James Rush



Rank: - Private

Number: - 19458

Regiment: - Leicestershire Regiment (Formerly 25293 KOYLI until Dec 1915) 2nd Bn.

Died: - Killed in Action, Mesopotamia 06/04/1916 Age: 21 years

Cemetery: - Basra Memorial, Iraq, Panel 12

Batley News, 20 May 1916 (photo)

James was born in Batley on 8 October 1894, his parents being John and Hannah (Annie) Elizabeth nee Pearson who had married at St. Marys Church, Batley on 19 May 1888. At first, they lived in the Churchfield Terrace area and subsequently Churchfield Street/Fleming Street area of the town. Mary Elizabeth was born in 1890 followed by Annie 1892, James, Kathleen 1896, Ellen 1898 but died in June 1900, Maggie 1900 and died April 1901, Sarah Jane 1902, Theresa 1904, Winnie 1906, John 1909 and William 1911. In 1911 the family was living in Peel Street.

James attended St. Mary's School and then worked as a hurrier at Howley Park Colliery where his father also worked. In addition to this he worked part time at Batley Hippodrome (later Super cinema) as a lamplight operator.

James joined up at the same time as his lifelong friend Thomas Dolan.

The pair were transferred to the Leicestershire Regiment in late December/early January 1916 and shortly afterwards sailed for the Mesopotamia. The Battalion was part of 28th Indian Infantry Brigade, 7th (Meerut) Division of the Indian Army.

After his departure his parents only received one field postcard and one letter from him. His letter written on 10 March 1916 said:

"Just a few lines hoping to find you all well, as this leaves me in the pink. You will think I have forgotten you all, but I have not, it is too hard. It is difficult to get paper over here, in fact we cannot get any at all, so the next time you write kindly send me some. I have been in action and I am alright so don't trouble about me."

The Leicestershire Regiment had received heavy casualties in action against Ottoman forces, and in particular from the appalling conditions the wounded suffered during the first attempt in early January 1916 to relieve the besieged British troops in the garrison town of Kut.

On the 7 March the Battalion formed up just south of the Dujaila Redoubt but by they withdrew, crossing the Tigris Bridge and reaching camp at 1.30am on the 10 March the battalion had to quote their official history:

... "dug in "on three occasions and marched 48 miles in 53 hours, it also incurred the following casualties, killed 13 non-commissioned officers and men; wounded 4 officers, and 136 other ranks, while 14 men were missing."

After spending a quiet March at around 9 pm on 4 April the Battalion once more marched to the front-line trenches towards the Umm-El-Hannah position.

From the War Diaries: -

5th an 6th April. Heavy bombardment of the enemy's position from both banks of the TIGRIS was carried out, and the first line trenches were captured at 5 am by the 13th Division, the capture of other lines following. About 50 wounded and unfounded prisoners were taken. Enemy retired to FALAHIYEH position, about 2 miles in the rear.

This was attacked and carried at about 7.30 pm by the 13th Division. Enemy now retired to SANNAYIAT position. The 19th and 29th Brigades supported by the 21st Brigade were ordered to carry out a night march with the intention of attacking at dawn.

The march commenced shortly after midnight (on the 6th) in massed formation, the 2nd Leicestershire's were in the 2nd line on the right. Owing to considerable delay (due to the road being congested by bodies of the 13th Division marching back or bivouacked across the line of advance, and loss of time caused in the passage of the trenches) the attacking Brigades were 1,000 yards short of the enemy's position at daylight. Suddenly the enemy opened a withering fire. The first two lines of the Brigade pushed forward to within 800 yards until compelled to halt through very heavy casualties our own artillery on right bank of the TIGRIS being responsible for a considerable number) when they entrenched. Some 400 yards behind these, another line was established and consolidated by some 200 men of Leicestershire Regiment and Highland Battalion. Heavy fire was kept up by the enemy throughout the day. At dusk the wounded and a few others of the Battalion and other units crawled back and organised stretcher parties... Other ranks killed 45----wounded 254 ---missing 19.

Edmund Candler, a British journalist in his book" Long Road to Baghdad" detailed what he saw on 6 April:

At 5.30, when they saw they were within 800 yards of the Turkish line, it had become light. The Turks could see them plainly, though their own trenches were hidden. They held their fire until the brigade was within 700 yards, and then poured in one solid sheet of lead...

The CWGC shows 56 officers and other ranks lost their lives on that day but only four have a known grave. The remainder including James are commemorated on the Basra Memorial.

The relief of Kut was unsuccessful and the garrison surrendered on 29 April 1916 which was a huge blow to the British.

James is remembered with Honour at St. Mary's Church and Batley War Memorial.

Thanks to Jane Roberts and for further details and acknowledgements
please see pasttopresentgenealogy