Harold Geldard



Rank: - Private

Number: - 201649

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 2/4th Battalion

Missing, presumed killed in Action: - 27th November 1917 aged 22 years

Memorial: - Cambrai Memorial, Louverval, Nord, France Panel 8

Family Details

Harold was born in Batley on 17th October 1895 the son of Frederick and Lily Geldard (nee Farmery) who had married at Batley Parish on 8th July 1895. Harold was baptised at the same church on the 1st December 1895 when they lived in Taylor Street.

Leonard was born in 1898 followed by Lily in 1900 and Alice in 1902. In 1901 the family was living at 36, Kent Street, Batley and Frederick was a rag and shoddy warehouseman but before 1911 the family had moved to live at 1, Broomhill Terrace, Warwick Road and Harold was employed as a baker's assistant.

Service Details

The 2/4th Battalion was formed in Wakefield on 30th September 1914 as a second line unit. On 1st March 1915 they moved to Bulwell and attached to 187th Brigade in 62nd (2nd West Riding) Division. In April they moved to Strensall and in May to Beverley, going on in November to Gateshead, January 1916 to Larkhill and in June 1916 to Flixton Park near Bungay, moving again in October to Wellingborough. They landed in Le Havre on 15th January 1917.

In 1917 they took part in Operations on the Ancre (15th February -13th March)

German retreat to the Hindenburg Line (14-19th March)

First attack on Bullecourt (part of the Arras offensive (11April)

The German attack on Lagnicourt (15 April)

Battle of Bullecourt (3-17 May)

Actions on the Hindenburg Line (20-28 May)

Cambrai Operations (Tank attack 20-21 November)

The capture of Bourlon Wood (23-28 November)

On the 21st the 62nd Division had a violent and costly battle for Anneux led by the 186th Brigade had been given the task of trying to capture the heights but could not penetrate further than the sunken lane facing the wood. The 40th Division were given orders to relieve the 62nd on the 23rd but it took them 15 hours to travel 9 miles to Havrincourt.

A relief and assault plan were quickly drawn up: 121 Brigade to capture Bourlon, 119 Brigade to go for the wood, both jumping off from the sunken lane. On their right, the 51st would move forward to Fontaine. On the left, the 36th would go in again at Moeuvres. 92 tanks would support these units. They attacked through ground mist on the morning of the 23rd. Some of the units of the 40th had to cross 1000 yards down the long slope from Anneux, across the sunken lane and up the final rise into the wood, all the while under shell fire. There was close and vicious fighting in the wood, but after 3 hours the Welsh units of 119 Brigade were through and occupying the northern and eastern ridges at the edge of the undergrowth. 121 Brigade was cut down by heavy machine gun fire, and few men got as far as the village. 7 tanks did but were unsupported and the survivors withdrew. On the flanks, the 36th and 51st Divisions made little progress, against strengthening opposition.

Over the next few days, further troops were thrown into the battle, including the Guards Division, which advanced into Fontaine. Once his troops had been driven from the wood, the enemy switched all of his artillery onto it. Battalions in the wood were wiped out. Three companies of the 14th H.L.I. miraculously penetrated to the far side of Bourlon but were cut off and gradually annihilated. And it began to snow. The weary troops settled into the newly-won positions. The British now sat some way ahead of the position of 20th November, being in possession of a salient reaching towards Cambrai, with the left flank facing Bourlon and the right alongside the top of the slope which ran down towards Banteux.

His effects of £187.2s.8 d. were left to his father Frederick. His probate date was 27th May 1919.

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

He is remembered with Honour at Cambrai Memorial, Batley War Memorial, Broomhill United Methodist Chapel and Purlwell Methodist Church.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group