Michael Horan



Rank: - Private

Number: - 19681

Regiment: - York and Lancaster 10th Battalion

Killed in Action: - 3rd July 1916 aged 35 years

Cemetery: - Becourt Military Cemetery, Bécordel-Bécourt, Somme, France I.R.7

Batley Reporter, 28 Jul 1916

Based on research by Jane Roberts: https://pasttopresentgenealogy.co.uk/

Family Details

Michael was born in Batley on the 7th November 1878 the son of Irish born parents James Horan and Annie Gallagher who had married in 1875. They came from County Mayo as did many of the Irish who had settled in Batley. James worked as a rag grinder.

Their children included Mary, born on 4th June 1876, followed by Michael, Ellen born 5th November 1880 and buried 11th May 1881, John Patrick 23rd January 1883 buried on 1st February 1885 and Thomas born 4th January 1885 just a month prior to his brother's burial. He also died aged two years and was buried on 15th May 1887. A sixth child has not yet been identified.

The Horan's family addresses are reflective of the ones associated with the Batley Irish community. They included New Street, Fleming's Buildings, Newsome Fold, Scargill Fold, and latterly Hume Street.

In 1891 when the family was living at Yard 2, Commercial Street, 12 year old Michael was already working as a hurrier in a coal mine. This was the first rung up the ladder to a career as a miner. In 1901 he was lodging along with another Batley man, Patrick Brett, in the home of Margaret Dawson in Winlanton, Durham and working as a coal miner hewer. He was back in Batley by 1911, still working as a coal miner hewer.

There are other references to Michael in Batley in the first decade of the 20th century, minor brushes with the law, two of which resulted in stays at Wakefield Prison. On April 1904 the Batley Reporter and Guardian carried the following piece.

ASSAULTING THE POLICE- *Michael Horan, collier of Batley, was charged with being drunk and riotous in Commercial Street, on the 2nd inst., and further with assaulting Police-constable Harris.- Police- constable Moore stated that at ten minutes past seven on the date mentioned he was on Commercial Street, accompanied by Police-constable Harris, when they saw defendant fighting with another man. He was very drunk and used bad language. They asked for his name which he refused to give and after walking about 40 yards Horan commenced to kick Police-constable Harris.- The defendant pleaded guilty and*

was find 2s. 6d.and costs for being drunk and riotous and 5s. and costs for the assault on the policeman.

The Wakefield Prison records show both his imprisonments resulted from similar offences—10 days for being drunk etc. on 11th April 1904 and 7 days for obscene language on 24th May 1907. In the absence of a photograph of Michael at least from these records we have a brief physical description. He stood at 5'2" and had brown hair. His education was the basic Standard 1. At the time he enlisted he was employed as a miner at Batley's West End Colliery which was in the ownership of the Critchley family, associated with Batley Hall. The workings of this mine were between Cliff and Spring Woods, near the bottom of Scotchman Lane, close to the Batley/Morley boundary.

Service Details

Michael enlisted in September 1914 and was briefly with the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (Service Number 16939) but it appears he quickly transferred to 10th (Service) Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment with the Service Number 19681 as a Private. His date of arrival overseas fits with him setting sail with the battalion from Folkestone at 10.30pm on the night of 10th September 1915 on board the *Duchess of Argyll*. They arrived at Boulogne in the early hours of the following morning. With him was a fellow St. Mary's parishioner Pte. James Groak, Service Number 19677.

After entraining for Watten on 11th September 1915, arriving at 11pm that night, there then followed a series of punishing marches, mainly in the evening and the early hours of the morning. These equated to a distance of around 50 miles as the crow flies until they reached Vermelles at 10pm on the 25th September. Exhausted before they started, they then went straight into action, forming part of the reserve for an attack on the Huluch-Lens Road. It was a true baptism of for the pair. They were being thrown into the Battle of Loos. This was the first time the British used poison gas during the war. It also witnessed for the first large scale use of the New Army or "*Kitchener's Army*" units. This given their rapid approach no wonder the casualty toll proved to be so heavy for these new troops.

The battle commenced on the 25th September 1915. The British were able to break through the weaker German trenches and capture the town of Loos,

mainly due to the numerical superiority. However, the inevitable supply and communications problems, combined with the late arrival of reserves meant that the breakthrough could not be exploited. A further complication for many British soldiers was the failure of their artillery to cut the German wire in many places in advance of the attack. Advancing over open fields in full range of German machine guns and artillery, British losses were devastating.

The 10th York and Lancsters were no exception. By the time they were relieved at 3.30am on 27th September their casualties stood at 14 officers and 306 other ranks killed, wounded or missing. James Groak suffered a thigh wound in action on the 26th September and it was sufficiently serious for him to be evacuated to a Cambridge hospital.

From October 1915 the 10th York and Lancasters unit diary give in its appendix's names not only of officers but other ranks casualties. This extends right through until the end of July 1916, with a separate list devoted specifically to casualties incurred during fighting between 1st and 3rd July1916 the first days of the Battle of the Somme.

At 9pm on 30th June, the eve of the attack, the 10th York and Lancasters left their billets in Ville, making for their assembly trenches north east of Becordel and just west of Fricourt. They fell under the 21st Division, who would be taking part in the attack around the heavily defended German-held village of Fricourt. As they made their way up the line, did memories flash back to the previous September's march?

On 1st July 1916 the plan for the 21st Division was that on the left side of Fricourt village would be the 63rd Brigade (which included the 10th York and Lancasters) and beyond them the division's 64th Brigade, would together carry out an outflanking move to the north. They would join up with the units of the 7th Division. A heavy bombardment of Fricourt began at 6.25am on the 1st July and gas was released between 7.15 and 7.25 am during which period a Stokes bombardment was also launched. At 7.28 am two mines were exploded to the right of Tambour where there had been heavy underground warfare since 1915. Two minutes later the 63rd Brigade assault commenced with the 4th Middlesex and 8th Somerset Light Infantry in the initial wave. The 10th York and

Lancasters with the 8th Lincolns were in the second wave. The York and Lancaster's unit diary goes on to say:

At 8.30 am (1st July) 10th York and Lancs and 8th Lincoln Regt. advanced from Assembly Trenches and passed through the Middlesex Regt. and Somerset L.I. respectively coming under very heavy machine gun fire from Fricourt and Fricourt Wood. The leading wave got some distance in advance of Dart Lane when they were held up by machine gun fire from Fricourt Wood. After very hard fighting in which heavy casualties occurred the Battalion consolidated in Lozenge Valley and later in Dart Lane. Battalion remained in this position until about 2pm third day when it moved up to Sunken Road and took up Support Position in Dingle Trench with H.Q. in Sunken Road.

News of his death reached Batley later that month and according to reports he was carrying ammunition when a shell exploded in his immediate vicinity causing his immediate death.

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

He is remembered with Honour at St. Mary's Church and Batley War Memorial.

In May 2020 his Victory Medal was for sale on e-Bay and Jane Roberts managed to buy it and bring it back home to Batley.

Research thanks to Jane Roberts.



v