James Edward May





Rank: - Private

Number: - 35776

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (Formerly 2076 4th Bn King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry) 2nd Battalion

Died of Wounds from complications following amputation of foot: - 20th April 1917 aged 34 years

Cemetery: - St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen, Seine-Maritime, France P. I. H. 12A.

Batley Reporter, 27 Apr 1917 (photo). Batley News, 28 Apr 1917 (photo)

Family Details

James Edward was born in Dewsbury in c.1882 the son of John Jeffrey and Amy Ellen May nee Milner who had married on 13th April 1879 at Thornhill Lees, Holy Innocents Church. In 1891 the family which included his elder brother Joseph William born 1880, younger sister Eliza Jane 1888 and maternal grandparents Joseph and Hannah Milner was living at 56 Back Gladstone Street, Dewsbury. John Jeffrey was a blacksmith who came from Cornwall.

James Edward attended Dewsbury Moor Church of England Schools

Olive was born in 1893 followed by Alfred in 1898 who sadly died in 1915. In 1901 the family was still living at the same address and 18-year-old James Edward gave his employment as a coal miner when the census was taken.

In 1907 James Edward married Annie Dobson who was born at Carlton near Pontefract in the Dewsbury Registration District. Ivy May Dobson was born in December 1906 followed by John Jeffrey in December 1908 and Gladys 1910- 1st Qtr 1915. Amy Ellen was born in 1913 but sadly died aged 11 weeks in April 1913 and Fred in late August 1914. Since his marriage he had lived as a boarder with his family at the home of James Heaton of 1, George's Terrace, Field Lane, Batley. James was an uncle of his wife.

James Edward worked at Soothill Wood Colliery as a dataller (a person paid by the day) or bye- worker as reported in the Dewsbury Reporter.

Service Details

James Edward was at camp in Whitby with the 1/4th Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (Territorial's) in August 1914 when war broke out.

His son Fred died in late August 1914 aged 3 days followed by his wife in early September, daughter, Gladys in early February 1915 and then his brother Alfred in November 1915. All his leaves home was because of these deaths and the authorities kept him in England until December 1916.

From 28 December 1915 the 2nd Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was attached to 97th Brigade in 32nd Division.

On the 9th April 1917 at Holnon, the Battalion was ordered to rest because they were showing signs of exhaustion from the abominable weather experienced during the previous week. In the late afternoon, when snow fell, they marched to Auroir which they reached at 11.30 pm and were billeted in the Chateaux. On the 13th they were

given orders to capture Fayet which was a village west of St. Quentin and vicinity. At 12.30 am on the 14th the Battalion lined up for the assault and all objectives were completed by 9.30 pm that evening and the Battalion dug in but all four Company Commanders were either killed or wounded. The battalion were relieved during the night of the 15th April by the 16th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers and was completed by 9.30 pm. The diaries report on the 17th April that 36 other ranks had been killed, 69 wounded and 14 were missing. It was probably on the 14th that James Edward was shot in the foot.

His parents received a telegram to say that he was dangerously ill having had his right foot amputated. A letter was received on the same day from the Matron at the Rouen hospital who mentioned that he was admitted to hospital suffering from a gunshot wound to the foot.

A Chaplain wrote on the 21st April to his parents: -

"Please allow me to offer you my sincere sympathy in the loss you have sustained by the death at 12.30 am yesterday of your son. He was admitted into this hospital just over a week ago with a bad wound in the right foot which necessitated its amputation. For a while it was hoped it would go well with him but to our sorrow, he never picked up his strength as he ought to have done after the operation and he gradually sank. I was with him just before the end, but he was then unconscious and I could only offer a prayer up on his behalf and commend his soul to the Almighty God. His funeral will take place with full military honours at ----. I will ask the Graves Registration Committee to send you a photograph of his last resting place."

James was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. He is remembered with Honour at Soothill Working Men's Club, Batley War Memorial and Dewsbury War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group