Richard Carroll Walsh





Arras Memorial Inscription – Photo by Jane Roberts

Rank: - Able Seaman

Service Number: - KX/305

Regiment: - Howe Battalion, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve

Date of Death: - 24 March 1918

Memorial: - Bay 1, Arras Memorial, Pas-de-Calais, France

Richard Carroll Walsh was born in Birstall on 3 July 1895. His middle name, Carroll, was his paternal grandmother's maiden name, but when he enlisted, in September 1914, he did so under the name of Carrolwalsh—possibly to cover up his previously served military service. His parents were Batley born Michael Walsh and his wife Maggie (nee Barker) from Darlington, who married in June 1889. According to the 1911 census, they had six children, in total, all of whom were still alive. They were John William (born

1890), Richard, Stephen (1897), Lawrence (1901) and Theresa (1905), the sixth child has not been identified at this date.

In 1891 the Walsh family lived in Spa Street, Batley, with Michael working as a hawker and Maggie a woollen weaver. Four years later they were living in Birstall. Thereafter they lived in locations in and around the Batley/ Birstall boundary. By 1901 when living at Woollers Place, Michael worked as a mechanic's labourer, with no employment listed for Maggie. In 1905, their address was given as Coach Lane, Birstall, and by 1911 they had moved to 55, Quarry Road, Brownhill, Batley with Michael working as an engineer's labourer manufacturing wrought iron pulleys. At this point Richard worked as a coal hurrier, having completed his schooling at St. Patrick's, Birstall. Richard enlisted in the Regular Army in July 1913 and he gave his occupation as a coal miner. He was a Gunner with the Royal Regiment of Artillery. It proved short- lived. His papers state he stood at 5'7" weighed 132 lbs and had a fresh complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. After initial training, in October 1913 he was assigned to 45th Battery Royal Feld Artillery (RFA). By the end of October 1913 Richard was awaiting trial by Court Martial for an unspecified offence. On 16 January 1914 he was discharged for misconduct.

Once war broke out, Richard re-enlisted on 2 September 1914 as a Private with the Northumberland Fusiliers under the name Richard Carrollwalsh. Perhaps this was to hide his ignominious discharge a few months earlier. He also gave a false date of birth, 10 May 1890, which was more in line with his elder brother.

On 7 September he was transferred to the land-based Royal Naval Division (RND), serving with the Howe Battalion, with the rank of Able Seaman.

In early October 1914 he wrote to his mother:

"I am on my way to…. When I get there, I will send my address. I am as cheerful as the rest so don't be downhearted."

The redacted location was Antwerp, where the RND were sent to help with the defence of the city. The defence failed, and those RND units who managed to withdraw returned to England arriving on 11 October 1914. Richard was amongst those who managed to escape. He arrived back in England on 11th October 1914 and gave a vivid account of the events to the Batley News and became the first winner of the Batley News Half Sovereign Order Competition.

He gave a Batley News reporter an account of the military action in Antwerp, their encounter with Germans at 500 yards distance and less, how the Teutons were easy to shoot because they moved in solid columns, and the infernal devastation wrought by

the enemy on the fine old Belgian city. He experienced thrills of shrapnel firing, of German aeroplane visits, and of seeing dear comrades killed or horribly wounded. Yet he and his bosom friend, Joe Gallagher…both escaped unhurt.

Walsh, who was formerly employed at Howden Clough Colliery, volunteered for the Royal Naval Brigade at the outbreak of war. Their camp was at Bettshanger, Kent, where work comprised of a 5½ hour drill, and other work every day – counteracted by the great kindness of the local people and by good food. When reveille was sounded at 5am last Sunday week, the command was circulated to get ready for France, and in two hours thousands of men were on their way to an unknown destination.

They landed at Dunkirk where the French people gave them cigarettes, chocolates, tobacco etc. and cheered them. They left at 8 pm, travelling through the night and were in Belgium at daybreak. They detrained at 9 am in Antwerp and were taken to a school for dinner. This building was later blown down by a bomb, seven people being killed. In it were all their kit and beds.

They were only there three hours before they marched straight to the trenches just before the Lierre Forts, on the west of the city. There were four battalions, altogether ten thousand men. His friend Joe Gallager, of Birstall, was on the very dangerous and important work of carrying messages on behalf of Lord Curzon.

They slept that night in a barn near the trenches, and get his first “real” taste of war at 5 pm on the Monday, just as they got to the trenches, when a German bomb fell into an adjoining turnip field, where it made the usual big hole sending the turnips flying in all directions. The trenches had all been made by the Belgians but he and his comrades set about making them bomb proof by covering them with iron.

