Lawrence Ryan





Rank: - Private

Number: - 3/1492

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 2nd Battalion

Killed in Action: - 24th April 1915

Memorial: - Menin Gate Panel 47

Batley News, 22 May 1915, 29 May 1915 (photo), 5 June 1915

Family Details

Lawrence was born in Batley c 1895 the eldest son of George Henry and Grace Ann Ryan (nee Braime). The couple had married at Batley Parish Church on 13th April 1895.

Annie Eliza followed in November 1897, Edwin January 1899 and Harry in July 1900.In 1901 the family was living at 29, North Street, Batley and George Henry was employed as a stone mason. Georgia was born in 1903.

Lawrence attended Batley Parish Day School and, on the Honours, Board records it shows he obtained a William Lee Scholarship to go to Batley Grammar School which he attended from Easter 1907 until July 1908.

In 1911 he was working as a piecener, his 13 years old sister was working as a "tyer on" and George Henry was a mason.

It was reported in the Batley News of 5th June 1915 that he was "As *quiet and nice boy as ever did live- that is the universal opinion."*

Before he enlisted, he worked for Messrs. J. Auty as a piecener.

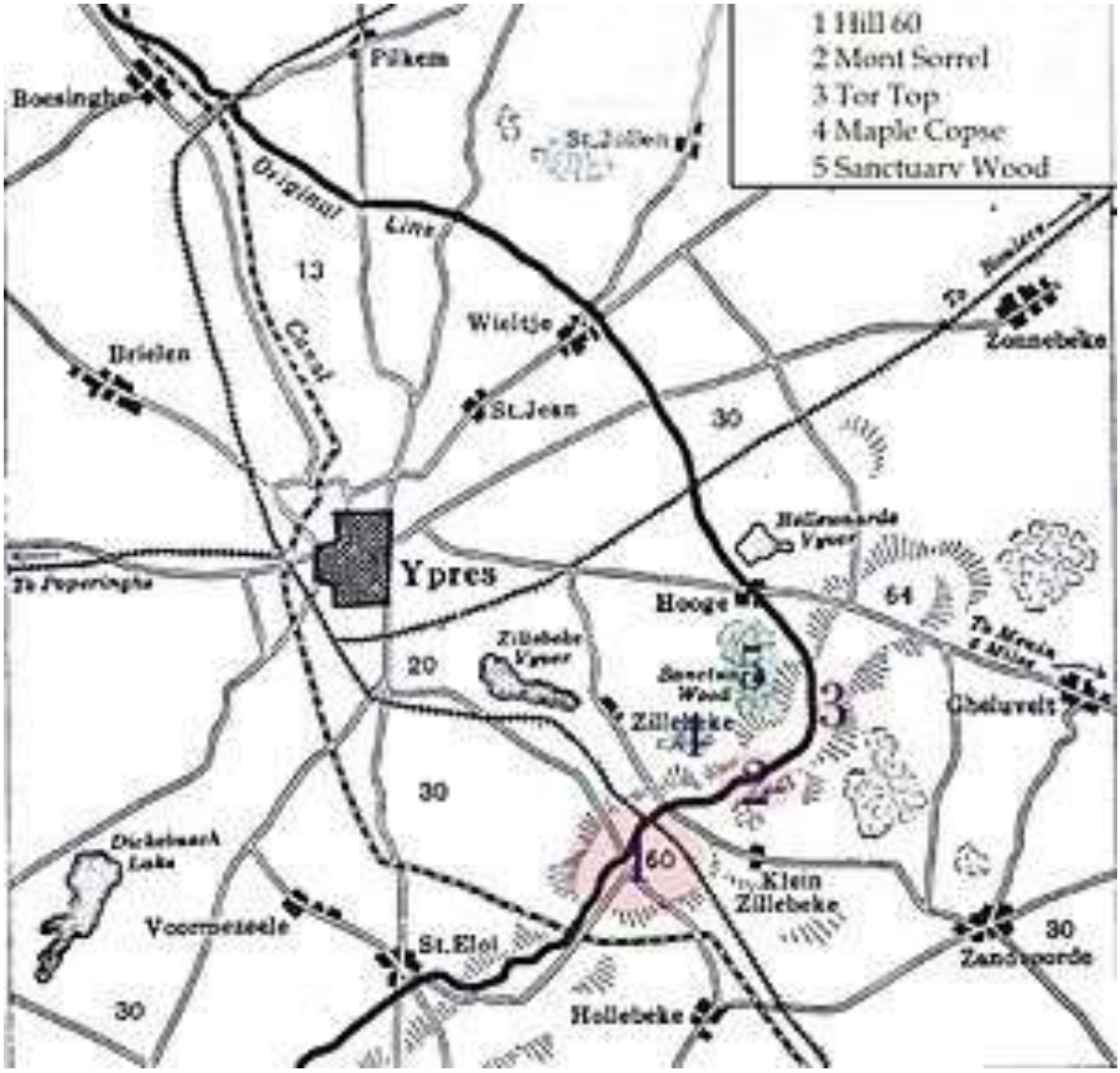
Service Details

Lawrence enlisted at the outbreak of war and went to France on the 9th February 1915.

