

WALTON THOMAS



12th April 1918

1894-1918 Aged 23

**Private 13603, 'C' Company 1/7th Battalion
Duke of Wellington's (West Riding)
Regiment.**

Walton Thomas was an early volunteer who survived two wounds before his luck ran out. His father John Mason Thomas moved from Otley to Burley-in-Wharfedale to work as a clerk at William Fison's Greenholme Mill. Mason Thomas progressed to book-keeper and then in the early 1900s to Company Secretary, and he would eventually become a Director of the company. In 1891 he married Alice Mary Casson, daughter of a Burley butcher. They had three children, one of whom died in infancy. Walton, the younger of the two surviving boys, was born on 14th November 1894. For his secondary schooling he travelled into Bradford from Burley station, firstly to attend Belle Vue School on Manningham Lane, and then to Bradford Grammar School from 1906-10 between the ages of eleven and fifteen. Walton was in the Modern forms. His academic record was an average one and each year he came in the lower half of the form order. When he left he worked as an office boy to a firm of yarn agents, and later his father found him a place as an apprentice in the wool warehouse at Fison's mill.

In August 1914 Walton enlisted in Ilkley. He was one of the early volunteers responding to Lord Kitchener's appeal. He was posted to the 10th Battalion Duke of Wellington's Regiment which went to France on 26th August 1915 with 69th Infantry Brigade, part of 23rd Division. After ten months at the front on 5th July 1916 the 10th Dukes made their first attack, shortly after the Battle of the Somme began. Walton was part of a bombing section sent to consolidate a captured trench south of Contalmaison. A shrapnel bullet ricocheted from his helmet into his wrist. He was treated by a German doctor who had been taken prisoner and then convalesced in hospital at Nottingham. He returned to the front in April 1917 and was posted to the 8th Duke of Wellington's. In October near Ypres he received his second wound when he was shot through the muscles of his arm.



After convalescing in France in early 1918 he was posted to 'C' Company, 1/7th Duke of Wellington's, his previous battalion having been broken up. In early April the battalion was moved from Ypres to block the German advance towards Hazebrouck. On 12th April it took up a position just south of Bailleul in French Flanders. Thomas's company was one of two holding the front line. About 4.30 p.m. the Germans attacked. While their barrage was light they had heavy covering fire from rifles and machine-guns. The 1/7th Dukes held their ground into the evening until things quietened down around 7.30. The battalion suffered only a dozen men killed including Walton Thomas. He was one of four who have no known grave and whose names were recorded on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing.



Acknowledgements:

Walton Thomas' photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family was researched using Ancestry.com. His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1907-1911. The details of his military career and wounds come from the book of First World War newspaper cuttings held by Burley village archives, with thanks. *Soldiers Who Died in the Great War* gives his enlistment place; the Medal Index Card gives the date he went to France; the Service Medal and Award Rolls 1914-20 detail the battalions he served with. The War Diaries of the 10th and 1/7th Duke of Wellington's were consulted through Ancestry.com. Thomas is not named but the actions are described in detail. Walton's name appears on the memorials of both his schools, Burley-in-Wharfedale Methodist Church, St. Mary's Parish Church and the village war memorial.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in April 2018. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>.