James Groark



Rank: - Private

Regt: -13th Battalion York and Lancaster Regt

No.: -19677

Missing: - 19 April 1918

Memorial: -Ploegsteert Memorial

James was born in Batley on 8 March 1889 the son of Patrick and Bridget Groark (nee Mullaney) who came from Ireland. The couple had married at St. Paulinus Church Dewsbury in November 1876. Their son Michael was born the following year followed by Mary Ann (born in 1879 and died in March 1904): James Henry (born in1881and died the following year): Maggie (whose birth was registered in the first quarter of 1883), Catherine (born in 1885and died the following year: Lizzie (born in 1887): Henry (born in1892): Francis (born in 1894), Nellie (born in 1896) and Agnes (born in 1900).

According to the 1911 and 1921 Patrick came from Swinford, Ireland. The family lived in the Cross Bank area of Batley in 1911, living at 56, Cross Bank Road when Bridget died and was buried at Batley Cemetery on 2 March. At this time James was working as a hurrier in a coal mine. Before 1915 the family lived at Fleming Square, Commercial Street, Batley. James joined the Army enlisting with the York and Lancaster Regiment in September 1914. His brothers Henry and Francis

was with the KOYLI. His eldest brother Michael, who had served as a Regular soldier re-joined his old regiment, Royal Scots Fusiliers.

Serving with the 10th York and Lancaster Regiment after training at Halton Park, Leighton Buzzard, Tring and Witley, James finally set sail from Folkestone on 10 September 1915 arriving at Boulogne in the early hours of the following morning. They spent the next two weeks on route marches arriving in Vermelles on the night of 25 September where they were thrown into the Battle of Loos, taking part in action around Hulloch-Lens Road and Hill 70. They were relieved at 3.30am on the morning of 27 September but James had sustained a thigh wound. 306 other ranks had been killed, wounded or missing. James was transferred to a Cambridge hospital to be treated for his wounds.

Before 27 January 1916 he had transferred to the 7th York and Lancasters. He was wounded again in the summer of 1917. At some point James transferred to the 13th (Service) Battalion which was often known by its original name of the 1st Barnsley Pals. It was whilst serving with them he was caught up in the German Spring Offensive of 1918.

With America's entry into the war in April 1918 it was imperative for the Germans that they should break the deadlock on the Western Front before the US troops arrived in numbers. The first of the four planned attacks was Operation Michael on which the British suffered 38,500 casualties on the first day. By 5 April they had taken 1,200 square miles of territory. The next phase was Operation Georgette.

On 11 April Sir Douglas Haig issued his famous "*back to the wall*" order saying all Allied troops should stand firm and fight to the death.

That evening James' battalion was involved in a successful counter-attack against the Germans, to the north east of Le Verrier, France. The attack, made by 13th York and Lancasters and 18th Durham Light Infantry in failing light at 7 pm and without artillery preparation, caught the enemy completely by surprise and succeeded in re-taking La Becque and La Rose. This action was about 10 miles from the border with Belgium. Overnight and the next day (12 April) they found their right flank was exposed and they were forced to withdraw under heavy machine gun fire and shelling, suffering many casualties as they pulled back towards Meteren. By the early morning of 15 April, when they were finally relieved, their Unit War Diary records the operation had cost 2 officers and 15

other ranks killed: 6 officers and 164 other ranks wounded and 3 officers and 218 other ranks missing.

James was one of the missing.

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

He is remembered with Honour at St. Mary's Church and Batley War Memorial.



Thanks to Jane Roberts and for further information please see:-

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