Outside of work he was a member of the Batley branch of the United Irish League Club.

Peter attested with the KOYLI in November 1914, disembarking in France on 9 July 1915 as part of the reinforcements for the local Territorials. The family was praised by local newspapers in April 1916 for their patriotism. Brothers Joseph and William were serving at the Front with the 17th West Yorkshire Regiment and brothers Edward, John and James had all attested. At this point Peter had suffered personal injury and the death of a close relative.

In the early hours of 19 December, he and his cousin Thomas Gavaghan were caught up in a fatal has attack on the Ypres-Boesinghe front line trenches in Belgium. The 1/4th KOYLI's Unit War Diary for the day described events: -

> *4.50am: A hissing noise like a fast-running motor car was heard in the German lines. Very shortly after the presence of cylinder gas, said to be Fosgene, was detected in the air. Warning was given, tube helmets put on and rapid fire opened on the enemy's parapet with rifles and machine guns. S.O.S. Gas was sent to the Artillery who immediately opened fire. No infantry attack was made but later German patrol numbering about ten was seen advancing towards our trenches. Rifle fire was opened on them and they dispersed, only one man being seen to regain the German trench. The enemy heavily bombarded the whole of our front line and Support trenches during the day.*

The Battalion did manage to fend off the enemy, but as they were being relieved that evening a fresh German bombardment was launched using shells filled with lethal phosgene gas. That day one officer and 23 men were killed through gas poisoning, with a further two officers and 149 other ranks suffered its ill effects. Peter suffered from gas poisoning and Thomas was commended for his actions that day. On 28 December 1915 Thomas was killed by German snipers.

By February 1916, the Battalion had left Belgium for the Somme region of France. On 1 July, the opening day of the Battle of the Somme, they were held in reserve, but the following day until 7 July they were involved with action as part of the

attack on Thiepval. During this short period the Battalion's Unit War Diary records 20 other ranks killed and 180 wounded.
On 14 July 1916 local newspapers reported that Peter was in Boulogne Hospital, being treated for shell shock, though it was not until 9 August that his name appeared on an official casualty list. On 25 August 1916, Peter's brother, Joe, was killed in action on the Somme.

After being deemed fit, Peter returned to his Battalion, who were still on the Somme. At the beginning of November 1916 his parents received a telegram which said their son was dangerously ill in 20th Casualty Clearing Station, France, suffering from gun-shot wounds and regretfully, permission to visit could not be granted. The CCS at this time was near the chateau at Warlincourt-Halte.

This initial telegram was followed by a further wire to his family on Saturday 4 November from Territorial Records, York which read:

Regret 3539 Private Peter Gavaghan died November 3rd in 20th Casualty Clearing Station, France.

Peter was awarded the 1914-15 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal.

He is remembered on St. Mary's of the Angels War Memorial, Crawshaw and Warburton's at Shaw Cross and Batley War Memorial.

Thanks to Jane Roberts. For further details click here