At daybreak on the Wednesday, a German aeroplane flew over the trenches, and the German artillery began to fire on them. 100 men were killed or otherwise put out of action by 2 pm.

Plenty of the Germans were electrocuted. They had barbed wire and when the enemy touched it they died because of the heavy current of electricity going through it. They also had wires hidden in or on the earth. After being in the trenches for 51 hours the men got the orders to quietly retire. The Company had lost 70 killed or wounded but he got back safely with Lord Curzon although another Company were left to come back with a “guide” and over two thousand men were taken prisoner on Holland. They returned to England without any kit because it had been blown up in the school.

Richard was home on leave in January 1915 before being sent to the Dardanelles and Richard was reported to be in one of the first landing parties on the Gallipoli peninsula.

Shortly after this, at the beginning of September 1915, Richard was admitted to hospital in Egypt suffering from neurasthenia, the term for mental trauma such as shellshock. He moved to a convalescent home in Cyprus in November 1915.

He returned to the UK in late August 1916 and on 5 September 1916 he married Ellen Phillips at St. Mary's. He was based at Blandford Camp, Dorset until December 1916 when he was drafted back into the Howe Battalion for service overseas before Christmas. In early 1917 he was with the Howe Battalion near Engelbelmar on the Somme. Rain, snow, mud and waterlogged trenches restricted activities but he was involved with the Operations on the Ancre.

Towards the end of April 1917, he had an abscess which was serious enough for him to be evacuated to the Beaufort War Hospital, Bristol for treatment.

He was allowed home to 45, Hume Street, between 20-29 May 1917 and was discharged from hospital care on 8 June 1917. His daughter, Ellen, was born on 28 June, when he was at Blandford Camp with the 2nd Reserve Battalion. He returned to the Howe Battalion and the Western Front before Christmas 1917.

On 11 February 1918 Richard was one of 12 Officers and 250 men transferred from Howe Battalion and attached to the 2st Royal Marine Battalion. On 21 March 1918 the Germans launched their massive Spring Offensive in an attempt to seize victory before the arrival of American Troops. "Operation Michael" phase was the main initial attack, launched from the Hindenburg Line, and fought over old Battle of the Somme ground.

The German Offensive began at 4.40 am under cover of thick mist. The heavily outnumbered British troops were taken by surprise by the intensity of the German stormtroopers. They were driven back in a fighting retreat. On the first day alone British casualties numbered 38,500, including 21,000 soldiers taken prisoner. It was the second worst day for the British Army in the First World War. The 1st Royal Marines Unit War Diary shows they were in the frontline trenches near Flesquieres on 21 March 1918. By 24 March they had been pushed back over seven miles to Bertincourt. The retreat from Bertincourt to Martinpuich between 24 and 25 March amounted to another 11 miles.

The Diary+ gives some indication of the pressure they came under:

FRONTLINE BN HQ SCREW TRENCH – 21//3/18 – FRONT LINE and back area heavily shelled during early morning & intermittent shelling during day.

FLESQUIERES—Battn. ordered to withdraw through 2nd Bn R.M.L.I. thereby causing SUPPORT LINE to become FRONT LINE.

HAVRINCOURT WOOD- 22/3/18 – Bn. Ordered to evacuate & proceed to OLD BRITISH LINE in HAVRINCOURT WOOD. Shortly before evacuation Lt. Colonel C.J. Farquharson M.C. R.M.L.I. commanding 2nd Bn. RMLI wounded in BROWN LINE.

23/3/18 –Battn. Proceeded to prepared line in front of BERTINCOURT & took up positions in FRONT LINE on the left of 2nd Bn. R.M.L.I During the afternoon enemy heavily shelled the right Battn.

BETINCOURT – 24/3/18 – Bn. ordered to withdraw from BERTINCOURT & proceed to BAUPAUME PERONNE ROAD & there to MARTUBO|PUCH.

Richard was reported missing on 24 March 1918.

His name was included in the Red Cross missing list and a formal enquiry was made to them on 2 August 1918. All to no avail.

Richard had no known grave and along with almost 35,000 others, he is remembered on the Arras Memorial.

Richard was awarded the 1914 Star, Victory Medal and the British War Medal

He is remembered at St. Mary's Church, Batley War Memorial, Birstall War Memorial, Brownhill St. Saviour's Church and Howden Clough Methodist Chapel.

In late 1920 his widow, Ellen, married John Thomas Watson at St. Mary's.



Thanks to Jane Roberts and for more information please see pasttopresentgenealogy.co.uk

+ 1st Royal Marine Battalion Unit War Diary TNA Ref WO 95/3110/1.