Walter Clarence Gibson





Rank: - Corporal

Number: -- 1505

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

Died of wounds: - 4th August 1915

Cemetery: - Longuenesse (St Omer) Souvenir Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France 11.A.12

"PEACE PERFECT PEACE GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN"

Batley News, 7 Aug 1915 (photo)

Family Details:

Walter Clarence Gibson was born in Earlsheaton on 21st June, 1893 to Earlsheaton-born Harry Gibson and his wife Clara (née Murten) from West Ardsley. They had married at Batley Parish Church on 13th August, 1889 and were living at 13, Back Lawson Street in Dewsbury when Walter was born. Walter was baptised at St. Philip's Church in Dewsbury on 17th July, 1893.

In 1901, the family which included Harry and Clara, Robert William (1890), Walter (1893), Marshall (1898) and James Arthur Murten (aged 8 months), had moved to 3, Cross Street in Batley. The youngest, James Arthur later died in August of the same year, the couple having lost four of their seven children.

Walter Clarence was educated at Batley Parish schools and was a much-respected member of the church. He took an active interest in all church work, particularly that of the Boys' Brigade, an organisation of which he was a member for eight years. Upon finishing school, Walter was employed as a piecener at Hick Lane Mill in Batley.

By 1911, the family had moved again, this time to 8, Carlton Street, Batley. Harry worked as a Night Watchman while Robert William also worked as a piecener at Hick Lane Mill and Marshall was still at school. Walter Clarence, having been a member of the Batley Territorial's for around 4 years was then called to service at the outbreak of the war, joining the 1st/4th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in 1914.

Service Details:

The 4th Battalion had been at their annual camp at Whitby just before the outbreak of the war. They returned to Wakefield on 4th August and then moved to Doncaster on Tuesday 18th August with the Territorial's occupying specially-erected tents on Doncaster Racecourse. The early August weather was sunny and hot and to add to the excitement, that day a local flying enthusiast landed his airplane on the Race Common, staying some 20 minutes to chat to the new recruits. The battalion moved later that month to Sandbeck Park, to the east of Rotherham and then in November to Gainsborough to undertake coastal defence duties.

On Christmas Eve 1914, the GOC 1st West Riding Division issued a report saying that the officers were "keen and efficient", well-behaved and that the physique of the NCOs and the men of 1st/4th was good and healthy.

Here a tragic accident happened on Friday 19th February when the battalion were taken to the gyme (a deep pool) for raft-building exercises. Unfortunately, when the raft tried to return to the bank, the pole would not reach the bottom. Pandemonium ensued, with the raft titling and many of the men either falling or jumping into the water. Seven men subsequently died in this accident, including E B (?) from Batley. Harold Hirst (son of Joseph Hirst of G. H. Hirst and Sons, Batley) was in charge of the exercise at the time, though he was not held responsible for the tragedy that occurred.

The battalion moved then to York in February 1915 and from there on the 13th April the 1st/4th and 1st/5th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry division's boarded trains to Liverpool Street station, London. Arriving at 6:20PM, the two King's Own divisions joined with the 1st/4th and 1st/5th York and Lancashire regiment, making up the 3rd West Riding Division Brigade commanded by Brig. Gen. R. Dawson. The fully-formed Brigade then crossed during the night to Boulogne-sur-Mer in northern France.

By the 19th April, the Division had concentrated in the area of Estaires –Merville-Neuf Berquin. They were involved in the Battle of Aubers Ridge on the 9th May. An attack at Hooge on 19thJuly, which included the explosion of a mine in the grounds of the chateau, provoked an immediate reply from the Germans and an artillery duel began along the whole of the line around Ypres. Throughout the night, the 1/4th in trenches south of Boesinghe carried on a hand grenade fight with the Germans.

At the end of July, the major activity in the Salient was centred on the Menin road. Around this time, the weather was poor creating appalling conditions for the men on the front line. One soldier notes how: -

"*The weather is very broken and the trenches in a horrible state –if you try to dig and improve them you almost always disturb human remains either in the floor or parapet –the stench is awful in spite of the chlorate of lime. On July 27th,28th and 29th I and my Platoon had a particularly rotten time for we had to hold an advanced and detached slit trench We could not stand up because it*

meant sure death as the German trenches were only 30yards away –we had to sit or squat amongst those awful maggots. We were continually shelled during the day. None of the senior officers ever came to see what the conditions were like."

On the night of 29/30 July a German night attack near Hooge introduced the BEF to an ancient weapon of war seldom used since the Middle Ages -liquid fire. At 3-15am on 30 July "C" company of the 8th Rifle Brigade was mounting the fire step to "Stand To" when it was enveloped by a huge conflagration, hosepipes from the German trenches opposite sprayed liquid fire over the Rifle Brigade's front line. Few in the trench survived and the Germans, in overwhelming numbers, raced towards the British Line. Most of the men from this Kitchener division had enlisted less than a year before, but over the next three days they displayed tremendous courage in halting the advancing Germans and stabilising the front.

Walter Clarence and his friend from Batley, Clifford Ernest Parkin were hit by the same shell on the 2nd August Clifford being killed outright and Walter died 2 days later from his wounds.

A year later the Batley News Memoriam section there appeared: -

Gibson--- In loving memory of Corpl. Walter Clarence Gibson of 2, Carlton Street, Batley who died from wounds August 6th 1915.

There on the field of battle,

He bravely took his place,

And fought and died for England,

And the honour of his race;

Sleep on dear son, in a hero's grave,

A grave we may never see,

But so long as life and memory last,

We will remember thee.

From his loving Mother, Father and Brothers.

He was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-20 and the Victory Medal.

Walter is remembered with Honour on Batley War Memorial, Batley Parish Church and Longuenesse (St. Omer), Souvenir Cemetery.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group