Horace Waller V. C.







Rank: - Private

Number: - 30144

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry "C" Coy 10th Battalion

Killed in Action: - 10th April 1917 aged 20

Cemetery: - Cojeul British Cemetery, St. Martin-Sur-Jojeul,

Family Details

Horace was born at 11, Woodhill Terrace, Batley Carr on the 23rd September 1896 the son of John Edward and Esther Waller (nee Myers). He was baptised at Holy Trinity on the 15th November 1896. His elder brother John Strickland was born in 1891. Horace was only two years old when sadly his mother died suddenly after a short illness in July 1899 aged 28. At that time the family were living at 14, Hill Head, Halifax Road, and Dewsbury.

Horace's grandfather, Strickland Waller, had been a successful plumber and founded the family firm. John Edward followed the family tradition and became a plumber and glazier. When Strickland died, in 1898, his wife was in charge of the business in Batley Carr and John Edward and his sons returned to live with her and help in the business at 82, Upper Road, Batley Carr.

On the 5th October 1903 John Edward married Sarah Elizabeth Prescott, a spinster and four years older than him, at Holy Trinity, Batley Carr. The family continued to live at 82, Upper Road, Batley Carr.

Horace received his early education at Miss Whitworth's School, Halifax Road, and Dewsbury before attending Purlwell Junior School from where he won a free scholarship to Batley Grammar School where he began his studies in the autumn of 1909. After being there a year he won a County Minor Scholarship entitling him to remain there for another three years. By the age of seventeen he had left school and joined the family firm of plumbers which went the trading name of "*Strickland Waller and Sons"* but he continued his studies at Batley Technical College.

It was reported in the local press that he was an unassuming lad, with a wide circle of friends and was highly respected at Batley Carr Parish Church where he had a lifelong connection. His only hobby was cycling.

Service Details.

Horace wanted to enlist at the outbreak of war but was twice rejected on medical grounds. Determined to go he tried a third time and was accepted in "C" class on the 30th May 1916 and after training disembarked in France on 14th December 1916. Whilst in training he took great pleasure in visiting the Y.M.C.A. tents and often wrote home expressing his high appreciation of such an organisation.

He wrote home from France and on one occasion during the winter of 1917 said that they had to expose themselves in "No Man's Land" to obtain their rations because the communications trenches were so full of water due to the heavy rain.

The War Diaries show that at the beginning of April 1917 the 10th Battalion was preparing for attacks and were in bivouacs in the woods near the railway station at Boisleux au Mont, on the river Cojeul, south east of Arras. On the night of the 10th April the 9th Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, 15th Durham Light Infantry, and 1st East Yorkshire's took up their positions on the jumping off trenches which had been dug along the Hindenburg Line. The 10th Battalion remained in the sunken road. Forty-six men of "C" Company were attached as a carrying party to 64th Machine Gun Company. The brigade attacked the Hindenburg Line in the afternoon.

The war diary for the 10th KOYLI's record that on the 9th April 1917

"At about 7.30 pm A and C Companies under Captain Marsh were sent up to reinforce the 1st East Yorkshires and 15th Durham Light Infantry had had succeeded in penetrating the Hindenburg Line and were holding about 1,000 yards. A difficult operation which was carried out successfully in the dark"

The diary shows the following day, April 10th at 3.30 am

"*C Company of the 10th KOYLI relieved the bombing posts of the 15th Durham Light Infantry on the left and held the line from the communication trench to the left of the captured line."*

Horace was part of this bombing party.

At 8pm the same day the diary records: -

"C Company repulsed a very determined bombing attack throwing over 300 bombs. Private Waller of C Coy distinguished himself on this occasion. Although wounded he stuck to his post and continued bombing until he died. He has been recommended for the Victoria Cross. "

His Commanding Officer, Captain Air, wrote to his parents

"It is with infinite regret I have to report your son is missing –believed killed. Words cannot describe the glorious fight he and his comrades made in certainly the worst violent hand to hand fighting I have ever witnessed. For an hour and a half in the first counter attack, he stood and bombed and finally won. In the second and more

violent attack he still held his post for an hour, fighting for half an hour after being wounded, until finally hit directly with a grenade. I think the bravest boy I ever knew was this son of yours. Many of my Company have gone but the loss of none goes to my heart more than the loss of Horace. Perhaps in the opinion of the Higher Command I have asked too much in asking for the highest of all honour for him. I fervently hope not. My Colonel has endorsed this recommendation but rewards are only a tithe of the gratification you can feel for having produced so fine, so courageous so British a man. So long as this Company hold together the glory of his deeds will never die."

His parents also received a letter from one of his old school chums who was in the same regiment saying he had been found and buried in the Divisional Cemetery at Cojeul near Croiselles.

Nothing more was heard of the recommendation until the official list of V.C. winners was published when to following appeared: -

"For most conspicuous bravery when with a bombing section forming a block in the enemy line. A very violent counter attack was made by the enemy on this post and although five of the garrison were killed Private Waller continued for more than an hour to throw bombs and finally repulsed the attack. In the evening the enemy again counter attacked the post and all the garrison became casualties except Private Waller, who although wounded later, continued to throw bombs for another half an hour before he was killed. Throughout these attacks he showed the utmost valour and it was due to his determination that the attacks on this important post were repulsed."

At the time of his death the family was still living at 82, Upper Road, Batley Carr.

Brigadier General H.R. Headland, the commander of the 64th Brigade which the 10th KOYLI's formed part of wrote: -

"I command the brigade in which is the battalion to which he belonged and consequently know very well the situation during which Private Waller performed his magnificent act of bravery. His fearless conduct and splendid bravery on that occasion were deciding factors to a critical period, and no man ever won the Victoria Cross more deservedly."

On July 21st 1917 Horace's parents went to Buckingham Palace to be presented with their son's Victoria Cross by the King. The Times newspaper reported in their July

23rd 1917 edition on page 9 that after investing many surviving officers with medals "*–the King subsequently received the following "next of kin" of deceased Officers and Men and handed to them the Victoria crosses which had been awarded in the war to their relatives"*

The July 1917 edition of the Batley Grammar School magazine opened with the news of Horace Waller's death and the award of the Victoria Cross. Under the heading of *"Obiter Dicta"*

"The highest honour for gallantry in the field has been won by an old boy-Horace Waller. But in carrying out his act of bravery he paid the supreme sacrifice and all we can do now is sympathise with his parents and to revere his memory.

We remember him at school as quiet and reserved but as one who had high ideals. On the evening of the 25th June the whole school went down to Batley Carr Parish Church to pay one last tribute to our hero."

His brother John Strickland Waller was in training in England with the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

Cojeul British Cemetery was started in April 1917 by the 21st Divisional Burial Officer and used by fighting units until the following October. One other soldier, Captain Arthur Henderson of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who also received a V. C., is buried in the next row of graves.

The Commonwealth War Grave headstone shows not only that he won the Victoria Cross, was in the KOYLI's but also the words "**Honour'd Beloved Mourn'd**" making a fitting epitaph for a Batley lad.

In 1992 Horace Waller V C Parade was opened in Shaw Cross near John Ormsby Way who had also won the Victoria Cross but lived to tell the tale.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group