



PRIVATE WALTER WATTS

SERVICE NO. 32271

2nd BATTALION, SOUTH LANCASHIRE REGIMENT

DIED 12TH APRIL 1918 AGED 31

Walter Watts, was born in Odiham on 23 August 1887¹. He was the eighth child of James and Patience Watts who lived in the Chalk Pit, Odiham. He had four older brothers, James, Albert, Tom and George, and two older sisters, Kate and Alice². According to the censuses Walter's father, James, was a general labourer, although in 1901 he was recorded as a bill poster³. He died in 1907, aged 64.

In 1911, Walter was working as a grocer's porter, still living in the Chalk Pit with his mother, Patience and siblings, Albert, Tom and George. Four years later he enlisted at Aldershot for the duration of the War and initially joined the Training Reserve, 96th Battalion, and was allocated service number TR/7/13028⁴. From his partly burnt record it seems that on 1st May 1917 he was 'posted to 46th', although because of the damage to the document it is not clear what this is. However, on 19th May 1917 he was transferred, assumedly to the 2nd Battalion, South Lancashire Regiment, with a new service number – 32271.

The 2nd Battalion, South Lancashire Regiment, at this time was in the 75th Brigade, 25th Division. The Battalion had been fighting on the Western Front since 1914 and Walter would have been involved in the various battles since his posting in 1917, and then in 1918 various phases of the Battles of the Lys. These included the Battle of Bapaume (24 March), the Battle of Estaires (9 April), the Battle of Messines (10 April), and finally Hill 63 (11 April). This was the day when British defensive action was unsuccessful against the German 'Operation Georgette' Spring Offensive. In the early afternoon orders were received to withdraw from the British-held catacombs on Hill 63. However, the message was misunderstood and, instead of withdrawing, they believed that they should remain and only a few small groups managed to escape. It is likely that Walter lost his life at this point or the following day, for his service record records that his date of death was 'on or since 12-4-18' and 'presumed dead'. And 'killed in action'.

Walter would have received the Victory Medal and the British War Medal. He is commemorated on the Ploegsteert Memorial, Hainault, Belgium.

¹ Source – London Road Board School Admission Register

² Source - Odiham Censuses -1881 and 1891

³ Source – Odiham Censuses – 1881, 1891 and 1901

⁴ Source – Mainly from British Army Service Records, ref; WO364 (burnt documents) Findmypasy.co.uk