Charles William Major



Rank: - L/Cpl

Number: - 557786

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 2nd Battalion

Killed in Action, died during an Infantry charge: - 18/04/1915 Aged 32 years

Memorial: - Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium Panel 47

Batley News, 8 May 1915. Batley Reporter, 21 May 1915

Family Details

Charles William was born in Arnold, Nottingham in c. 1883 the son of Caleb John and Elizabeth Major nee Smith.

In 1891 living at 12, Durban Street, Radford, Nottingham with his parents and siblings Martha 1877, John 1879 and Samuel James 1886. Caleb was a coal miner.

In 1901 Charles was living with his parents and younger brother, Samuel at Back Bright Street, Dewsbury. The two brothers were piecers and Caleb was described as a labourer.

On 21st June 1902 he married Gertrude Wainwright at Dewsbury Parish Church.

Sarah Elizabeth was born in Dewsbury in 1903 followed by Charles William in 1906 who was baptised at Holy Trinity Church, Batley Carr on 28th February 1906 when the family was living at 33, King Street, Batley and his father gave his occupation as a flock grinder. Amy was born in 1908 followed by Ivy in late 1911.

Before the 1911 census was taken the family had moved to live at 8, Bromley Road, Hanging Heaton.

At one time Charles was employed by Messrs. Wilman Bros. shoddy manufacturers Dewsbury and Mr. John Illingworth at White Lee as a flock curler. The Batley News states that he worked for Messrs. Critchley's collieries prior to enlisting but the Dewsbury Reporter states Mr. John Illingworth's.

He was actively associated with Dewsbury Socialist Sunday School of which he had been secretary and was a member of the Textile Union Committee.

Service Details

Charles William was formerly in the militia but bought himself out. During the South African War he served 12 months in Malta.

On 4th August 1914 the 2nd Battalion were stationed at Dublin as part of the 13th Brigade of the 5th Division.

On 16th August they mobilised for war and landed at Havre and engaged in various actions on the Western front including;

The Battle of Mons and subsequent retreat, (23-24 August)

The Battle of Le Cateau and the Affair of Crepy-en-Valois where it took some 600 casualties, (26 August –1 September)

The Battle of the Marne (7-10 Sept), The Battle of the Aisne (12-15 Sept), The Battles of La Bassee and Messines (10 October- 2 November), The First Battle of Ypres (19 October- 22 November).

Charles William did not enlist until December 1914 according to the Dewsbury Reporter but the Soothill Roll of Honour states he was a reservist at the outbreak of the war.

The 13th Brigade was temporarily under the command of 28th Division between 23 February and 7 April 1915.

Charles was killed just before the Second Battle of Ypres and the Capture of Hill 60 (22 April – 25 May).

Private J. Toft of the same regiment wrote to his wife: -

"I am sorry to tell you your husband Lance Corporal Major was killed in action on April 18th. He died without pain. He was killed whilst we were making a charge. It was a very great blow to me, as we were great friends. I express my deep sympathy with you and the children. I hope you will bear the sorrow the best you can knowing his life was given for King and country and he is now on the role of honour. We are all ready to undergo the same as he has done. We miss him in the Company as he was well liked with all the comrades. He was always willing to do anything he could. I am sending his watch and chain and his bookcase; they were all I could get out of his pockets at the time."

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

He is remembered with Honour at St. Paul's Church, Hanging Heaton and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of Batley History Group