Willie Halliday





Rank: - Sapper

Number: - 144728

Regiment: - Royal Engineers 124th Field Company

Died of Wounds: - 1st November 1918 aged 21

Cemetery: - Forrest Communal Cemetery, France C. 16

"THERE IS A CORNER IN A FOREIGN LAND WHICH IS FOREVER ENGLAND"

Batley News, 16 Sep 1916, 23 Nov 1918 (photo)

Family Details:

Willie was born in the latter half of 1897 to Batley born couple John and Polly Agnes Douglas Halliday (nee Stockwell). In 1901 he lived at 42, Bradford Road West, Carlinghow with his parents and older siblings Emma (1892) and Marjorie (1894). John was a foreman cloth finisher.

John must have worked hard for his family because by 1911 they had moved to a six roomed house at 2, Pynate Road, Batley and he had changed his job to become an Insurance Agent. Emma was a shorthand typist; Marjorie was a dress maker, Sam (1896) a law clerk, whilst Willie was a parcel boy. Sam had been staying with his aunt and uncle in Brookroyd Lane a decade earlier.

Willie attended Carlinghow Council School and St.John's Sunday School where he sang in the choir at this church when he was a boy.

He was later apprenticed to Messrs. William North & Sons, joiners & undertakers, Hanover Street, Batley.

Service Details:

Willie joined the forces in 1915 as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers and after six months training, he was sent to France where he fought for two and a half years before being wounded.

The Royal Engineers maintained railways, roads, water supply bridges and transport allowing supplies to get to the armies. They operated the railways and inland waterways, maintained wireless, telephones and other signalling equipment making sure communications existed. The Royal Engineer tunnelling companies, nicknamed "the Moles" were specialist units within the Corps of Royal Engineers formed to dig attacking tunnels under enemy lines during WW1.They also designed and built frontline fortifications, creating cover for the infantry and artillery .It was in the hands of the technically skilled RE's to develop responses to chemical and underground warfare and to also maintain the weapons.

The 124th Royal Engineers were attached to the 38th Welsh Division and went to France in December 1915; Willie would have joined them in mid-1916.

They fought at the Battle of Albert (July 1916), Battles of Pilkem and Langemarck in 1917 and Battles of Ancre, Herrisart, Albert, Baupaume, Havrincourt, Epehy, St.Quentin Canal ,Beaurevoir, Cambrai ,Selle and Sambre in 1918.

It was reported that Willie died in a field ambulance from wounds received on 1st November 1918.

His brother Sam Halliday joined the West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own) as a Rifleman. On 3rd September 1916 he was wounded in the head and knee. Official news was received by his parents but he also wrote himself to say it was not serious but was in hospital in Boulogne because he had been "peppered well with shrapnel during a bayonet charge." At this time he had been at the Front for 17 months having been previously in the offices of Mr. J. H. Wilman, Clerk to the Batley Justices.

Forrest Communal Cemetery has over 100, 1914-18 war casualties commemorated in this site. Of these, a small number are unidentified. All fell in October and November 1918, in the clearing of Forest and the surrounding country. They were buried by the 17th, 33rd and 38th (Welsh) Divisions. Thirteen German graves of October and November 1918 were later removed from the cemetery.

Forrest (Nord) is a small village on the road (D932) from Le Cateau to Bavay about 3 kilometres from Montay halte. The Communal Cemetery is on the small road to Fontaine-au-Bois and Landrecies, almost on the outskirts of the east side of the village.

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

He is remembered with Honour on Batley War Memorial, St.John's Church Carlinghow and Forrest Communal Cemetery.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group