Walter Hepworth





Rank: - Sapper

Number: - 223064

Regiment: - Royal Engineers 130th Field Company

Missing, Presumed Killed in Action: - 27th May 1918 aged 35

Cemetery: - La Ville –Aux-Bois British Cemetery Engineers, Aisne, France.

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Batley Reporter, 19 Jul 1918. Batley News, 18 Jan 1919 (photo)

Family Details:

Walter was born 21st May 1881 son of George Farrar Hepworth and his wife Eliza Ann (Nee Chew). He was baptised at Batley Parish 22nd June 1881 the same day as his cousin Edith daughter of James Hodgson Chew. The family were living at Trinity Street and George was described as a mason.

George Farrar Hepworth had previously married Ruth Beecroft in 1860 but she died November 1879. There were no living children to this marriage. Eliza Ann also had a previous marriage to James Spink and they had one child Herbert born in 1874. James Spink had died in 1875.

George Farrar Hepworth and Eliza Ann were married at Batley Parish Church on 11th September 1880.

In 1881 the family were living in Trinity Street near the Chew family in Corporation Street. Herbert Spink 1874 was brought up with the Hepworth family and is later described as Herbert S. Hepworth. Walter was followed by Willie (1883- 1883), Sam (1884-1887) and George Farrar (1888).

The family had moved to Stralau Street, Batley before the 1901 census was taken moving later to Field Hill. George Farrar Hepworth was a building contractor and Walter would have worked for him. After his father' s death in 1909 Walter became a builder and contractor working with Mr G. Kershaw of Carlinghow and helped to rebuild Branch Road Mills of Messrs J. T.& J. Taylor after a fire.

Walter was a chorister at Batley Parish Church for around 20 years later moving to St. John's Carlinghow and was a member of Batley Conservative Club.

In the 1901 census the family had an adopted daughter living with them named Amelia Rawden b 1889 who was the daughter of Martin Rawden and Elinor Chew. Martin a stone mason and sculptor had died in January 1899, Elinor died in April the same year. Amelia was taken to live with her mother's cousin, Eliza Ann. In 1911 the family were living at 7, Pearl Street, Carlinghow and Walter was a mason and bricklayer whilst his brother George was a blacksmiths striker. On 23rd February 1918 whilst home on leave Walter married Amelia at St.John's Church, Carlinghow. They went to live at 12, Ruby Street, Carlinghow Batley.

Service Details:

Walter enlisted at Batley in January 1917 and embarked in April 1918. He became a Sapper in the Royal Engineers joining the 130th Field Company.

His first taste of battle could have been on the Somme at the Battle of Lys where the Division suffered heavy losses. They then fought in the Battle of Aisne. Intelligence reports began to indicate that an attack might be expected against the British positions as far north as Ypres. German shellfire opened in the early morning of 29 April but British artillery and infantry firepower from 75th Brigade broke up several enemy attempts. The line afterward became comparatively quiet, and the Division was withdrawn by 4 May to about 10 miles west of Poperinge. From the start of the Battle of the Lys on 9 April, the Division had suffered another 7702 casualties, of whom 270 were known to be dead. This was two thirds of the Division's fighting strength. Of the total, 3407 were missing.

