Joseph "Joe" Robert Webber





Rank: - Private

Number: - 3/3527

Regiment: - King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 8th Battalion (formerly 2nd Battalion)

Missing, presumed Killed in Action: - 1st July 1916 aged 41 years

Cemetery: - Blighty Valley Cemetery, Authuille Wood, Somme, France V.8.39

"MAY HIS REWARD BE AS GREAT AS HIS SACRIFICE"

Batley Reporter, 14 May 1915, 4 Aug 1916, 25 Aug 1916. Batley News, 31 Mar 1917 (photo)

Family Details

Joseph Robert was born in Cross Gates, Leeds in 1875 the son of Robert and Charlotte Webber nee Dickinson. His father, Robert came from Porlock in Somerset and joined Leeds City Police in October 1872. He married Charlotte Dickinson on 5th December 1874 at St. Matthias, Burley, Leeds by special licence and Robert gave his occupation as a mechanic. Joseph was born a few months later and was followed by Beatrice 1876, George Henry 1878 in Batley, and Maud in 1880-1900. In 1881 Robert and his family was living at Hatfield, Thorne near Doncaster and he was a Police Officer. Charlotte Ann was born in 1883 followed by Mary 1885, Lucy 1887 and Dora 1889-1902 who were all baptised at Todmorden in 1890 when the family was living at Cornholme.

In 1891 when the census was taken the family was living at 21, Barker Street, Stansfield, Todmorden.

The family moved to live in Batley before the birth of Ernest Floyd in November 1897. In 1901 Robert was described as a retired police officer and was living with his family at 2, Stanley Terrace, Park Road, Batley and Charlotte was working as a woollen weaver. In 1902 they had moved to live in Oaks Road Soothill but had moved to 90, Lady Ann Road before the death of Robert in April 1910.

When the 1911 census was taken Charlotte Webber and five of her children including Joseph were living at 114, Lady Ann Road, Batley and Joseph was employed as a colliery bye worker.

Joseph was associated with Soothill Congregational Church and before enlisting had been a pump-man at Soothill Wood Colliery.

Service Details

The 2nd Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was in Dublin when war broke out in 1914 and they were part of 13th Brigade in 5th Division. On 16th August 1914 they landed at Le Havre.

Joe enlisted a few months after war broke out.

It is unlikely Joe joined them before early 1915 but the battalion in 1915 took part in the Second Battle of Ypres and the Capture of Hill 60. (22nd April -25 May). T*his began with surprise German attack using poison gas against French North African forces holding defences near Ypres. Both sides rushed reserves in and the battle*

developed into the second epic in that area. British Second Army withdrew to a shorter line near Ypres.

Joe was injured taking part in the capture of Hill 60. He wrote to his mother from the Southern General Hospital, Oxford: -

"*I am sorry to say I am in hospital wounded in the thigh. The bullet struck one leg and went through to the other. I have plenty of pain with it and the doctor said I was lucky with the wound...Our officer has been wounded- he is the son of Mr. Fred Lumb of Bradford Road, Batley.(This refers to Lieut. Arthur Lumb) .The Germans lay all over our place dead and wounded. They are all poisoning our men with gas. When they fall they cannot get up. Don't bother about me. I shall soon be all right. I am thankful I am not a dead man."*

He transferred to the 8th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry who did not go to France until August 1915.

Between 21 and 26 August 1915 most of the division landed in Boulogne, with the artillery going to Le Havre between 25 and 28 August. All proceeded to the concentrate near Tilques.

On 5 September the Division was attached to III Corps and moved to the Merris-Vieux Berquin area, where trench familiarisation began under the tutelage of the 20th (Light) and 27th Divisions. The Division took responsibility for a front-line sector for the first time nine days later, taking over between Ferme Grande Flamengrie to the Armentieres-Wez Macquart road. CIII and CV Brigades RFA were attached to 8th Division for operations in connection with the Battle of Loos.

At this time, 23rd Division was holding the front at Bois Grenier. It remained in this area for a considerable time. 10th Northumberland Fusiliers carried out the Division's first trench raid in the night of 31 December / 1 January.

The Division was relieved after a lengthy five-month spell in the front line by 34th Division, between 26 January and 8 February 1916. After a certain amount of confusing movement, Divisional HQ was established at Blaringhem and the units concentrated around Bruay.

On 3 March 1916 orders were received to relieve the French 17th Division in the Carency sector. The front to be held was between the Boyau de l'Ersatz and the Souchez River, including the posts on the Notre Dame de Lorette hill behind.

Artillery was positioned in the area Carency – Ablain St Nazaire – Bois de Bouvigny, an exposed position in which it was subject to severe shelling. In early March many former miners were withdrawn from the ranks to establish a Tunnelling Company of the Royal Engineers. Mid-March saw 68th Brigade taking over the Calonne front and 69th the Angres front. Many parties attached to 176 Tunnelling Company RE especially for work in the Noulette sector. Relieved by 2nd Division between 12 and 19 April and withdrew to Bruay area. Moved back into the Souchez-Angres front 10-13 May.

The German Attack on Vimy Ridge.

The enemy attack on 21 May fell most heavily on 47th (London) Division, which was to the 23rd Division's right in the area of Berthonval. Shellfire fell heavily around Aix Noulette from 4.30pm. Divisional artillery was very active in support of the 47th Division until 24 May and again on 1 June when 2nd Division continued operations to recover lost ground. 23rd Division was relieved by 47th (London) Division on 11 June and moved to Bomy, with the artillery going to Chamblain Chatelain ("Charlie Chaplin") and Therouanne. Intensive training commenced.

They took part in the Battle of Albert in which the Division played a part in the capture of Contalmaison. Joseph was posted missing on the first day of this battle and in September 1916 he was "posted missing and wounded" from 1st July but it was not until March 1917 that his relatives received official confirmation that he was killed in action in France on July 1st 1916.

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

He is remembered with Honour at Soothill Congregational Church, Hanging Heaton War Memorial (St. Paul's) and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group