# Edward Leonard








**Rank: -** Private

**Number: -** 2202

**Regiment: -** West Yorkshire (Prince of Wales' Own) 1st/8th Battalion

**Missing presumed Killed in Action: -** 2nd July 1916 aged 22

**Remembered with Honour: -** Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France. Pier and Face 2A, 2C & 2D

**Family Details:**

Edward was the second surviving child of Leeds born couple William and Emma Leonard (nee Dowd). He was born in June 1894. The couple had married in Leeds in 1890 and in 1891 were living at Springfield Lane, Morley and William gave his occupation as a coal miner. His growing family had moved to New Park Street, Morley before the 1901 census when William gave his occupation as a pit deputy (underground). Ann was born in (1891), Edward, Alice (1896), Walter (1898), Agnes (1900), Doris (1902), Ethel (1904) were all born in Morley before the family moved to Batley to live in a three roomed home at 24, North Bank Road before the birth of Elsie (1906 ) and Nellie (1908). Another sibling had died in infancy.

Edward won a scholarship for Batley Grammar School in 1905 and by 1911 he was working as an office boy for a shoddy manufacturer but before enlisting he had become a confidential clerk for Messrs. Bodhenheim and Carlebach, rag merchants, at Dewsbury.

**Service Details**

Edward enlisted shortly after the outbreak of war in August 1914 at Leeds into the West Yorkshire (Prince of Wales' Own) 1st/8th Battalion Leeds Rifles. The Leeds Rifles were based at the Carlton Barracks, Leeds. They came under the command of 146th Brigade, 49th (West Riding) Division.

On 10th August 1914 they moved to Selby and then for training to Strensall Barracks, York moving again in March 1915 to Gainsborough where they left by two trains on 15th April 1915 for Folkestone en route for Boulogne. The battalion minus the machine gun section came under the command of Major J. W. Alexander and at this time their strength was 30 officers, 1007 other ranks, 74 horses and mules, 2 machine guns, 13 limbered wagons, 6 G S wagons, 2 water carts and 1 medical cart.

After arriving in France, the battalion received their first instructions of trench warfare at La Gorgue.

Edward wrote several letters home and some were published in the Batley News.

According to the war diaries of the 1st/8th Leeds Rifles they were in the trenches at Le Trou from the 11th-17th June. Edward wrote the following letter which was published in the Batley News on 26th June 1915 –

*"We came out of the trenches last night after six days of it, and we were billeted in an old barn. You asked me to tell you how I spent my twenty first birthday. Well I cannot say that there was any incident worth special mention. We went up into the firing line on Friday night and of course, we were awake all night. We did not get into "bed" until 9 o'clock on Saturday morning, the 21st birthday of your humble servant. It was a quiet day – about the quietest I have spent in the trenches. I think the Germans must have known it was my birthday. We had a bit of music at night to celebrate it, with a mouth organ for accompaniment to a few songs from our men.*

*Some of the cycling corps went with us for two days instructional purposes. Some of them naturally were a little nervous, but they soon got used to the shells and bullets playing the German National Anthem as they whistled over. Taking things all round we have had a very quiet week as far as shells etc go. We had about the busiest day yesterday, when the enemy started sending us shells and trench mortars over.*

*I saw in a paper not long ago that a man who had been in the trenches had written to say that they could see the shells coming over like tennis balls at express speed. He must have had the finest pair of eyes it is possible to imagine. You can hear them whistle over but cannot tell to a few hundred yards where they are going to burst. They "don't half "make a row when they burst. But the trench mortars are the worst. You can see these coming in the day time. They look like bottles coming at about the speed a man throws a cricket ball. When they drop, they are about ten seconds before they burst, but when they do they shake everything for a good distance away. Personally, I think they are the most terrible things they send.*

*We get any number of aeroplanes over and it is amusing to see how contemptuous they seem of the guns that are trained on them. I have seen any number of shots sent at them. We have been extremely lucky this time having had very few casualties.*

*I understand there are one or two strikes impending in England. This is what the men at home are doing to help those of us who are out here – doing their bit for their King and country – just because they are not getting what they think they ought to! All those who are in favour of strikes at present ought to be sent out here where they have to think themselves lucky to get eight hours sleep out of 24 never mind eight hours work then the sleep, they get is with one eye open.*

*I think they might leave strikes alone, at any rate until the war is over. They want to think of the men who have left such good positions to come out here for a lot more work and about a shilling a day. It is to be hoped the men take a sensible view of things and stick to their work.*

In July 1915 Edward was injured in the arm and the event was chronicled in the Batley Reporter. Rifleman Carbutt of Birstall wrote: -

"*I am pretty well at the moment but I can tell you that we have been having it pretty rough out here. Your Edward has been wounded. It happened while he was on duty yesterday afternoon when a stray bullet caught his arm. But do not be at all alarmed, as it is only very slight and I think he will not be long before he is home. "*

John Grunt, also wrote to his parents saying that Edward had been wounded. He told them that "Ted" was not in danger and that one of his fellow soldiers had even offered him ten pounds to take his place, with the possibility of some time at home in England being the attraction. Rifleman Grunt also said that he thought the war would not last long so the Leonards should "keep their hearts up".

