Percy Hill





Rank: - L/Sgt.

Number: - 1736

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

Died of Wounds sustained at Warloy-Baillon, France: - 30th September 1916 aged 24 years

Cemetery: - Warloy-Baillon Communal Cemetery Extension

"R.I.P. THY WILL BE DONE"

Batley Reporter, 22 Sep 1916 27 Oct 1916 (photo) Batley News, 21 Oct 1916 (photo)

Family Details

Percy Hill was born in Soothill on the 1st August 1892 the son of Albert and Sarah Ann Hill nee Summerscales the nephew of John Herbert Hill (1872) and cousin of John Herbert Hill (1906). His parents had married at St. Paul's Church, Hanging Heaton on 11th August 1890 and Harry was born later that year.

In 1901 Percy was living with his family at Bromley Road, Hanging Heaton. His siblings were Annie 1897, Lilian 1898, Albert Edward 1901, Doris 1903 and Arthur 1906.

He was a scholar at Mill Lane School, Hanging Heaton, where he was well liked for his pleasant disposition. After leaving school he worked at Critchley's West End Collieries as a by-worker. He married Miriam Moore on 7 June 1913 at All Saints Parish Church, Batley. First daughter Ivy was born on 12th June the following year.

Service Details

Percy was in the 1/4th KOYLI, part of the Batley Detachment of the local Territorial Army. He had joined in around 1912. They were on their annual two-week camp at Whitby in August 1914 when war broke out. They were immediately mobilised and sent to a camp in Doncaster.

Even before going to France the Battalion suffered casualties. Whilst at Doncaster part of their duty was to guard the Steel Tubular Bridge over the River Trent on the Great Northern main line at Newark. On the morning of Saturday 22 August 1914, they suffered their first loss – Pte Austin Nolan who was killed in a train accident on the bridge. His was the first military funeral of the war to be held at Batley Cemetery. Months late on 19 February 1915 whilst the Battalion was at Gainsborough approximately 25 men were involved in a rafting accident. Seven of them lost their lives, including another Batley man, Edmund Battye.

On 12 April 1915 the Battalion were in York and it was from here they travelled by rail to Southampton for their crossing to France, arriving at Le Havre and

Boulogne the following day. Writing home from France shortly after his arrival there in April 1915 Percy said: -

"It is grand weather here. We are fairly near to the firing line. We can hear the guns going all day through".

One incident of note in these early months was a gas attack which the 1/4th KOYLI suffered in the early hours of 19 December 1915, when in Ypres/Boesinghe line of trenches north of Ypres. The history of the Territorial Battalions of the KOYLI shows that, because of intelligence gathered from a captured German NCO, the British were well-prepared, the men having recently received plenty of gas helmet drill training in anticipation of such an event. Nevertheless, it reports that the KOYLI had one officer and 23 men killed as a result of the attack and two officers and 149 men were affected to a greater or lesser extent, many of the men local to Batley. Further losses were suffered in the following fierce small arms fire and the intense and sustained German artillery bombardment. I do not know if Percy was involved in the incident, but he would have been aware of it as it affected so many of his comrades.

Percy took part in the Battle of the Somme. On 1 July 1916, the first day of the Battle, the Battalion waited in the assembly trenches at Aveluy Wood. It was a day of waiting. They were redeployed twice – first to the North Bluff and then to more assembly trenches west of Ancre. But they were not required. No casualties are recorded in the Unit War Diary for this day.

The 2 July 1916 started in a similar manner. They were told they were needed at Thiepval Wood but once again told they were not required and sent back to assembly trenches in Aveluy Wood. During this move an officer and an "other rank" sustained wounds. These are the Battalion's only recorded casualties on day two of the Battle of the Somme.

Subsequent newspaper reports about Percy state that he was wounded by shrapnel in the left shoulder these early exchanges. One report says he sustained his injury on 1 July, another says 2 July. Given the War Diary casualty details, it appears the 2 July is the most likely date.

Percy was treated in hospital in France and had a period at the base rest camp. He returned to his Battalion around the middle of August 1916, probably

between the 19 - 28 when they were out of the line and in rest billets and undergoing training at Puchevillers.

They returned to Aveluy Wood on 29 August. It appears that Percy, by now a Lance- Serjeant, was wounded for a second time whilst in the Thiepval Sector where they were deployed in the frontline on 11 September. Between then and the 16 September they suffered a number of casualties whilst holding the line and taking part in raiding parties, including one on the Pope's Nose, a German held Salient and strong point so-named by Protestant Ulstermen determined to punch it on 1 July 1916.

Percy's parents received a field card from their son, dated 16 September, in which he said that he was in hospital and going on nicely. However, he took a turn for the worse and died on 30 September 1916. A sister at the hospital where Sergt Hill passed away wrote to his wife as follows: -

"*I am sending you a few lines to tell you the very sad news of the death of your husband Sergt. Hill. He came in, as you know, very severely wounded in the abdomen and one leg. We did everything that could be done for him, and he was quite happy with us. He did not suffer much pain. In the last few days, he has been quite free. He became very bad yesterday afternoon, and died at 1.15pm. I cannot tell you how sorry I am for you. He was a splendid fellow. He will be buried to-morrow morning, and his grave will be carefully kept. His belongings you will receive later."*

Miriam was pregnant at the time of her husband's death. On 9 November 1916 she gave birth to her second child, a daughter, who she named Piercie.

The family remembered Percy regularly in the In-Memoriam columns of the local newspapers on the anniversary of his death. These are but a sample of the many entries:

Batley Reporter and Guardian - 28 September 1917: -

"*In loving memory of our dear son and brother, Sergt Percy Hill, KOYLI, who died from his wounds at Warloy Baillon, West of Albert, France, September 30th 1916, aged 24 years*.

And: -

One year has passed, and still to memory dear, thy loving name we breathe, and shed a tear; Time cannot alter love so deep and true; The year brings back our grief anew.

Now a mother's heart is aching
For a son she loved so well;
He gave his life for his country,
In honours cause he fell.

Sleep on, dear lad, and take your rest,
They miss you most who loved you best
The battle fought; the victory won;
His Captain's voice has said "well done".

So sad, but so true – we cannot tell why – The best are the first that are called to die."

Batley News – 28 September 1918: "*Hill – In loving memory of my dear husband, Sergeant Percy Hill, of the 1st-4th KOYLI who died from wounds received in action on 30 September 1916 aged 24 years.*

Two years have passed away, Remembrance brings back all War's bitter cost

A dear life lost

But memory lives through all

"Too dearly loved to be ever forgotten" From his loving wife and children".

And:

Batley News - Saturday 5 October 1918: "*Hill – In loving remembrance of my dear brother, 1736, Sergt. Percy Hill, 1st 4th KOYLI (Batley Territorial's), who died of wounds at Warloy Baillon, France, September 30th 1916, aged 24 years.*

Not far behind the firing line,

Within the sound of the guns

A wooden cross is the only sign 'Neath the rays of the setting sun to mark the resting place of one Who did his duty well, facing dangers as each day dawned and like a hero fell.

From his loving sister Annie.

Percy is buried at Warloy-Baillon Communal Cemetery Extension in the Somme area of France.

Like his uncle Jesse, Percy was awarded the 1914-15 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal.

He is remembered on the Batley War Memorial and the Soothill Upper War Memorial at St Paul's, Hanging Heaton.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group