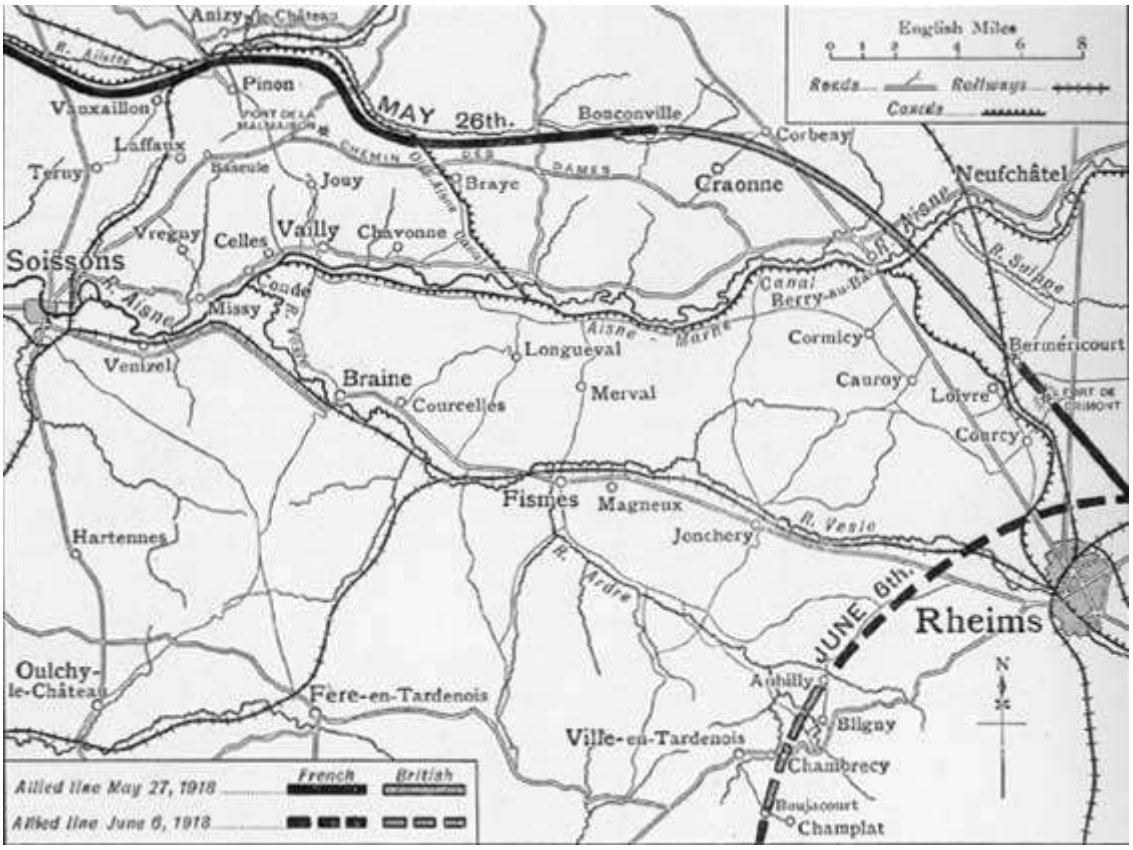
The Battle of the Aisne 1918.

The Division entrained at Rexpoede on 9 May and undertook a long journey to Fismes, 20 miles SE of Soissons in the Champagne. It was the last of four British Divisions making up IX Corps to arrive in the area, under a plan to relieve fresh French Divisions for the north. The front line on the Chemin des Dames and south of the Aisne had been very quiet since spring 1917 and it was expected that the tired Divisions could recuperate there.

On 26 May, intelligence confirmed a heavy German attack could be expected. 25th Division was in reserve and ordered up into a closer support position.

At 1am on 27 May 1918, a heavy German bombardment with gas and high explosive hit the entire area between the front line beyond the Chemin and Fismes itself. The infantry began to attack three hours later. The Division was instructed to hold the second line of defence, except for the poor 8th Border which was sent off to hold the Aisne bridges at Pontavert and Concevreux. By 10am, all three Brigades had come under orders of the 21st, 8th and 50th Divisions respectively, which by now were fighting for their lives north of the river. By mid-day the Germans had broken through and crossed the Aisne: the

units of 25th Division were thrown piecemeal into action. They were all but destroyed.



Walter is remembered with Honour at Batley Parish Church, St John the Evangelist, Carlinghow, Batley Conservative Club, Batley War Memorial and La Ville-Aux-Bois British Cemetery along with another 96 who were killed the same day.

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



Researched by members of Batley History Group