Percy William Longbottom Sheard



Rank: - Private

Number: - 725142

Regiment: - Canadian Infantry 20th Battalion (1st Central Ontario Regt)

Died of wounds: - 13th April 1917 aged 46

Cemetery: - Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension Ext 1.A.4

"THY WILL BE DONE"

Batley News, 28 Apr 1917

Family Details

Percy William Longbottom Sheard was born in Batley on Christmas Day 1871 to Batley born couple, James and Hannah Sheard (Nee Nicholson) who had married in 1865.

Martha Hollingsworth Sheard was born in 1866 followed by Percy (1871), Ada Elizabeth (1874), Luther Colbeck (1876), Archibald (1878) and Lionel Robert (1880). In 1881 the family were living at 83, Commercial Street where James states he is a cloth manufacturer. Martha was still a scholar despite the fact she was 14 years old which was unusual for a female at this time. Beatrice was born in 1883 followed by Polly Nicholson (1886).

James died in 1889 and Hannah became the head of the family and took over the business of glass and china dealer and was living with the family at 40, Commercial Street, Batley. Percy was an ironmonger's assistant. He served his apprenticeship with Mr Jabez Sheard of Batley.

The family continued to live at this address and the 1911 census shows that there had been 11 siblings but only 7 had survived infancy. Hannah aged 67 was still a glass and china dealer but she died later that year. Martha was her assistant and Percy was an ironmonger's shop manager with Ada and Lionel as his assistants. For a time, he was shop manager for Mr Archer of Dewsbury, later moving to the Halifax branch of Messrs. Scarr's to manage their shop and coming back to manage the Daisy Hill shop at Dewsbury. At the time he went to Canada he was a prominent member of the Trades and Friendly Club.

He was a member of Batley Working Men's Club and the Conservative Club.

He left Liverpool sailing on the Empress of Britain arriving at St. John's, Newfoundland on 16th February 1913.

Percy joined the Forces in Canada.

Service Details

Percy was living at 407, Adelaide Street, Toronto when he signed his Attestation Paper on 12th January 1916, giving his next of kin his sister, Ada Sheard of 4, Marlboro' Terrace, Batley. His trade was described as a hardware man. He is described as being 5 feet 6 1/4inches in height with a fair complexion, blue eyes and dark brown hair. He had no distinguishing marks.

He came to England and spent a short time with his relatives in Batley before departing for France.

The Canadian Corps was ordered to seize Vimy Ridge in April 1917. Situated in northern France, the heavily-fortified seven-kilometre ridge held a commanding view over the Allied lines. The Canadians would be assaulting over an open graveyard since previous French attacks had failed with over 100,000 casualties.



To capture this difficult position, the Canadians would carefully plan and rehearse their attack. To provide greater flexibility and firepower in battle, the infantry was given specialist roles as machine-gunners, rifle-men and grenade-throwers. These same soldiers underwent weeks of training behind the lines using models to represent the battlefield, and new maps crafted from aerial photographs to guide their way. To bring men forward safely for the assault, engineers dug deep tunnels from the rear to the front. Despite this training and preparation, the key to victory would be a devastating artillery barrage that would not only isolate enemy trenches, but provide a moving wall of high explosives and shrapnel to force the Germans to stay in their deep dugouts and away from their machine-guns. "Chaps, you shall go over exactly like a railroad train, on time, or you shall be annihilated," warned Canadian Corps commander Sir Julian Byng.

In the week leading up to the battle, Canadian and British artillery pounded the enemy positions on the ridge, killing and tormenting defenders. New artillery tactics allowed the gunners to first target, and then destroy enemy positions. A nearly limitless supply of artillery shells and the new 106 fuses, which allowed shells to explode on contact, as opposed to burying themselves in ground, facilitated the destruction of hardened defences and barbed wire. The Canadian infantry would be well supported when it went into battle with over 1,000 artillery pieces laying down withering, supportive fire.

Attacking together for the first time, the four Canadian divisions stormed the ridge at 5:30am on 9 April 1917. More than 15,000 Canadian infantries overran the Germans all along the front. Incredible bravery and discipline allowed the infantry



to continue moving forward under heavy fire, even when their officers were killed. There were countless acts of sacrifice, as Canadians single-handedly charged machine-gun nests or forced the surrender of Germans in protective dugouts. Hill 145, the highest and most important feature of the Ridge, and where the Vimy monument now stands, was captured in a frontal bayonet charge against machine-gun positions. Three more days of costly battle delivered final victory. The Canadian operation was an important success, even if the larger British and French offensive, of which it had been a part, had failed. But it was victory at a heavy cost: 3,598 Canadians were killed and another 7,000 wounded.

The capture of Vimy was more than just an important battlefield victory. For the first time all four Canadian divisions attacked together: men from all regions of Canada were present at the battle. Brigadier-General A.E. Ross declared after the war, "*in those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation."*The Battle of Vimy Ridge took place between the 9-12 April 1917.

A message was sent to his family from a chaplain saying he had sustained gunshot wounds in the hip on April 12th but was cheerful and going on nicely.

Later a letter was received from the Sister-in-Charge at 6th Casualty Clearing Station in France who wrote: - *"Pte Sheard was brought her very seriously wounded on April 12th and though everything possible was done for him he passed away peacefully on April 13th He did not realise how ill he was. You will be pleased to know he did not suffer much pain and everything necessary for his comfort was done. He was buried in the cemetery here, and his grave will be marked with a cross and nicely kept"*

Fifteen Canadians including Lieut R.H. Louis and three from Britain were buried at this cemetery on 13 April 1917. Barlin Communal Cemetery was used for burial by 6th Casualty Clearing Station in 1916. He is remembered at Batley Parish and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group