John Anthony Scaife





Rank: - Private

Number: - 3/1355

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 8th Battalion (formerly 1st and 10th K.O.Y.L.I.)

Died of Wounds: - 14th December 1917 aged 21

Cemetery: - Giavera British Cemetery, Arcade, Italy Plot 2 Row G Grave 11

Batley News, 5 Jan 1918 (photo)

Family Details:

John Anthony was born in Pocklington in 1896 the eldest son of Charles and Mary Sophia Scaife (nee Bell). The couple had married at Pocklington in 1894.

The family moved to Sutton on Hull before the birth of Sarah Annie in 1900 and in 1901 they were living in Back Street, Sutton where Charles's occupation was described as a railway plate layer.

The family were still at Sutton for the birth of Elsie May in 1902 but were at Thorp Arch for the birth of Charles Ernest in June 1903 followed by Florence Mary in 1906. Harry Eric was born at Beckwell Green in 1910 but the family had moved to Green End, Carlton, nr Wakefield before the 1911 census. Charles was working as an agricultural labourer and 15-year-old John Anthony was a labourer at the pit top.

Roy Allen was born in July 1911 followed by Amy born in Hunslet in 1914 and Lily in 1918 when they would have been living in Batley.

John Anthony never actually lived in Batley but his parents had moved to live in Victoria Street, Carlinghow around 1915.

Service Details:

His War Records have not survived but, according to the Dewsbury District News, John Anthony joined the K.O.Y.L.I. (Militia) in February 1914. His service number, with the 3/ prefix, indicates this was with the K.O.Y.L.I. 3rd (Reserve) Battalion. Special Reservists had an initial six-month period of full-time training, paid the same as a regular soldier. Thereafter they underwent three to four weeks training annually. The newspaper stated John completed his initial training when war broke out in August.

The job of the Special Reserve was to provide reinforcement drafts for the active service battalions. In the case of the K.O.Y.L.I. this would be for the 1st and 2nd Battalions. However, the newspaper report says that John went immediately for further training with the local Batley K.O.Y.L.I Territorial's. This would be the 1/4$^{th.}$ According to his Medal Index Cards he disembarked in France on the 7th April 1915. The 1/4th did not go until the 14th April so there is some discrepancy. His medal rolls cite his medal entitlement service with the 1st, 8th and 10th Battalions of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. So, it is a possibility he went out to join the 1st K.O.Y.L.I. In April 1915 as part of a reinforcement draft.

According to the Dewsbury District News John was wounded and returned to England. Also, from the same source we learn that he returned to fight serving in Egypt and then Salonika but at some point, he was invalided home with malaria and dysentery. When he recovered, he once again went to France in June 1917. His final regiment would have been the 8th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

In 1917 the 8th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry fought in The Battle of Messines, The Battles of the Menin Road, Polygon Wood and the The First and Second Battles of Passchendaele before moving to Italy in late October 1917. It completed concentration between Mantua and Marcaria by 16th November, taking over the front line at Montello on 4th December.

The Italians had entered the war on the Allied side, declaring war on Austria, in May 1915. Commonwealth forces were at the Italian front between late October 1917 and November 1918.

Scaife was part of one of five British divisions (and six French) rushed to the Italian front from the western front to halt the Austro-Hungary-German advance towards Venice at the Piave river.

The move was forced on them in the wake of the Battle of Caporetto in late October 1917. The assault was led by the Germans, who were convinced the Austro-Hungarian forces couldn't survive another Italian attack.

With the Germans leading the assault, a rout of the Italians ensued. The Italian death toll was 10,000, with 30,000 wounded and 293,000 taken prisoner, while a further 350,000 others deserted.

But the success of the Central Powers and the ground gained meant their lines became stretched and their starving troops stumbled across Italian wine and food depots, which also immediately halted their progress - and enabled Scaife and his colleagues to halt the advance.

On 4th December 1917 the X1th and X1Vth British Corps relieved the Italians on the Montello sector of the Piave front, with the French on their left. The Montello sector acted as a hinge to the whole Italian line, joining that portion facing north from Mount Tomba to Lake Garda with the defensive line of the River Piave covering Venice, which was held by the Third Italian Army.

The Commonwealth troops on the sector were not involved in any large operations, but they carried out continuous patrol work across the River Piave as well as much successful counter battery work.

The war diaries of the 8th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry show that on the 11th December whilst in the front-line trenches one officer was killed and eight other ranks were wounded. On the 14th whilst the brigade was in support five other ranks were killed and two other ranks were wounded.

It is probable that John was one of the soldiers wounded on the 11th December but died from his wounds three days later at a casualty clearing station.

A telegram was received by his parents that he was dangerously ill at a casualty clearing station followed by a letter.

A Chaplain wrote to his parents: -

"I have been with your boy these last few days. He was admitted suffering from severe shell wounds which he bore with patience until he was taken out of his pain yesterday having nobly given his life for the righteous cause which we are fighting. I myself feel the pain of being the bearer of bad tidings at this holy season but Christmas teaches us how God Himself came to share and sympathise with human suffering, and I pray He will help and comfort you in your sacrifice. I buried him with two comrades looking towards beautiful snow-capped hills and I thought of the 121st Psalm "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. A small cross has been erected over his grave with his name and the date on a metal tablet."

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

He is remembered with Honour on Batley War Memorial, St.John's Carlinghow and Giavera Military Cemetery, Arcade, Italy.



Thanks to Chris and Jane Roberts for their help.