Lawrence Judge





Rank: - Private

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

Number: - 200877

Date of death: -24th July 1917

Cemetery: - Coxyde Military Cemetery, Koksiide, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium

Lawrence was born on 4 March 1882 at Wild Boar Street, Bradford. His parents were Irish-born Patrick Judge and his wife Kate (née Madden). She was born in Bradford, but of Irish descent. At the time, Patrick worked as a musician, although in the previous year the census recorded his occupation as a mason.

Patrick and Kate married at St. Mary's RC Church, Bradford in January 1876, with Patrick's surname at this point recorded as Braheny. Later the anglicised form of the surname, Judge, was adopted. Mary Elizabeth was baptised in April 1876.

Andrew was born in 1877, James Patrick 1879, who died shortly afterwards, Sarah Ellen 1880, Lawrence, Jane 1883, Patrick 1885, Thomas December 1887, by which time the family had moved to Batley. Thomas died aged 2 months. On 5 July 1889 aged 43, Patrick died and Kate was pregnant with Annie Agnes, but this infant died the following summer aged nine months.

Later that year Kate married John Cunningham. The 1891 census recorded 26-year-old coal miner John, and wife Kate (34) living at 3, Yard 2, Commercial Street along with Kate's children. In August 1894 Kate died, and the family split up.

In the 1901 census Andrew and coal miner (hewer) Lawrence, were boarders at 5, Scargill Fold, Batley with James and Annie Horan. Lawrence lived at this address when he married Margaret Donlan in April 1904. A little over a month later, Catherine was born followed by Mary Elizabeth in November 1905. Thomas was born in October 1907, followed by Lawrence in March 1910, but he died in April 1913.

At the time of the 1911 census the family lived at 50, Hume Street, with Margaret working as a rag sorter and Lawrence as a coal miner filling corves. It is possible this was at Howley Park Colliery because it was reported, at the time of his death, that he had there for several years. In February 1912 Margaret was born and John Patrick in March 1914.

Lawrence enlisted in November 1914 but did not go to France until August 1916. This was a month after the opening of the Battle of the Somme and reinforcements were urgently required.

On 12 July 1917 the Germans introduced a new type of gas weapon to the Salient area—mustard gas. This new development in chemical warfare was a powerful irritant and blistering agent, which damaged eyes, the respiratory tract and rapidly caused contact injury to the skin, even through woollen uniforms. Gas masks were now of no use. Mustard gas settled in the soil and could continue to contaminate long after contacting materials. Delivered in shells, it had what was described as a garlic/mustard smell. The immediate effects were slight irritation of the nose and throat. Sneezing and vomiting followed. It could also cause headaches and stomach pains. The effects of chemical burning developed and could take longer to appear. The eyes became acutely inflamed and very painful, with severe conjunctivitis resulting in cases. Inhalation resulted in coughing and in severe cases a build-up of fluid on the lungs, bronchitis, bronchitis-pneumonia, and scar tissue in the lungs. These breathing problems could persist.

Skin damage could occur with large blisters developing and the most severe affected areas being prone to increased perspiration. The degree of skin damage could vary from skin discolouration to a severe destruction of the skin tissue, leaving marks resembling scalds. Fatally injured victims could take weeks to die after exposure.

The same month the Germans introduced this new chemical agent to the field, the 1st /4th KOYLI moved to the coastal area of France and Belgium. By 18 July they occupied the Nieuport-defences on the Belgium coast, north of Ypres.

The Unit War Diary notes at 11pm on 21 July, after great enemy aerial activity throughout the whole day the *"enemy heavily bombarded Nieuport with shells of all calibres, including a large quantity of Gas Shells for about 15 minutes."* Another 15- minute bombardment rained down on Nieuport at midnight and again at 2 am on 22 July. These bombardments included a large quantity of the new mustard gas shells which drenched Nieuport and surrounding areas. The Unit War Diary states:

"*These gases were the chief cause of the large number of casualties sustained by the Battalion on the night 21/22 July":*

It notes seven other ranks killed and a further nine wounded on that night. There is a separate entry specifically for gas casualties which notes nine officers and 413 other ranks wounded by gas, with a further three other ranks missing, believed to be wounded by gas.

Later, on 22 July, two officers and 114 other ranks who had remained behind the lines at Coxyde joined to reinforce the battalion such was the number of casualties incurred. The shelling continued on 23 July, including once more with gas. This resulted in more casualties, noted in the diary as one killed, with gas accounting for the wounding of three officers and a further 73 other ranks.

The battalion was finally relieved on 24 July, a day which saw another 34 other ranks wounded by gas. Lawrence was amongst those in the battalion fatally wounded by gas in this period. He died in Belgium on 24 July whilst being treated by the 91st Field Ambulance. These Field Ambulances were mobile front line medical units manned by troops of the Royal Army Medical Corps. Their Unit War Diary on 22 July recorded: -

"Commencing at 6 am cases of gas shell poisoning commenced from the line. Up to noon 377 were counted in and there was no slackening...suffering from

Diarrhoea, vomiting, and congested eyes. Between 5am and midnight admissions roughly 2,300, mostly 49th Division. At 8 am a message came from Capt Stark at ADS that 200 cases were waiting to be brought down. The men say the smell is not unpleasant rather resembling mustard"

The gas cases were still arriving the day Lawrence died.

Margaret first heard the news of her husband's death from an unofficial source, but she did not accept it as final until she received official confirmation. The confirmation duly came, stating that his death occurred abroad on 24 July 1917 and was due to injuries caused by "gas".

His officer, in a sympathetic letter to Margaret wrote: -

Your husband was a good soldier, both in the line and out. A hard worker and liked by all who knew him, he will be missed by the Company and his friends in other units.

Lawrence was awarded the Victory and British War Medal and is remembered at St. Mary's Church, Batley and Batley War Memorial.



Thanks to Jane Roberts and for more information please see

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