Edward himself wrote to a friend living at Carlinghow. He wrote: -

"*It was all rather sudden. I had already written home saying I was going on alright when the officer told me I was wanted in the reserve trenches as a witness in a court enquiry. So, I was sent down from the firing line and was sat outside the officers dug out when I was hit straight through the muscle of my right arm. I was extremely lucky not to get two wounds.*

*The bullet went into my top pocket after going through my arm, but some things in my pocket deflected its flight and sent it down my coat sleeve, it passing through my handkerchief on its way out. Otherwise it would have penetrated my*

*chest. The wound is very painful, but going on alright. I am now in a large hospital at base camp only about twenty minutes walk from the sea. They are looking very well after us here."*

It appears that Edward returned home for a short period of time because there was a report in the Batley News "Batley Rifleman saved from serious injury by his braces" which was "exclusive" to the News.

The article states that he was home for a few days and that the injury occurred in the hottest part of the line and at sometimes the trenches were only 15 yards from the Germans. Edward goes on to say that he was sitting smoking when he was shot apparently by a German sniper. The bullet went through his right arm above the elbow and passing through the sleeve went into his pocket. There fortunately it struck the buckle of his braces, rebounded through the sleeve and glancing down his arm buried itself in the trenches.

He went on to tell of a more miraculous escape from injury by one of his companions. About six men were in a dugout during a bombardment, and a shell burst directly above it. Five of the men were dug out either dead or seriously injure but the sixth man, strangely enough, did not receive a scratch. With the exception of shock he was none the worse for his adventure.

Edward recalled that he had once seen two of our aeroplanes bring down a German airman. The plane came over the British lines and our airmen ascended to encounter it. One engaged the German' s attention whilst the other climbed much higher and eventually dropped a bomb on the enemy machine setting it on fire. "*It was an impressive sight to see the German aeroplane coming to earth on fire. The pilot made frantic attempts to get back to his own lines but failed. When he knew he had no chance of descending safely he jumped out of the machine and was killed outright."*

Although Edward had not been called upon to take part in a bayonet charge but had seen other soldiers return victorious after capturing enemy trenches.

He remarked "*It was amusing to see them return carrying souvenirs of all descriptions. Some of the fortunate could be seen displaying a greatly coveted German helmet, whilst others had revolvers and other things."*

He recalled another alarming incident whilst he and others were carrying ammunition to the front line. The first line of the British trenches was a line which had been captured from the Germans and the German front line was one that had formerly been their reserve trenches. The first line and supports always being connected by communication trenches, the British and German trenches were in touch with each other. As the party of West Yorkshires were carrying the ammunition to the first lines, they lost their bearings owing to the intense darkness and the bewildering line of zig zag trenches. For some time, they kept on with the hope they would find their bearings but soon it became apparent that they had passed the British line and were in the communication trench leading to the Germans. It was an alarming position but the party by making a quick retreat, were able to reach their own trenches.

On another occasion he recalled that whilst carrying trench mortar shells to the first line, the party was overtaken by a cloud of poisonous gas, and had to retire leaving the shells in the trench to be brought up later. He told the reporter that he had seen a good deal of the work of the German gas shells. "*When they explode the fumes smell like almonds but grow stronger and stronger, until they are intensely bitter and burn the eyes and prevent the victim from drawing his breath. The victim starts to sweat and choke and is eventually overcome. He concluded that when it comes to a fair fight the Britisher is easily superior."*

Edward returned to join his battalion where he served in France. At the end of June 1916, the War Records show that the total strength was 44 officers and 1,007 other ranks in the battalion which came under the orders of 147th Infantry Brigade in reserve to 32nd Division. They were able to have working parties of 350 men day and night during the first two weeks of June 1916.

On the 30th June they were in Aveluy Wood but were sent on the 1st July, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, to Thiepval Wood under immediate support of 36th Division who had attacked at zero hour. This move entailed crossing a swamp by two duck boarded causeways. The 1/7th and 1/8th Leeds Rifles took the North causeway. They came under German machine gun fire and had to cross in small parties, but by 11.35 am they were in assembly trenches in Thiepval Wood. They were swept by machine gun fire from Thiepval Fort.

The war diary for the 1/8th Leeds Rifles reads: -

*"Moved into Thiepval Wood in immediate support to the 36th Division. Heavy fighting ensued. The battalion were not called upon to go over the parapet had heavy casualties. Fighting continued during the 2nd but in the evening, we moved to Aveluy Wood. "*

They were not called upon to go over the parapet but there was heavy fighting with heavy casualties. Fighting continued on the 2nd July before the Battalion moved, in the evening, to Aveluy Woods.

The War Diaries show that the Battalion during the month of July 1916 two officers were killed, 12 wounded, 1 missing, 1 gassed. Other ranks, 56 killed, 297 wounded, 13 missing, 3 gassed. Strength at the end of the month was 31 officers and 705 other ranks.

On the 21st July the Leonard family received a telegram saying that Leonard had not been seen since the heavy fighting of the 2nd July. Tragically this was the same day that his sister, Ann, died of picric acid after working in the munition's factory.

Edward is remembered with Honour on Thiepval Memorial along with 567 others killed on the same day, Batley War Memorial, St. John's Church Carlinghow, St. Mary's R.C. Church, Batley and Batley Grammar School.

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




Researched by members of
Batley History Group