

WILLIAM HALEY NEWPORT



27th September 1916

1883-1916 Age 33

Private 18212, 7th (Service) Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment.

William Haley and his twin brother John Brooks Newport were born in Manningham on 7th March 1883. Their parents were Henry William Newport, a Londoner who moved to Bradford where he worked as a clerk, and his second wife Grace Ann Haley, a local girl fourteen years his junior. Henry died in 1890 leaving Grace to bring up the two boys. William, the younger of the twins, attended Bradford Grammar School in the 1890s. For how long and to what effect is not known. At the time of the 1901 and 1911 censuses, Grace had disappeared. Although she did not die until 1912 she seems to have parted from her sons. In 1901, John and William lived with Grace's father and her sister Annie. They were aged eighteen and were both in respectable occupations, John as clerk to an accountant and William as an insurance official. Ten years later, they lived with their aunt Annie in Horton. John was now described as an 'Accountant', and William was an official of the London and Lancashire Fire Insurance Company. All three were single.

The outbreak of war does not seem to have excited patriotic fervour in either of the brothers. Although unmarried, they may have considered themselves too old for the rigours of military life as they were in their early thirties. By the early months of 1915 it was clear that voluntary recruitment was not going to provide the numbers of men the armed forces needed, and it was also a wasteful and unfair form of recruitment. Late in that year Lord Derby established a scheme to encourage more men to come forward. On 25th November 1915 William attested in Bradford that he was willing to serve, but deferred his service until such time as the government called him up. He was mobilized on 4th April 1916 and was joined a training battalion. William's service record shows that he was a fit man, 5' 9" in height and weighing twelve stones.

William's military service provides a good example of how severely the Somme offensive of 1916 consumed Britain's manpower. After only a few months' basic training, in late August he was sent to the Base Camp at Etaples, France. Following a



further ten days training at the notorious 'Bull Ring' he was despatched to the 7th Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment near the Somme. The demand for replacements for casualties was so great that drafts were no longer directed to battalions of their local regiment. William joined the 7th in the middle of a period of intensive training in preparation for the assault on Thiepval by 18th Division on 26th September. The 7th were in support for this operation. They were called forward during the afternoon but they were not actually needed as Thiepval was captured by 8.30 the next morning. However, they were now in the danger zone and were shelled heavily, a single shell causing forty casualties. It is likely that this is how William lost his life on the morning of 27th September. He had been in France for thirty days. He has no known grave and his name is on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, which stands close to where he was killed.

Despite the receipt of the news of his twin brother's death, John Newport hoped that William might have survived. In 1920 he saw a photo of a freed British prisoner of war who bore a marked resemblance to his brother. He wrote to the War Office to enquire whether this was William, but his hopes were misplaced.



Acknowledgements:

There is no photo of Newport in the O.B.A. Roll of Honour, and his death does not seem to have been reported in the Bradford Daily Telegraph (it is not in the index of WW1 dead in the Local Studies Library, Bradford). The family history was researched using Ancestry.com. The B.G.S. Annual Reports and the Bradfordians for the 1890s have yet to emerge from the School Archives. During the war, the Bradfordian did not report his service in one of the lists it published. The survival of Newport's Service Record illuminates his life somewhat.

7th RWK War Diary on Ancestry jumps from July 1916 to the start of 1917, leaving a gap for the period of Newport's arrival and death. Fortunately C. T. Atkinson, The Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment—1914 to 1919, (originally published London, Simpkin Marshall Hamilton Kent and Co Ltd 1924, and available online in the 2003 reprint by Pen & Sword and available at <http://janetandrichardsgenealogy.co.uk/QORWK%20-%20C%20T%20ATKINSON%20Ch%2013.pdf>), p.211-2 makes it possible to find out something of the circumstances of his death (accessed 26-9-2016). The main assault on Thiepval was carried out by 53rd and 54th Brigades of 18th Eastern Division, with 55th Brigade *(which included 7th R.W.K). In the days that followed, the West Kents assaulted the Schwaben Redoubt to the north of Thiepval, but were unable to hold on to it in the face of German counter-attacks.

The photo of the Thiepval Memorial was taken by the author. This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in September 2016 (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com).



This photo of the remains of Thiepval Chateau, taken on 28th September 1916, illustrates the effects of three months of shelling:
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