Thomas William Oakland





Rank: - Private

Number: - 35920

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry1st/5th Battalion
(formerly 48296 West Yorkshire Regiment)

Killed in Action: - 9th October 1917 at Paschendaele aged 19

Remembered with Honour: - Tyne Cot Memorial Panels 108 to 111.

Family Details

Thomas William was born on 10th Dec 1897 in Batley the son of Morley born Herbert and Emma (nee Kaye) Oakland who came from Heckmondwike. He was baptised at Batley Parish Church on 16th January 1898. The family lived in Rushworth Street, Batley and Herbert worked as a quarryman.

His sister, Annie, was born in December 1899 and the family had moved to Back Richmond Street, Carlinghow before the 1901 census was taken.

Florence was born in December 1902 but sadly died in February 1904; Emma was born in February 1905 but died aged 10 months. Frank was born in 1907 followed by Alfred in 1910 and by 1911 the family were living at 3, Vero Street, Batley. Herbert was working as a stone mason and thirteen-year-old Thomas was working as a dyer's apprentice.

As a child Thomas attended Carlinghow Council School and Cross Bank Wesleyan Chapel and Sunday School. For a considerable time, he was a member of Batley Ambulance Brigade where he gained the rank of sergeant.

Before enlisting at Dewsbury in April 1917 he worked as a tuner at Messrs. Wilson Bros. Little Orme Mills.

Service Details

Thomas enlisted at Dewsbury in April 1917 and joined the West Yorkshire Regiment later changing to the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. He disembarked for France in July 1917. The 1st/5th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was a territorial force which in 1917 was part of 148th Brigade, 49th (West Riding) Division.

In October 1917 the landscape of the Ypres battlefield had become wilderness littered with the debris of war. There were rusting hulks of disabled tanks, twisted and bent guns, destroyed wagons and unburied bodies of men and animals lying across the landscape. The rain began on the afternoon of the 4th October continued in a steady drizzle with occasional heavy showers throughout the next two days and on the 7th were squalls of cold drenching rain. The battlefield had turned into sea of deep mud because over 30 millimetres of rain had fallen. General Haigh believed that "just one more push" was all that was

needed to reach the Passchendaele Ridge from where operations could begin to take the Belgium coast.

It was decided to try to take the ridge on the 9th October but journeys which should have taken less than an hour were taking three or more. General Haigh wrote to his wife on the 8th saying that the weather was bright and clear with a high wind which was drying the ground nicely but the previous rain had stopped all the guns they wanted getting forward but they had enough for the next day's attack. The 49th Division started to move into position but shortly after passing Boethoek the 1/5 KOYLI was held up while a battalion from another division that had lost its way crossed in front. Despite having guides only one platoon of the leading company reached their posts by zero hour. The battalion was very badly delayed and there were gaps in the infantry following on behind. The 49th Division was to attack with 148th on the right, 146th on the left and 147th in support at the rear. The task was to take Bellevue Spur and to occupy the Passchendaele Ridge. The operation was a disaster Capt. R.W. Moorhouse from the 1/4th KOYLI was brought in mortally wounded and when his father Lt. Col H. Moorhouse went to try to find a medical officer he was hit by a bullet and killed. It was around this time that the 1/5 KOYLI arrived having sustained very heavy casualties including all its company officers.

Capt. L.W. Batten MO 1/5th K.O.Y.L.I. Struggled forward in the hours of darkness before the attack and wrote: -

"On *the morning of the 9th October 1917 I found myself completely separated from my battalion, wet, hungry and tired, geographically lost and wandering among shell holes, occasional duck board tracks and rare ferro-concrete "pill boxes" of the Passchendaele battlefield. My instructions to set up a regimental aid post at "Otto Farm" made no sense at all.*

The official report says that Thomas William was killed on the 9th October but other reports from friends say the 11th October.

His parents received a letter from his pal Signaller Fred Sykes of Gomersal who had been employed at Mr Brown's Farm, Carlinghow: -

"I am sorry to say Tom was killed on October 11th by a shell. The same shell killed another and wounded two more in the trenches. He did not speak again and died

about five minutes after. This I saw myself. He was doing his duty like the rest of us, and I am thankful to be here myself as it was a hot shop. Perhaps you will have got news from our headquarters, if not you will get to know before long. He was well liked by all of us and he and I were best of pals. The boys have asked me send you their deepest sympathy. "

He had grown up living next door to Willie Taylor.

Thomas William was awarded the British War Medal and the Allied Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at St. John's Carlinghow, Cross Bank Wesleyan Chapel, Batley War Memorial and the Tyne Cot Memorial, Belgium.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group