Harold Lyles





Rank: - Private

Number: - 351270

Regiment: - Durham Light Infantry 2nd Battalion

Killed in Action: - 21 March 1918

Cemetery: - Morchies Military Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France D 59

Family Details:

Harold Lyles was born in Batley on 7 April 1898 the second son of Fred and Susan Lyles (nee Ledger). The couple had married at Batley Parish on 6th October 1894. Harold was baptised at St Matthew's Church, Westtown, and Dewsbury on the 31 January 1900.

The following year Fred, Susan, Arthur Edward (1895) and Harold were living at 12, Cullingworth Street, Staincliffe, Batley. At some point the family moved to Dewsbury because Harold attended Boothroyd Lane Council School before moving to 14, Providence Street, Batley when he attended Park Road Day School and Zion Sunday School. The family grew, Ivy (1903), Gilbert (1907) and Alice (1910) but unfortunately Fred died in Leeds Infirmary in February 1910 before the birth of Alice, however Susan, on 28 October 1911 at St Thomas 's Church married widower Percival Redfearn.

Harold was well known in both Batley and Dewsbury and was apprenticed to Percy Sykes, confectioners at Batley after leaving school but at the time of enlisting he was working for Messrs. Kilner Bros. Thornhill Lees.

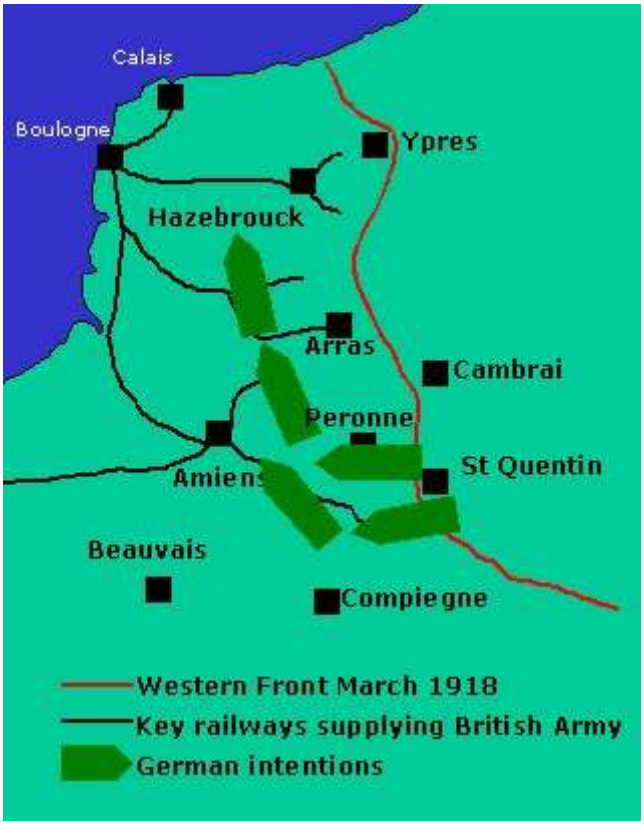
Service Details:

He enlisted in January 1917 and was sent to France in February 1918.

The 2nd Battalion Durham Light Infantry was part of 18th Brigade in 6th Division.

In November 1917, the German High Command decided to make a decisive attack in the west in the following spring, hoping to destroy the British Army. By mid-February 1918 the Germans had moved many Divisions from the Eastern Front to the West. They needed to move before the Americans built up their military power. It is a common misapprehension that the German attack was aimed at splitting the British and French armies, which joined south of Saint Quentin. Their aim was actually to cut through the Somme to" *punch a hole and things would develop."* If all went well they may even have wheeled north- west to cut the British lines of communication behind the Artois fronts, bottling the BEF in the narrow neck of land in Flanders. The British Army would be surrounded with no means of escape.

Harold would have been killed on the first day of the Battle of St Quentin which was part of the First Battles of the Somme 1918.



The extra miles of 'line' that the BEF had recently taken over from the French barely existed, and much labouring and construction work was needed to put it in a defensible state. Unfortunately, the labour was just not available. When the battle opened, few of the defensive positions were ready, and the second and third lines did not exist at all.

German tactics

The German army adopted an approach that had succeeded on the Eastern Front, particularly at the Battle of Riga. Their infantry attack would be preceded by an intense barrage concentrated not on the British infantry holding the forward posts, but on the artillery and machine-gun positions, headquarters, telephone exchanges, railways and other important centres of communications. In other words, it was a very deep barrage designed to knock out the British ability to respond - but lasting only a few hours before the infantry went in. When the German infantry attacked, they would operate in small groups, specially trained to "infiltrate" - exploiting gaps and moving forward, not worrying about areas that were held up: they would be dealt with by follow-up units. For the British, unused to a discontinuous line and the idea of a deep zone

of defended hotspots, such a tactic would spell chaos, uncertainty and disaster. It very nearly worked.

British intelligence had come to the conclusion that a German attack was to be expected, as early as November 1917. It was known to all by March 1918 and only the precise date, time and place was to be determined. Forecasts made by the "E" (Enemy) Group of the British military staff at the Supreme War Council proved to be reasonably accurate but were largely dismissed by GHQ as a result of politics between the two.

British in state of flux

At the same time as German strength was growing, the British Army was depleted, having to face up to a manpower crisis and resultant reorganisation, and at a low point of morale after enduring the conditions of Passchendaele and the disappointment after early success at Cambrai. They were also coming to terms with the need to fight a defensive battle for the first time since 1915 and the adoption of a deep defensive zone rather than a continuous trench line system.

The battlefield

Operation Michael involved a vast attack along the whole front between the River Oise (bottom right of this map, flowing through Chauny) and the River Sensée (top of this map, opposite Arras). This area is generally known as "the Somme" sector, although geographically it includes the Cambrésis and the Santerre plateau. The entire area between the St-Quentin/Cambrai front line and the Bapaume/Albert area had been deliberately laid waste by the Germans when they withdrew from that area (in Operation Alberich) in spring 1917. The Bapaume/Albert area had been the site of the Battle of the Somme in 1916. Thus, other than the area west of Albert and on to Amiens, this was in effect one endless area of devastation. The only significant geographical barriers to an advance were the River Somme south of Péronne and the Canal du Nord north of it.

Percival Redfearn died in 1924 and Susan married Ralph Sandiford in Dec 1924 therefore on the c.w.g.c. Harold is commemorated as the son of Mr & Mrs R. Sandiford of 10, Mill Street, Birstall



Harold is commemorated on Batley Parish Church, Batley War Memorial and Morchies Military Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France, along with another eleven killed on the same day.

He was awarded: - Allied Victory Medal, British 1914-18 Medal.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group