Johnson Hemingway





Rank: - Private

Number: - 201671

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

Missing Presumed Killed in Action: - 22nd July 1916 aged 32

Remembered with Honour: - Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France.
Pier & Face 11C & 12A

Batley News, 16 Sep 1916, 23 Sep 1916 (photo), 9 Jun 1917 (photo)

Family Details

Johnson was born on 7th March 1885, in Dewsbury, the son of Charles Henry and Anna Maria Hemingway (nee Johnson). He was baptised at St. Philip's, Dewsbury on 24th May 1885 when they were living in Crescent Place, Ashworth Road, Dewsbury. Charles' occupation was a spinner. Before 1901 he had changed his occupation to become a weaver and moved to Walkley Lane, Heckmondwike with additions to the family of Evelina, born Batley Carr in 1886 and Charles Edward born 1889 in Batley. Ten years later the family had moved to 24, Back Upton Street, Carlinghow when Charles was employed as a woollen machine minder and Johnson (Joshua) was a condenser minder in a woollen mill. William Middleton had been born in 1893 in Heckmondwike and Edith in 1898 in Batley but she sadly died in 1901. Wilfred had died in August 1896 when he was only two days old and Charles died in 1905.

In 1901, at the age of sixteen, Johnson served 7 days in Wakefield prison for giving a false answer on his attestation papers. At this time, he was 5 feet 3 1/4 inches and had brown hair.

Johnson worked at J.T. & J. Taylor's mill before marrying Sarah Ann Farrar at Carlinghow, St. John's on 1st September 1906 and the same year Herbert John was born but he died in 1907 aged four months.

In October 1908 Johnson was a witness at his sister Evelina's wedding to Charles Frederick Clarkson whose brother Sargent Clarkson was killed in action in October 1918.

The couple decided to go to America and sailed on 14th June 1909 from Liverpool to Philadelphia on the *Haverford.* He was a mill hand and they were both 24 years old. On the 25th April 1910 he was living at 2913 Third Street, Philadelphia Ward 33 and he worked as a spooler in a cotton mill. It appears his brother William Middleton joined him in August 1912 because he gave Johnson's address on the passenger list as 2543, Emerald Street, Philadelphia. William died in New Jersey in 1967.

Shortly after the outbreak of war Johnson returned to England to join the K.O.Y.L.I.

Service Details

Johnson returned from Philadelphia and joined the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 1/4th Battalion. He disembarked in France on Christmas Day 1915. They spent the first

few days of 1916 in tents at No.6 Rest Camp Beaumaris, Calais. On the 11th January they marched to Ostove and Zutkerque and the first day's march of 14 miles proved too much for many men and the next day they marched a further 18 miles. The rest of the month was spent in training before moving by train to Longeau, near Amiens from Esquelbecq. On the 11th February the battalion marched in very wet weather, over poor roads to Authuille. The diarist for the 1/5th KOYLI who was with them complained: -

" The men had no gum boots and consequently their feet suffered severely. The trenches deteriorated badly owing to the water rising and in parts of the line it was so deep that pumps were kept working both day and night .The remainder of the month was spent in routine trench life six days in the front line followed by six days in support but at no time were the battalions away from the danger of enemy shell fire. Snow fell frequently and whilst there was some trench mortar fire from the enemy there was little machine gunning and practically no sniping."

On the 1st March the 1/4th moved to Acheux where they remained for the rest of the month.

Training continued in April, May and June in and around Aveluy Wood Somme. On the last day of June, the battalion moved forward to occupy trenches in the Southern Redoubt in Aveluy Wood waiting for the Big Push to start the following day.

On the 21st July the battalion was transferred back to 148th Brigade and went straight into the front line at Leipzig Salient where it was possible with the use of trench periscopes to see across 200 yards of No Man's Land into the Hindenberg Trench. This Salient was one of the high places of the field and was the only part of the Thiepval defences gained as a result of the 1st July and was of great military importance.

Johnson had not been heard of for some time and his brother appealed asking if anyone had seen him. Captain J.G. Kaye replied to a letter which his mother had sent enquiring about Johnson:

"I received your letter yesterday enquiring about Private J. Hemingway. I have made some enquiries about him, and I have seen some of my sergeants and they said that Pte. Hemingway took part in an attack on the German trenches and was about six yards off the trench when he was seen to fall. The sergeant says he did not see him again, and as the Company had to retire shortly afterwards, he had to be left behind. I

hope most sincerely that he is a prisoner of war, but up to now I have heard no information regarding him. Unfortunately, I only took command of this Company a few weeks ago and don't know the men very well at present. "

Customers at the Wellington Inn, Batley, the home of Mrs. Chew, had set up a special fund to send gifts to soldiers who were at the Front or were in hospital. Three soldiers replied, Private G. Metcalfe and Private W. Broadhead each received 5shillings and thanked them for their generosity. Private W. Thompson a former Batley postman was sent cigarettes and pipes for the use of him and pals. They all belonged to the K.O.Y.L.I. Private Thompson replied:

"You will think that I am an unthankful brute, but you cannot think what kind of job this has been since 1st July, the start of the Big Push. It was over three weeks before I could get a line to the wife and you know she comes first. I received the parcel alright, and you can bet we did enjoy the twist. We cannot buy it out here. There are a few more Batley lads out here besides me and besides I share the twist and pipes with them. Please thank everyone for me for the parcel. And if I live to come back, I shall not forget the boys who thought of me out here."

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

Johnson is Remembered with Honour on Batley War Memorial, St. John's Church, Carlinghow and the Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France (along with another 319 soldiers on the same day).



Researched by members of
Batley History Group