Herbert Ward Haggerston





Rank: - Private

Number: - 4261

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

Killed in Action, hit by gunfire behind the lines: - 19th June 1916 aged 21 years

Cemetery: - Aveluy Communal Cemetery Extension, Somme, France B.37

"ONLY ASLEEP"

Batley News, 1 Jul 1916

Family Details

Herbert was born in Leadgate, Co. Durham in c1895 the son of Jesse and Florence Williamar Haggerston nee Ward who had married in 1894 in the Lanchester District of Durham.

In 1901 he was living with his parents and younger brother, Alfred born 1899, at 486, Leadgate, Iveston, Co. Durham. Leadgate born Jesse was employed as a coal miner, hewer.

Kenneth was born in 1901 followed by Jesse Simpson 1905 and Mary Williamar 1909. In 1911 Herbert was described as being a coal miner, pony driver.

John William 1894 and Jesse 1897 had both died in infancy.

At some stage after 1911 the family went to live at 98, Halifax Road, Staincliffe. Herbert attended Heckmondwike Parish Church where he was attached to the Boys' Brigade. It was reported that he was well known and highly respected in the area. He was also a violinist in the Dewsbury Orchestral Society. Before the war he worked at White Lee Colliery Company.

Service Details

Herbert enlisted in the local Territorial Force in February 1915 at Dewsbury. The 1/4th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was from 15th May 1915 attached to 148th Brigade, in 49th (West Riding) Division.

Herbert went to France in January 1916.

The first few months of 1916 were not spent in any major actions and the division held a relatively quiet sector of the Western Front.

Working on the Candas-Achieux railway project, providing working parties for the 36th Ulster and 32nd Divisions in and around Aveluy Wood, plus infantry training sessions, occupied the battalion during May and June.

A letter was received by his parents from his Commanding Officer: -

"It is with extreme regret I have to inform you your son Private Haggerston in the Battalion under my charge was killed in action this afternoon. Please accept my

heartfelt sympathy with you in this your sad bereavement, which I am sure you will feel very much. There is some consolation, however, that your son has given his life for King and Country, fighting in a true and noble cause, to uphold the honour and flag of the British Empire. Your son is buried in a military cemetery just behind the firing line, and the place is marked with a cross."

One of Herbert's friends, Private P. Tyas also wrote to his parents: -

"I am sorry to have to write to you so sad and hard a letter, but no doubt you will have heard before you receive this, that your dear son got killed whilst doing his duty for his King and country. I was only a few yards away from your son at the time. About 100 of us were working just behind the line and about 10.30 a dozen shots came over. The first one told its tale, and it caught him between the lungs and heart and he fell into one of the sergeant's arms without saying a word of any kind. A stretcher- bearer tried like lightning to do his beat but it was too late. I went to the dressing station with your son and a pal who sleeps with me helped me to take him to the cemetery – a nice place just behind the line. There we laid him to rest but you have no idea how the blow affected me, for we have never been anywhere without going together. It was very hard to part with one who was so near and dear to me. The chaplain read the full Church of England service over the body while we lowered it into the last resting place on this earth and when the Lord's Prayer was said every soldier present joined in the sympathetic service. On Whit Sunday your son went to church, and took the Holy Communion so he never forgot the Church.

I have a few small articles here which I shall take very great care of and I think the shoe which I send with this letter is one which little M—gave him. Most of the other things which were on him will be sent to you by the officers and I hope you will receive them alright.

All your son's pals send their deepest sympathy and hope you will try with the help of God to bear the burden cast upon you so suddenly.

I enclose a letter which arrived for him yesterday from E--. A parcel has just arrived which I thought was best to open and to share amongst comrades but I return the letter. The sergeants in the Company also the Sergeant-in-Charge send their deepest sympathy.

I got the cross for the grave this afternoon and along with my other friend will go down to the cemetery with it. As long as we are here, I assure you we will do our best to keep the graveside respectable. I send my deepest sympathy and may we all meet at the Great Day before the Throne."

A Memorial Service was held for him at Christ Church, Staincliffe in the evening of the 1st July when there was a large congregation which consisted of the 1st Staincliffe and 4th Dewsbury Boy Scouts, Heckmondwike Church Lads' Brigade, where Herbert had been the bugler, and the band of the Heckmondwike Volunteer Corps.

The Vicar during the service said there was one thing conspicuous virtue about Herbert and that he was always ready at the call of duty. In his home life he was obedient, willing and prompt to do what he knew was right and at school he was the same. He was one of the first men to go to do his duty to God and his King.

His brother, Albert, died of illness in captivity on 25th June 1918.

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

Herbert is remembered with Honour at Christ Church, Staincliffe, Staincliffe C. of E. Junior School, St. James's Church, Heckmondwike and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group