Willie Oldroyd M.M.





Rank: - Corporal

Number: - 780073

Regiment: - Royal Field Artillery "B" Bty. 246th Bde. (Heckmondwike Battery)

Died of Wounds: - 20th October 1917 aged 23 years

Cemetery: - Vlamertinghe New Military Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium V111.11.9

"EVER REMEMBERED"

Batley News, 5 May 1917, 27 Oct 1917 (photo)

Family Details

Willie was born in Dewsbury on 11th October 1894 the son of Joseph and Emily Oldroyd nee Smith who had married on 12th May 1894 at Dewsbury Moor St John's Church. He was baptised at Christ Church, Staincliffe on the 9th October 1895 when the family lived at Staincliffe and his father gave his occupation as a groom.

In 1901 the family was living at 13, Staincliffe Hall Road and his father was described as being a carrier for woollen goods. Ethel was born in March Qtr. 1908 and his mother died in the same Qtr. 1908. His father on the 14th February 1909 married widow Ellen Kaye nee Cryer at Christ Church, Staincliffe. Albert was born in the latter part of 1909 but sadly died the same year.

Willie attended Staincliffe Church School, being the Captain of the school in 1907 and after leaving worked for Messrs. Blackburn and Tolson's, Heckmondwike. He was connected with Staincliffe Parish Church and was also a playing member of Staincliffe Cricket Club.

In 1911 Joseph and his family was living in a two roomed home at 3, Beaumont's Place, Staincliffe, Batley and whilst he was a carrier for a shoddy manufacturer 16-year-old Willie was working as an assistant pattern cutter for a woollen manufacturer.

Service Details

Willie was a member of the Heckmondwike R.F.A. and went into training with them at the outbreak of hostilities. He went to the Front with them in April 1915. Divisional infantry went via Folkestone-Boulogne while all other units went from Southampton to Le Havre. By 19 April the Division had concentrated in the area of Estaires – Merville – Neuf Berquin.

His sergeant was Sergeant Marshall D.C. M. of Dewsbury and he served continuously in France except for a short illness in hospital and a short leave in around January 1916. Willie received his corporal stripe since going to France and was awarded a Card of Merit in October 1915.

After writing a letter to his parents from France he added in a post script *"I have much pleasure in informing you that I have been awarded the Military Medal."*

He did not give the reason what he had done to receive this award but the flag was flown at Staincliffe Church School in his honour. The notification of his Military Medal was listed in the London Gazette on 11th November 1916.

The 246th Brigade was part of the 49th (West Riding) Division and in 1915 took part in the Battle of Aubers Ridge (9 May) and the defence against the first Phosgene attack (19 December).

In 1916 they were on the Somme fighting at the: -

Battle of Albert (1st-13th July)
The Battle of Bazentin Ridge (14th -17th July)
The Battle of Pozieres Ridge (23rd July -3rd September)
The Battle of Flers-Courcelette (15th -22nd September)

In 1917 they took part in: -
Operations on the Flanders Coast (Hush). The Germans occupied most of the Belgian coast after the 'Race to the Sea' in 1914. The Marines Korps Flandern was created by the German navy to protect the coast and to create naval bases. Antwerp could not be used for German naval operations but Ostend, Zeebrugge and Bruges were all used for submarine and surface raiders. German U-boats sank British ships with torpedo attacks and by laying mines. German A-class torpedo boats, along with G- and S- Class destroyers also harassed British ports and the critical supply routes across the English Channel. The idea was that the British would land in Belgium and take the ports in July/August 1917. This actually never happened but was the basis for the Third Battle of Ypres.

They took part in the Battle of Poelcapelle (9th October) but it was reported that Major Emil Pickering from Dewsbury and his local Battery of the R.F.A. had been in the thick of heavy bombardment for some weeks and during the month no fewer than one D.C.M. and five Military Medallists were amongst the casualties.
One of these casualties was Willie whose parents received a letter from Major Pickering: -
"*I am very sorry to have to break the sad news to you of the death of your son. He was in charge of a party of drivers, with a pack horse, taking ammunition to the guns. He had seen them safely off the position and was returning when he was killed with his*

horse by a shell of large calibre, his death evidently being instantaneous. We are burying him tomorrow in the same cemetery as Sergeant Marshall D.C.M. Your son was one of the few originals left who was with the battery before the war and the number dwindles daily. He was my best signaller and I had such a special appreciation of him for his past services that I had arranged for him what I thought would be a safer job. He only had to go up to the guns about twice a week. However, his luck was out and he was killed. It does seem so hard that he should have gone for 2 and a half years without being hit and then to be killed. My heart is very full and my old hands seem to get less every day and such gallant fellows cannot be replaced. During this month I have lost one man who had the D.C.M. and five with the M.M. all earned by gallantry in the field. I feel it more as your poor son was one of the few left of those I used to motor up home from the Drill Hall before the war. He was a gallant and efficient soldier whom I valued very highly and a credit to his parents and his town. I cannot adequately express the sympathy I feel for you. You have given your son and he has given his life for his country. No one can do more. May the Almighty succour you in your grief."

Willie was awarded the Military Medal, the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at Christ Church Staincliffe; Staincliffe Liberal Club, Staincliffe Church of England School and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group