The 2nd Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was in Dublin at the outbreak of the war but quickly arrived at Le Havre on 16th August 1914.They were part of the 13th Brigade in 5th Division.

The battalion had taken part in several battles in 1914 before Lawrence joined them. In 1915 they took part in the Second Battle of Ypres and the Battle of Hill 60.

The lengthy campaign was a murderous stalemate of attrition that perfectly demonstrated the horror and futility of war. A massive 1.7 million soldiers died in the attempt to capture the Belgian town and its environs over the length of a four-year campaign.



The Second Battle of Ypres was fought between 22nd April and 25th May 1915 for control of the strategic Flemish town of Ypres.

It was the first mass use by Germany of poison gas on the Western Front. For the first time, a former colonial force (the 1st Canadian Division) defeated a European power (the German Empire) on European soil (in the battles of St. Julien and Kitcheners 'Wood, engagements during the battle).

The Battle of Hill 60 (17 April – 7 May 1915) took place near Hill 60 south of Ypres. Hill 60 had been captured by the German 30th Division on 11 November 1914, during the First Battle of Ypres (19 October – 22 November 1914). Initial French preparations to raid the hill were continued by the British 28th Division, which took over the line in February 1915 and then by the 5th Division. The plan

was expanded into an ambitious attempt to capture the hill, despite advice that Hill 60 could not be held unless the Caterpillar nearby was also occupied. It was found that Hill 60 was the only place in the area not waterlogged and a French 3 ft × 2 ft (0.91 m × 0.61 m) mine gallery was extended.

Experienced miners from Northumberland and Wales were recruited for the digging and the British attack began on 17 April 1915. The hill was captured quickly with only seven casualties but then it was found that the salient which had been created made occupation of the hill very costly. Both sides mistakenly accused the other of using poison gas in the April fighting; German attacks on the hill in early May included the use of gas shells and the Germans recovered the ground at the second attempt on 5 May. It remained in German hands until the Battle of Messines in 1917.

The Battle of St. Julien commenced on Saturday 24th April and lasted until 4th May.

The War Diary for the 24th April 1915 reads: -

"*At 12 noon the Battalion got sudden orders to proceed at once to assist the 10th Canadian Brigade in retaking the lost line NE of Wieltje. We marched at once followed by the Queen Victoria Rifles and on approaching St. Jean we were subjected to a very heavy shell fire , which followed us until we reached our allotted positions in part of GHQ's line of trenches, 500 yards NE of Wieltje, where we had to crowd into a trench already filled with Canadian Highlanders .*

Owing to bad staffing arrangements by the Canadian Division ,this line, which should have been empty , was so crowded with troops of different regiments that our companies had to lie in the open, fully exposed, to the enemy who opened up a heavy shrapnel fire on us killing Lieutenant Hunter and many men and wounding Lieutenant Webb and many more."

The first intimation his parents heard about Lawrence was from Batley lad Private Joe Toft who was in the same regiment and wrote to his sister Mrs. Robinson of Field Lane, Batley: -

"May 13th- I am quite well again now, my hand much better. It was a lucky shot I can tell you. The bullet came crossways and caught the handle of my trenching tool and went through my haversack and caught the back of my hand, making six little splinters. So, I had the little pieces of shell taken out and it is alright now. Of course, it did not stop me from keeping with my company. I still went shooting at the German "nuts". At the same time my pal Lance Corporal Major was killed.

There was another Batley lad next to me, his name was Private Ryan of Cross Bank and he were killed too."

Mr. and Mrs. Ryan had not heard from their son since 22nd April but they still hoped he was still alive.

When they found he had been killed his father joined the Forces a month later to avenge his death and was killed on the 1st July 1916.

Lawrence was awarded the 1915 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at Cross Bank Wesleyan Chapel, Batley Grammar School. Batley War Memorial and on the Menin Gate Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group