Harry Summerscales



Rank: - Private

Number: - 21746

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, 2nd Bn.

Died: - Presumed, Killed in Action 18 November 1916

Memorial: - Thiepval Memorial, Pier and Face 11 C and 12 A.

Harry Summerscales was born in Batley on 30th September 1895 and was baptised at Batley All Saints on 4th May 1898. He was the elder son of miner Fenton and Annie (nee Ainley) Summerscales who married at Batley Church on 10th March 1894. At the time of his marriage Fenton, aged 22, was a miner living in Hanging Heaton and his bride Annie Ainley, aged 28, lived at Batley and worked as a millhand. Bride and Groom made their mark on the Marriage Registration paper. Allen Ainley was born in September 1894 but sadly died a month later when his parents lived at 14, Hume Street, Batley. Harry's sister, Ada, born 3rd August 1897 was baptised on the same day as Harry by which time the family lived at 22, East Street, Batley. Sadly, young Ada died in April 1900 aged just two years.

By 1901 the family had moved to a three roomed dwelling on Union Street Batley where Fenton and Annie lived with their sons Harry and newly born Sam, aged three months. By 1911 the family, mother and father with two sons, was

living at 31 Cross Street, Gawthorpe and Harry was 15 and a colliery labourer working below ground.

By 1914, Fenton Summerscales was recorded at Bolus Lane Outwood and after WWI his address was Croft Cottages, Outwood. In August 1914 Harry Summerscales was 19 years of age, old enough to serve overseas and most probably still working as a miner. Harry's army service record has not survived but it is known that he enlisted at Wakefield (which might suggest that he too had moved to Outwood) and that on 17th May 1915 he embarked for France with his regiment, The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI).

The 2nd battalion KOYLI was serving in Dublin when war was declared but it was mobilised for France on 16th August 1914 when it disembarked at Le Havre. Harry arrived as a reinforcement nine months later following earlier losses and particular pressures in the Ypres Sector. In the first instance his Regiment came under orders from the 13th Brigade of the 5th Division which was part of the original British Expeditionary Force (BEF). The 13th Brigade was particularly active in spring 1915, including the capture of Hill 60 in mid April 1915 shortly before Harry's arrival.

On 17th July 1915 Harry Summerscales was wounded in the trenches at St. Eloi, a village near Ypres when the enemy exploded a mine with terrific force at 2.45 am which demolished the trench and its occupants buried. Only five men survived. The enemy continued to shell and fire trench mortars. 2nd KOYLI suffered casualties amounting to 111 men including 29 killed. Harry suffered a gunshot wound to the head and was transferred to sick convoy and transferred to the Casualty Clearing Station at Bailleul. He was subsequently listed as "wounded" on the Casualty List on 1st August 1915 issued by the War Office and Harry was entitled to wear a "wound stripe".

Ypres was never quiet and he remained with the 5th Division, back in France, until late 1915, when some of the regular units of the 5th Division were exchanged for those of the 32nd Division, a newly arrived volunteer formation. The idea was to strengthen ("stiffen" in the jargon of the time) the inexperienced division by mixing in some regular army troops; even though by now many of the pre-war regulars had gone and the regular battalions themselves were often largely composed of new recruits

So it was then that in late December 1915/early January 1916 his KOYLI battalion transferred to the 97th Brigade in the 32nd Division which was largely comprised of locally raised units often known as "Pals". It was a predominantly Northern

Division, although locally raised units from Birmingham and Bristol were also in the structure. It remained on the Western Front for the remainder of the war.

By 24th June 1916 the battalion was in dugouts near Crucifix Corner in readiness to move into front line trenches, the objective being to capture the village of Thiepval, situated on a ridge 450 ft in height and take a strongly fortified position called Mouquet Farm in the German second line. This plan was to play out on 1st July 1916 but the Germans had turned Thiepval into a fortress with heavy machine gun fire. The 32nd Division advance was led by two battalions of the Lancashire Fusiliers (Salford Pals) and the "following" battalions were from the Northumberland and Inniskilling Fusiliers whose casualties littered the fields.

The German infantry stood solid on their parapets and took aim without fear of being hit by return fire. The 2nd KOYLI trenches were 400 yards in the rear of the front line but its men were still picked off even before reaching the British front line. The official account of its experiences written in the regimental diary for 1st July 1916 was short and to the point: -

Battalion reported present in assembly posts at 5.50 a.m.

Battalion reassembled at assembly posts at 4.30 p.m.

Casualties sustained: 1 Officer killed, 3 wounded, 188 other ranks killed and wounded.

The intensity of this first phase of the battle continued for another twelve days.

Private Harry Summerscales survived the first day of the Battle of The Somme on 1st July 1916 but he was not to survive the last day on 18th November 1916.

The battle of the Ancre, 13-18 November 1916, involved an attack on the German front line as it crossed the Ancre River, a sector of the front that had first been attacked on the first day of the battle without success. The first British objective involved an advance of 800 yards and required the capture of at least three lines of trenches. The next target was the German second line, from Serre south to the Ancre. Finally, it was hoped to capture Beaucourt, on the Ancre but this was delayed whilst the 51st Division captured Beaumont Hamel, and the 2nd Division captured parts of Redan Ridge. The attack was renewed on 14 November and Beaucourt fell at 10.30am.

This success encouraged a more ambitious offensive and one final attack was made, on 18th November. This began in snow and sleet and descended into chaos. The 97th Brigade, including 2nd KOYLI attacked at dawn with the objective

to capture the German front line trenches. Machine gun and rifle held up 2nd KOYLI who also faced severe fighting and heavy losses. The battalion lost 14 officers and 351 other ranks killed or wounded. Private Harry Summerscales was one of the men killed.

For all of that the attack was deemed a relative success when Beaumont Hamel and Beaucourt were captured, although Serre and the northern part of the German line remained untouched. Once again mud intervened to help the defenders, preventing the use of the few available tanks, and making all communication difficult. On the night of the 19th November 1916 2nd KOYLI went back to billets.

So ended the prolonged fighting in what is now known as the Battle of the Somme 1916. As a consequence of the campaign Field-Marshall von Hindenberg was forced to shorten his line by strategic retirements and to economise men; his measures were carried out in 1917.

Private 21746 Harry Summerscales 2nd Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was killed in action on 18th November 1916. He served and survived the first day of the Battle of the Somme on 1st July 1916 but sadly he lost his life on the final day of the First Battle of the Somme on 18th November 1916.

Harry Summerscales is Remembered with Honour at the Thiepval Memorial at Pier and Face 11 C and 12 A. Also at St. John's Wesleyan Church, Outwood Memorial and the Wrenthorpe Colliery memorial.



Thanks to Alan Howe of Ossett Heritage—Lest we forget