James Swinscoe





Rank: - Private

Number: - 21/410

Regiment: - West Yorkshire (Prince of Wales' Own) 2nd /5th Battalion (formerly 1/4th K.O.Y.L.I. 2128)

Killed in Action: - 20th July 1918 aged 25

Remembered with Honour: - Soissons Memorial, Aisne, France.

Batley News, 17 Aug 1918, 24 Aug 1918 (photo)

Family Details:

James was born in Womersley on the 24th February 1893 the eldest surviving child of William and Mary Maria Swinscoe (nee Jackson). He was baptised at the Wesleyan Chapel on the Pontefract Circuit on 12th April 1893. Hunslet born William worked on the railway as a shunter in 1901 but a decade earlier he was working as an agricultural labourer.

Sadly many of their children died in infancy, William was born in 1892 and died 1896, Alice (1894-1899), Annie (1895), Arthur (1897-98), Florrie (1899-1900) and Elsie (1901-02) born in Hunslet. William's wife, Mary Maria also died in 1902 in Leeds.

William married Birkenshaw born Ellen Hoyle in Hunslet in May 1904. This couple also had several children who died in infancy, Lily was born 1903 and died a year later, Harry 1904-06 and one other child had died, only Ivy born 1909 survived both parents.

In 1911 James, his father, half-sister Ivy, Ellen and her father, Levi Hoyle were living at 36, Cemetery Road, Normanton. He was employed as a pony driver (below ground) and William was a clay digger.

At some time during 1914 the family must have gone to live at 42, Cross Bank Road, Batley and Joseph was employed as a teamer for Mr. George Hollies of Batley. He became associated with Batley Salvation Army.

Service Details.

On 20th May 1914 James passed a preliminary medical examination to join the Territorial 1/4th K.O.Y.L.I. being given the number 2128. He was living at 6, Argyle Street, North Common, Normanton and was described as a miner working for H. Briggs and Co. He was 5 feet 5 inches in height and had good vision.

He was mobilised with the Normanton Territorial's at the outbreak of war, however on 26th January 1915 in a medical he says he has had a squint in his left eye for many years and had pain in his right for over a year with loss of vision. He also had bad teeth. He was "discharged as permanently unfit "from the army on this date at Sheffield. This decision was approved at York on 14th February 1915. This was only a few days before the raft tragedy at Morton near

Gainsborough where seven men of his battalion were accidently drowned when the rafts, they had made capsized in the gymes (deep pools) on Friday, 19th February. Edmund Battye from Batley was one of the seven.

The rules for military service were relaxed later in the war and he joined the 2/5th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment and they disembarked at Le Havre, France on 6th January 1917 at 7am.

At some stage James was wounded but later returned to the Front.

On 15th July the Germans made their final offensive push of the war. The attack failed and the Allies launched a counter- attack which marked the start of the relentless advice ultimately resulting in the Armistice.

During the course of this, the 62nd (West Riding) Division, of which the 2/5West Yorkshire Regiment formed a part, were involved in severe fighting to regain Marfaux. They fought alongside the 51st (Highland) Division and the New Zealand Cyclist Battalion.

The Unit War Diary for the period shows: -

On the 14th July 1918 the battalion were at Authuille and marched to Ducesnes where they entrained at 6.30 p.m. They de- trained on the 16th at 4.30 a.m. before proceeding to Jiligny where they arrived at 2 p.m. Early on the 17th definite orders were giving to move and the men had little time for breakfast. They left Juvigny at 5 am via Tours and Conde for Plivot but an advance party found there were no billets for them so the battalion had to bivouac in a wood near Bisseuil. It was a night of heavy rain, wind and thunder. The next morning, they mustered parades and marches after the cold night and there was also bathing in the river where unfortunately two Transport men drowned. At 6.30 pm there was a meeting and they were told they may have to move into line to relieve an Italian Division S.W. of Rheims the following day.

Orders were received that at 6.30 am the battalion were to proceed to woods near St.Omeges before moving later the same day at 10 p.m. to an assembly point near Pourcy for an attack to begin on the 20th when zero hour was set at 8 a.m.

They arrived at the appointed place shortly before dawn and there was no time to reconnoitre. There were no written orders received or issued.

Their first objective was Marfaux. The barrage was very poor, it started too far ahead so that the troops could not keep up and could not concentrate on Marfaux village. There were woods with enemy machine gun nests.

The battalion was very badly infiltrated and there were heavy losses mostly from machine gun fire.

James was one of the casualties on this first day of the 2nd Battle of Marne. Marfaux was eventually re-taken by the Allies on 23rd July 1918.

James is remembered with Honour at St. John's Church, Carlinghow, Batley War Memorial and Soissons Memorial, Aisne France

He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group