Thomas “Tom” Whitehead





Rank: - Private

Number: - 20592

Regiment: - Kings Own Scottish Borderers 2nd Battalion

Missing, presumed killed in action: - 4th October 1917 aged 27 years

Memorial: - Tyne Cot Memorial, West Vlaanderen, Belgium. Panels 66 to 68

Batley News, 9 Feb 1918, 31, Aug 1918, 14 Sep 1918 (photo)

Family Details

Tom was born in Batley in 1890 the son of Joshua and Sarah Jane Whitehead (nee Gill).

In 1891 the family was living at 6, Warwick Road, Batley and Joshua gave his occupation as a rag grinder and Sarah Jane was a weaver. Tom had older siblings, Ada born 1884, Miranda 1885 and Samuel 1887.

Richard was born in 1901, Joshua died in 1903 aged 43 years and the 1911 census, when the family was living at 1, Warwick Mount, Batley, shows there had been two other children who had died in infancy. John Whitehead who died in November 1894 aged 14 hours may have been one of these children.

Tom attended Warwick Road Council School and Broomhill Sunday School.

Before he enlisted, he worked at Messrs. Wrigley and Parker's, Greenhead Mills. At the time of his death his mother lived at 40, Grange Road, Soothill, Batley.

Service Details

The 2nd Battalion of the King's Own Scottish Borderers was attached to 13th Brigade in 5th Division. Tom went to France in September 1915.

In March 1916 the 5th Division took over a section of front line between St. Laurent Blangy and the southern edge of Vimy Ridge, in front of Arras. This was a lively time, with many trench raids, sniping and mining activities in the front lines. When the Franco-British offensive opened on the Somme on 1 July 1916, the 5th Division was enjoying a period of rest and re-fit and was in GHQ Reserve. However, this restful time was not destined to last and they fought on the Somme in: -
The Attacks on High Wood, the Battles of Guillemont, Flers- Courcelette, Morval and Le Transloy.

By 5 October 1916 the Division had left the Somme and was holding a quieter line near Festubert. There was a constant threat from enemy artillery and sniper fire, but in comparison with the Somme it was a relatively tranquil period that lasted until March 1917.

Tom was wounded, but we have not found when, and brought back to a hospital in Sheffield but returned to France in May 1917.

The Division then fought in the Battles of Vimy, the Attack on La Coulotte, the Third Battle of the Scarpe including the Capture by the Division of Oppy Wood all near Arras.

On 7 September 1917 the Division was relieved and moved out of the line for a period, being sent next to join the great offensive in Flanders fighting first at the Battle of Polygon Wood (26th September -3rd October) and then the Battle of Broodseinde (4th October).

On the 1st October the battalion was at Berthen and on the 4th Zero hour was set at 6 am where the plan was to take Polderhoek Chateau, wood and spur.

At 4.45 am the enemy put down a heavy barrage which was later discovered a preparation for their own attack. The battalion suffered very heavily during this attack.

"C" and "D" Companies formed the attacking line with "B" company in support and "A" in reserve. Promptly at 6 am "C" and "D" companies went over the top. It was rather dark to see properly and there was heavy ground mist which made visibility difficult. Their advance was hindered by a swamp which made them lose their direction and barrage although they did manage to get through. The battalion was counter attacked especially from the Chateau Wood which was full of Germans who were sniping hard and firing machine guns. The battalion did manage to take the Chateau but with considerable casualties.

In February 1918 his mother appealed in the Batley News for any news of him because it was known that he had been injured on 4th October 1917.

He was officially posted as "Missing, presumed killed" in August 1918.

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

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



Researched by members of
Batley History Group