Stephen Frank Yates





Rank: - Private

Number: - 8219

Regiment: - Scots Guards 2nd Battalion

Died of influenza: - 02/11/1918 Age: 24 years

Cemetery: - St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen, Seine-Maritime, France S. II. BB. 18.

"KISMET"

Batley News, 28 Aug 1915, 9 Nov 1918 (photo)

Family Details

Stephen Frank was born in Birstall on the 13th February 1894 the son of John George and Annie Maria Yates (nee Latham)

He was baptised at St. Saviour's Church, Brownhill on the 7th March 1900 on the same day as his siblings, Thomas William Edward born 18th June 1888, Herbert born 24th December 1890 and Alice Ann Lily born 17th January 1900. His father was a mason who lived at Howden Clough. When the 1901 census was taken the family was living at 3, Moat Hill, Birstall.

In 1911 the family lived at 4, Plantation Villas, Geldard Road, Birstall and Frank was working as a coal miner bye-worker. Florrie and Vinnie were born in 1892 but sadly died in October 1892, Arthur Edwin was born in 1901 but sadly died aged 4 months in January 1902. According to the 1911 there was also another child who had died in infancy.

Frank attended Brownhill Schools and St. Saviour's Church and prior to enlisting in 1910 worked at Howden Clough Colliery. He was a keen athlete and took part in many local sports being particularly friendly with the Teale brothers of Soothill.

On the 23rd October 1917 at St. George's Church, Leeds he married Hilda Johnson giving his address as 79, Intake Lane, Boothroyd, Batley. She was a day school teacher and taught at Carlinghow School, Batley. His parents later lived at 69, Intake Lane, Batley.

Service Details

Frank, as he was known, enlisted in the Scots Guards in 1910.

In August 1915 after a year of fighting he came home on leave and remarked to a Batley News reporter that the war was a good sport. He had been stationed at the Tower of London when war broke out and his battalion was sent to Zeebrugge in early September 1914 to help the Belgian army near Ghent. When the British left Ghent they moved to Ostend, Roulers and Thielt where a German aircraft was brought down by his company.

The German must not have known the Scots Guards were in the area because he was only about 200 yards away when a Maxim gun was turned on him and brought him down. He later saw Lieutenant Moorhouse manage to get back behind the British lines before he died of his wounds which he had received when making a successful bombing expedition.

His first big action was the First Battle of Ypres which was watched by the Kaiser from behind Hill 60. He was loathe to talk about it but said, ”All who were saved had narrow escapes” and he had been in hand to hand fighting. He was again in the thick of the fray on December 18th when he took part in a big bayonet charge near Armentieres, a trench being re-captured from the enemy. Things were quiet until April except for the cold weather and Frank said he was lucky to have a good pair of “gum” boots reaching to the knees and thus being spared frost bite. He told how on Christmas Day 1914 their battalion were opposite some Bavarians and there was a truce for a short time so they could bury their dead and fraternise. Sections of British and German troops met half way between the trenches and exchanged cigars, cigarettes and gave souvenirs. Several of the Bavarians could speak good English and one asked how Chelsea was going on. They were tired of the war but was positive that they were going to win.

At the Battle of Neuve Chapelle when it was declared that due to the lack of shells it was prevented from making a splendid success into a smashing victory Frank was given the job of carrying the shells from the transport to the lines. He also did not take part in the Battle of Festubert because he was tending to the officer’s equipment behind the lines. He and his comrades did find 80 bodies of the Scots Guards and a captain close together with a large number of Germans around them. The Guards had apparently been surrounded and fought to the last preferring death than to surrender. He said that during their periods of rest from the trenches, thanks to their officers, who organised concerts and boxing contests they had a good time. Frank could both box and wrestle.

His close friend in France was Fred Teale of Soothill who was in the same regiment. He was due to come home for his fourth leave in November 1918 when he died of influenza in a Rouen hospital.

His brother Thomas had been killed in action on 28th August 1918. Hilda moved to live at 16, Beanlands Parade, Ilkley in the 1920’s.

Frank was awarded the 1914 Star + Clasp, British War Medal, Victory Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at St Saviour's Church, Brownhill and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group