Jesse Hill





Rank: - Private

Number: - 11578

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 6th Battalion

Killed in Action: - 19th September 1915 aged 19 years

Cemetery: - Ypres Reservoir Cemetery West Vlaanderen, Belgium 11.A.7

Batley News, 16 Oct 1915

Family Details

Jesse was born in Rouse Mill Lane, Soothill on 13th November 1895 the son of Joseph and his second wife, Mary Ann Hill (nee Simpson) who was born in Horbury. The couple had married in 1892. Emma was born later that year followed by Charles 1894, Jesse and Martha 1898. Mary Ann had two children before she was married who were George Alfred born 1881 and Nellie 1888. His paternal half siblings were Albert 1871, John Herbert 1872 and Harry 1875.

The family home was at 13 Spurr Street, off Station Road, Soothill

Mary Ann died in June 1908 leaving Jesse a widower with young children for a second time. .

Jesse attended Mill Lane Council School and was a prominent member of both the football and cricket teams winning great popularity with all the boys.

When he left school, he went to work in the finishing department of Messrs. Wrigley and Parker's, Greenhill Mills.

Service Details

Jesse enlisted at Dewsbury in August 1914 and after going from Pontefract to Woking to Witley Camp, Surrey in November 1914 they went to Aldershot before going to France on the 21st May 1915 (Whitsuntide).

The Battalion left Aldershot for Folkestone on the 21st May 1915 arriving in Boulogne early the next morning. From there they marched the two miles to Ostrohove Camp where they remained for just one night before moving up the line and into Belgium by the end of the month.

This is where they remained for the next few months, undergoing the rotational routine of trench warfare. Typically, most men spent five days in the frontline, five in reserve, five back at the frontline and finally five in reserve. However, this was not fixed because, if circumstances demanded it, they could spend anything between four and eight days in the frontline trenches. While some men were in the front fire trenches, others would occupy the support lines, ready to provide reinforcement when hard-pressed in an attack or a raid. Finally, the battalion was removed from the frontline trenches and taken to the rear areas, a process known as relief and carried out at the dead of night via the communication trenches. But even when in reserve trenches they were kept busy and still at

risk, undertaking sentry duty and providing digging, wiring and ration parties. This became Jesse's daily routine in the areas around Ypres, Vlamertinghe, Hooge, Sanctuary Wood areas, frequently negotiating the Menin Road and Hellfire Corner to get from Ypres to the frontline trenches.

During these months he had a couple of narrow escapes. On one occasion he and four others were buried by shell wreckage; on another time a *"motor char-a-banc"* in which he was travelling overturned and Jesse sustained what were described as comparatively slight injuries.

On the evening of 15 September 1915, it was the 6th KOYLI's turn to have another spell in the trenches leaving Ypres through the Menin Gate, up the Menin Road and into the frontline. It appears that Jesse was in "A" Company in H16, H17, S17, H16A and H15A trenches.
It was all fairly standard stuff. During the relief, always a dangerous time, the Battalion lost a Machine Gun Sergeant and four men just after arrival in H14 to a large shell. On the 16 September 1915 the diary notes continuous shelling from their own guns behind the lines, as they were trying an experimental shell. The German reply was not vigorous. All in all, the 16 September was a fairly quiet night, with 60 more men coming up from base as the Battalion had been allocated far too much work and were having to carry their own rations. 17 September followed a similar pattern. Shelling increased from both sides on 18 September and six men from "B" Company were killed as a result, but overall, once again the night was described as *"peaceful comparatively".*

Friday 19 September dawned with heavy bombardment from the Allied guns at 4.50am. These rounds fell short of the German Lines and gradually became shorter and shorter until they were raining rapidly on the British held trenches, mainly around H18 and H19. However, because the telephone was out and the Forward Observation Officer had been killed, the Officer Commanding in the trenches could not report back to the guns. Shells were now hitting H18, H17A, the bombing post at H18A and H19 and casualties sustained – both dead and wounded.

Pieces of shell were collected from the holes and the trenches and they undoubtedly came from their own guns.

19th September is the day that official records, both CWGC and his Army Death Certificate, state Jesse died. If so, he was killed by this so-called friendly fire.

However, there is a small question mark. On the first anniversary of his death in September 1916 an “In Memoriam” notice appeared in the local newspapers. This indicates that the family believed his death occurred on 20 September.



IN MEMORIAM.

HILL.—In ever loving memory of our dear brother, Pte. Jesse Hill, who was killed in action on Sept. 20th, 1915.

His country called and he answered.

From his loving Sister Nellie and Brother George.

In Memoriam Notice from “The Dewsbury District News” of 30 September 1916

The Unit War Diary for 20 September notes that at 4.55am High Explosives from Hill 60 landed at Charing Cross killing six men. So, although official records state Jesse’s death took place on 19 September, it may conceivably have been 20 September.

A companion named Private Healey wrote to his relatives to inform them that he met his death suddenly having both his legs and part of his body blown off. The official intimation confirmed the sad news.

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

He is remembered with Honour at St Luke’s Church, Soothill; St Paul’s Church, Hanging Heaton; Hanging Heaton War Memorial (St Paul’s) and Batley War Memorial. Thanks to Jane Roberts for allowing research from her own family history and allowing photos to be reproduced. No work must be reproduced without her permission. For further information please see: - pasttopresentgeneology.

