John Edward Gledhill



Rank: - Rifleman

Number: - B/200848

Regiment: - Rifle Brigade 8th Battalion (formerly M/2/266965 Royal Army Service Corps (M.T.)

Killed in Action: - 21st March 1918 aged 38 years

Memorial: - Pozieres memorial, Somme, France Panel 81to 84

Family Details

John Edward was born in Batley on 3rd April 1878 the son of Alfred William and Emma Gledhill (nee Scargill) and was baptised at Holy Innocents Church, Thornhill Lees on 10th May 1878.

George Henry was his eldest brother born in Thornhill in 1871 followed by Annie Elizabeth (1876) who was born in Batley. Thomas was born in May 1881 followed by Edith Mary (1882), Nellie (1885), and Alice Maud (1885).

Before 1891 Alfred, who was a blacksmith, had moved to live at 48, Bradford Road, Batley and a decade later the family was living at 7, Taylor Street, Batley.

John Edward married Susannah Heathcote in 1906 and in 1911 the couple was living at 3, Mount View, Warwick Road, Batley. John was an iron fitter.

Service Details

The 8th (Service) Battalion was formed in August 1914 and came under the command of 41st Brigade in 14th (Light) Division.

His service records have not survived but we do know he enlisted at Grove Park, Kent and his battalion took part in the Battle of St Quentin in March 1917.

The priority of the British over the winter of 1917/1918 was to repair the roads and construct new supply lines, hospitals and light railways, as well as digging more trenches and installing more barbed wire opposite the Hindenburg Line.

The Allies were expecting a German offensive as their December Armistice with Russia made it possible for Germany to transfer men and guns from the Eastern Front to the Western one.

The Germans had a time constraint, because although the USA had joined the Allies in April 1917, their soldiers were not expected to be ready for the front until the spring of 1918. Hence a German attack could be expected as soon as winter had receded sufficiently to allow it.

The Allies had no idea where the attack would come. Haig was concerned that the Germans would seize the Channel Ports, but was denied any more troops by the British Government. The only way he could defend them was taking soldiers from the south of his command (the area held by among others the 16th Irish

Division) and moving them to the Channel. This left the area round St Quentin dangerously under-defended. The Germans attack, code named Michael, was aimed at the point where the British southern flank joined the French northern flank. This attack would be aimed towards Amiens.

At 4.40am on 21 Mar 1918 the Germans fired 1.16 million shells over a 80 km front in a 5 hour period their shells were both explosive and gas. Further as dawn broke, a thick mist reduced visibility to 25 metres. At 9.35 am, 500,000 German soldiers advanced through the mist. During the day the Dublin's withstood the direct attack, but the Germans managed to make an advance on the junction with 66 Division at the side of the salient. They surrounded Ronssoy, and threatened to attack the Dublin's from the rear.

By midnight the 1st Battalion withdrew through the brown line, which was held by 47 Brigade. They were missing about 600 soldiers from the 1st Battalion when they withdrew. They got to Divisional HQ at Tincourt about 4am to re-group. There were only 5 officers and 90 other ranks left. They took up a position along the road running north-west out of Tincourt.

John Edward was killed on the first day of the battle which lasted until the 5th April 1917.

John Edward is remembered with Honour at Broomhill Methodist Church, Howden Clough Methodist Church, Batley War Memorial and Pozieres Memorial.

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



Researched by members of
Batley History Group