Frank Ward





Rank: Private

Number: - 200345

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 1/4th Battalion "D" Company

Missing, presumed killed in action: - 1st July 1916 aged 29 years

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

Batley News, 12 Aug 1916 (photo)

Family Details

Frank was born in Batley in c 1887 the son of Fred and Amy Ward (nee Law) and was baptised at Broomhill on 12th May 1887 aged 5 months on the same day as his cousin Emily, when the family was living in Taylor Street, Batley. The couple had married at Batley Parish Church on 19th October 1879.

Frank was living at 1 Yard, 5 Taylor Street with his parents and siblings Maria (1880), Joseph (1882), Annie (1885), and Percy (1889) and his father was a power loom tuner.

Frances was born in 1893 followed by Alice (1896) and Ida (1901). In 1901 the family was living at 26, Talbot Street, Batley and Fred had changed his occupation to become a grocer's shop assistant and 14-year-old Frank was employed as a bobbin maker. Elsie was born c 1904.

Before 1911 Fred and his family had moved to live at 29, Byron Street, Batley and he was employed as a lamplighter. On 11th September 1909 Frank married Ada Swift at Broomhill Chapel and at the time of their marriage they were living at 35, Russell Street, Batley. He gave his occupation as a firer at a colliery. The couple moved to live at 2, Colbeck's Yard, Mount Pleasant before 1911 and later Goodall's Yard, Upper Commercial Street Batley.

His daughters, Dorothy Almira Ward was born in c1913 and died in October 1915 aged 2 years and Amy Cross Ward died in September 1915 aged 11 months.

He was associated with Broomhill United Methodist Church and was a well-known member of Batley St. John Ambulance Brigade.

Before enlisting he was employed as a greaser at Messrs. J.T. & J. Taylor's, Cheapside Mills, Batley and previously for seven years as a firer at Howley Park Colliery.

Ada married George Etheridge at Broomhill Chapel on 23rd August 1919.

Service Details

Frank was in the Territorials for many years and his time had expired when war broke out but he speedily enlisted. The 1/4th KOYLI was part of 3rd West Riding Brigade, West Riding Division.

He would have gone for training with the 1/4th at Doncaster and in November 1914 to Gainsborough where there was an accident and seven soldiers of "D" Company drowned on the 19th February whilst practising rafting on the gymes. They moved to York in February 1915 and landed in Boulogne on 13th April 1915. On the 15th May 1915 the formation became 148th Brigade, 49th West Riding Division.

In July 1915 the 49th Division moved into the Ypres Salient where the weather at that time of the year could be warm and pleasant and at times hot. The trenches were reported to be in a bad state of repair, but much of this was due to enemy shelling, not an excess of rain, although any appreciable amount of rain would cause problems for those in the front line.

The Battalion took part in the Battle of Aubers Ridge on 9th May 1915 and the defence against the first Phosgene attack on the 19th December 1915.

The battle plans for the X Corps on the 1st July 1916 was to capture the whole of the Thiepval spur and plateau in its first onslaught.

The 49th Division was in corps reserve and was to move before daylight to a position of readiness in Aveluy Wood, and a number of bridges with causeways across the marshy ground on both sides of the Ancre had been constructed to ensure rapid passage across the river.

The Germans had turned Thiepval which was situated on one of three spurs of the western end of the Pozieres Ridge overlooking the River Ancre and the British front line.

"At 7.30 am buglers in the front trench sounded the "advance" and the assaulting lines rose and moved forward at a steady pace with the precision of a parade ground movement."

The 1/4th and 1/5th KOYLI Regiments had reached Aveluy Wood at 3 am. The trees were still covered with foliage which gave the troops cover as they gathered for the coming attack. Each Brigade had been given its own assembly trench and as they waited, they could hear the noise of the guns and eventually saw the steady stream of wounded returning, plus some German prisoners. Parts of the 49th Division was split up and at 8.55 am 146th Brigade was ordered

to move into Thiepval Wood from where it was to advance to support either the 36th Division on the right or 32nd on the left.

As the morning wore on German resistance increased especially where there had been limited British gains.

German counter-attacks during the afternoon recaptured most of the lost ground and fresh attacks against Thiepval were defeated, with more great loss to the British. On the north bank of the Ancre, the attack of VIII Corps was another disaster, with large numbers of British troops being shot down in no man's land. The VII Corps diversion at Gommecourt was also costly, with only a partial and temporary advance south of the village. The German defeats from Foucaucourt to the Albert–Bapaume road, left the German defence south of the Somme incapable of resisting another attack and a substantial German retreat began, from the Flaucourt plateau towards Péronne, while north of the river, Fricourt was abandoned. The British army had suffered its highest number of casualties in a day and the elaborate defences built by the Germans, had collapsed from Foucaucourt south of the Somme, to the area just south of the Albert–Bapaume road on the north side of the river, throwing the defence into a crisis and leaving the Poilus "buoyant". A German counter-attack north of the Somme was ordered but took until 3:00 a.m. on 2 July to begin.

Despite a preliminary bombardment lasting seven days, the German defences were barely touched and the attack met unexpectedly fierce resistance. Losses were catastrophic and with only minimal advances on the southern flank, the initial attack was a failure. In the following weeks, huge resources of manpower and equipment were deployed in an attempt to exploit the modest successes of the first day. However, the German Army resisted tenaciously and repeated attacks and counter attacks meant a major battle for every village, copse and farmhouse gained. At the end of September, Thiepval was finally captured. The village had been an original objective of 1 July. Attacks north and east continued throughout October and into November in increasingly difficult weather conditions. The Battle of the Somme finally ended on 18 November with the onset of winter.

Amy, his wife, made enquiries when she had not heard from him for some time.

Official news arrived on 4th August 1916 from the Territorial Office in York stating that he was missing and on the following Wednesday his wife received a letter from the Colonel of his Battalion: -

"I am in receipt of your letter enquiring about your husband. I am afraid I cannot tell you very much about him only that he is missing and in all probability a prisoner of war. Sometime must elapse however, before official lists of prisoners are received and until then we must hope for the best."

There are 12,399 names on the Thiepval Memorial for soldiers from Britain and the Commonwealth, missing, who have no known grave, for the 1st July 1916

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

He is remembered with Honour at Broomhill Chapel, Thiepval Memorial and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group