John William Mortimer





Rank: - Sapper

Number: - 106898

Regiment/Battalion: - Royal Engineers 151st Field Company

Missing Presumed Killed in Action: - 19th May 1918 aged 23

Remembered with Honour: - Pozieres Memorial, Somme, Panels 10-13

Batley News, 15 Jun 1918, 22 Jun 1918, 21 Jun 1919 (photo)

Family Details.

John William was born on 16th April 1895 in Batley, the son of George Mortimer and his wife Elizabeth (nee Babcock) who he had married at St. John's, Carlinghow on 13th December 1890. The couple already had a son Charles (1893). John William was named after his paternal grandfather. He was baptised at St.John's, Carlinghow on 19th February 1902 when the family was living at Back Coal Pit Lane. In 1891 George was a miner whilst Elizabeth was a power loom weaver living in High Street, Batley with Elizabeth's widowed mother and Sister Ann.

In 1901 the family had moved to 2, Tolson Houses, Cross Bank Road, Batley and George had become a stone mason.

A decade later George was a mason's apprentice with his brother Charles. The family lived at 38, Pearl Street with George (1908) and Ann Taylor Boocock his maternal aunt.

He attended Carlinghow Council School, Batley Technical College and then passed to go to Huddersfield College for stone carving. Before joining the Forces, he assisted his father in the business of G. & J. Mortimer (contractors), Carlinghow. He was a member of Cross Bank Wesleyan Chapel choir and a member of Batley Clarence football team.

Service Details

John William joined the Royal Engineers in August 1915 and was in France for almost two years.

The 151st Field Company was attached to the 38th Welsh Division from April 1915.

They suffered many casualties during the Battle of the Somme where it captured the heavily defended Mametz Wood.

It did not see major action again for almost a year and in 1917 but it launched a successful launch at the Battle of Pilckem Ridge.

During the German Spring Offensive and the Allied Hundred Day Offensive, the division was continually sent to attack fortified German positions. The division was now considered to be one of the elite British divisions and breached German position dug-in on opposing banks of the River Ancre, smashed through the Hindenburg Line and broke through German positions on the River Selle.

In April 1918 the division was near Albert and the Germans had captured high ground near Bouzincourt and Aveluy, overlooking the British lines. The division was ordered to retake the high ground to deny the Germans the ability to observe the British positions and to gain observation positions overlooking the German positions in the Ancre valley. The division gained 250 yards on a 1,000-yard front which achieved the objective. The Germans made repeated attempts to push back the Welshmen and a big attack was repulsed on the 9th May. Over the following days, the division attempted another abortive attack on a German held ridge and conducted several raids on enemy lines.

An officer wrote to his parents: -

"Your son volunteered for a big raid on May 9th. Three sappers were missing, one of whom we know definitely to be killed and buried by our chaplain. A second was stated by an eyewitness to be killed and the third was buried with the first sapper. As the third had no documents the Chaplain could not identify him and he did not notify us until some days after the funeral. This sapper, I regret to say, we presume to be your son, and I am very much afraid it is only too true ".

At the time of his death his brother, Charles was in France with a special company of the Royal Engineers and he had been wounded three times and gassed once.

John William was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour on St. John's Carlinghow, Cross Bank Wesleyan Chapel, Batley War Memorial and Pozieres Memorial, Somme.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group