John William Speight



Rank: - Private

Number: - 240967

Regiment: - Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment) 1/5th Battalion

Missing, presumed killed in Action: - 3rd September 1916 aged 23 years

Memorial: - Thiepval, Somme, France Pier and Face 6A and 6 B

Batley Reporter, 3 Oct 1916. Batley News, 14 Oct 1916

Family Details

John William was born in West Ardsley, c.1894 and was baptised on 25th March 1894 at Woodkirk, St Mary's. His father was a coal miner and lived at Hill Top.

Samuel Speight had married Maria Aveyard Lumb on 19th March 1875 at St. Mary's, Woodkirk and Eliza was born the following year and Sarah Jane in 1877 but both sadly died in November 1878. George was born in 1883 but died in July 1885. Ann was born in 1886 followed by Albert in 1889 but sadly Ann died in October 1889 when she lived at Hill Top. Annie was born in 1891 followed by John William.

In 1901 the family was living in Heybeck Lane but moved to live at 71, Soothill Lane before the death of Maria in November 1910. Before the 1911 census was taken Samuel, Albert, Annie and John William was living in a two roomed house at 71, Gregory Street, Soothill and John William was employed as a under piecener. The family moved yet again to live at 125, Soothill Lane, Batley.

Before he enlisted John William worked as a piecener at Messrs. G.H. Hirst's Victoria Mills, Savile Town. He was a popular member of Soothill Working Men's Club.

His father died in December 1917.

Service Details

Newspaper reports suggest that John William went to the Front on 14th April 1915 landing at Boulogne. The 1/5th Duke of Wellington's became from the 15th April 1915, 147th Brigade in 49th (West Riding) Division.

On 31 March the Division was warned that it would go on overseas service and entrainment began on 12 April. 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. The Division then remained in France and Flanders and took part in the following engagements:

The Battle of Aubers Ridge (9 May)
The defence against the first Phosgene attack (19 December).
In 1916 they fought 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)

Pozieres was a small, straggling village on the main Albert-Bapaume road. It is situated on high ground that gives the occupier observation southwards along the road towards Ovillers, La Boisselle, Albert and beyond; to the east across to High Wood, Delville Wood and beyond; and westwards to Thiepval. Possession of Pozieres was key to making possible any further advances towards Bapaume, the capture of the Thiepval ridge and the breaking of resistance at High and Delville Woods. The battle for Pozieres and nearby Mouquet Farm became an epic in its own right, with tenacious German defence keeping determined British-Australian attack at bay for several weeks. This was the first large-scale Australian battle in France and proved to be its costliest in terms of total casualties.

His father received a notification in October 1916 that his son was officially posted" missing" after an engagement on September 3rd.

John William was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at Soothill Congregational Church, Soothill Working Men's Club, Hanging Heaton War Memorial (St. Paul's) and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group