James Clifford Watson



Rank: - Sapper

Number: - 107298

Regiment: - Royal Engineers 106th Field Coy

Missing, presumed Killed in Action: - 28/05/1918 Age: 20 years

Memorial: - Soissons Memorial, Aisne, France

Batley News, 26 Jul 1919. Batley Reporter, 25 Jul 1919 (classifieds)

Family Details

James Clifford was born in Batley on the 5th June 1897 the son of George Clifford and Evelyn Watson (nee Kenyon, m. 1890, registered Dewsbury). He was baptised at Cross bank Wesleyan Chapel on the 11th July 1897 when his parents lived at 26, Blakeridge Lane, Batley.

The family lived with his 80-year-old paternal grandfather at this address in 1901. Living in the house was George Watson aged 80, Hannah Watson (aunt) George Clifford, Evelyn, Herbert Morris born 1891, George 1894, James Clifford and Nellie aged 7 months. Frederick born 1896 had died in early 1897 aged 16 months. His grandfather died in 1904.

Before the next census was taken the family had moved to live at 26, Grange Road, Soothill, Batley. George Clifford was working as a woollen warehouseman and James Clifford was a plumber's apprentice for Walter Beckwith, plumber, Station Road, Batley when the 1911 census was taken.

The family moved to live at 12, Bankfields, Batley where his father died in the last few days of 1919 but his brother Herbert Morris Watson continued to live there.

Service Details

The 106th Field Company was attached to the 25th Division.

In 1918

The Division moved to the area north west of Bapaume on 13 February, becoming reserve Division to IV Corps. AS rumours of an impending enemy attack grew, 74th and 75th Brigades moved up closer to the front, at Fremicourt and Biefvillers respectively, where manual work in cable laying was undertaken.

They then took part in the battles of St. Quentin (21-23 March) First battle of Bapaume (24-25 March) Estaires (9-11 April) which was part of the battles of Lys. Messines (10-11 April), Bailleul (13-15 April), First battle of Kemmel (17-19 April), Second Battle of Kemmel (25-26 April).

The Division entrained at Rexpoede on 9 May and undertook a long journey to Fismes, 20 miles SE of Soissons in the Champagne. It was the last of four British Divisions making up IX Corps to arrive in the area, under a plan to relieve fresh

French Divisions for the north. The front line on the Chemin des Dames and south of the Aisne had been very quiet since spring 1917 and it was expected that the tired Divisions could recuperate there.

On 26 May, intelligence confirmed a heavy German attack could be expected. 25th Division was in reserve and ordered up into a closer support position. They went to an area of Guyencourt – Muscourt – Ventelay, south of the River Aisne and north east of Fismes.

At 1am on 27 May 1918, a heavy German bombardment with gas and high explosive hit the entire area between the front line beyond the Chemin and Fismes itself. The infantry began to attack three hours later. The Division was instructed to hold the second line of defence, except for the poor 8th Border which was sent off to hold the Aisne bridges at Pontavert and Concevreux. By 10am, all three Brigades had come under orders of the 21st, 8th and 50th Divisions respectively, which by now were fighting for their lives north of the river. By mid-day the Germans had broken through and crossed the Aisne: the units of 25th Division were thrown piecemeal into action. They were all but destroyed. The 11th Lancashire Fusiliers, holding high ground north of the Vesle, held out to the last man. The remnants of many units were temporarily joined into composite units, fighting a withdrawal as the enemy pressed on many miles across the River Marne. Casualties between 26 May and 14 June amounted to 4338 officers and men, of whom 2511 were missing.

In July 1919 both the Batley News and Batley Reporter gave reports that his parents had received official notification that James Clifford was missing, presumed killed in action on or since May 28th 1918.

James Clifford was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group