

# JOHN CHALTON WHITTAKER



28th April 1918

1896-1918 Aged 21

## Second Lieutenant 1/4th Battalion Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment.

Jack Whittaker was born in Liverpool on 21st September 1896. His father Frederick William Whittaker was a mechanical engineer whose work meant that he frequently moved around northern England. He settled in Baildon in the early 1900s at a house on Jenny Lane named 'Summerseat'. He must have commanded respect locally as he became Chairman of the District Council. His first wife Bessie Wilde died after giving birth to a daughter; his second wife Barbara Jane Wood bore eight more children, of whom Jack was the third. Jack and his elder brother Fred both attended the Bradford Grammar School, Jack starting in 1906. He was in the Classical forms for two years but for his final year he moved to Fourth Modern middle. He left in 1911 before he was fifteen and then became pupil to an architect. Fred was apprenticed to their father. Both brothers were playing members of Baildon Rugby Football Club.

Jack enlisted in the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment at Belle Vue Barracks on 5th August 1914, the day after war broke out. He added a year to his age to ensure that he would be able to serve overseas. He was placed in 'H' Company (later part of 'C' Company) which had the reputation of being the B.G.S. old boys' company. His medical inspection records gave two different heights for him—according to one he was 5 ft 8 ins tall, the other has him as three inches taller. Although practically untrained he accompanied the battalion to Strensall Camp near York, where he fractured his ankle in September while taking down a tent. He was fit to go to France with the 6th Battalion in April 1915, where he served in the ranks until February 1917. He took part in the attack at Thiepval on the afternoon of 1st July 1916, but he missed the unsuccessful 3rd September attack as he was in hospital on the coast suffering from scabies. At the end of February 1917 Jack returned to the U.K. in preparation for Officer Training and joined 10th Training Battalion at York in May. He was granted his commission in the 6th



Battalion Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment on 30th August 1917.

The date Second Lieutenant Whittaker returned to France is not known, and at an unrecorded date he was transferred to a different battalion, 1/4th Duke of Wellington's. Possibly this occurred when he was posted from the Base Depot in France. When the 1/4th West Riding went into action near Passchendaele on 9th October 1917 he was kept back with the Second Echelon. On 10th April 1918 the 1/4th West Riding were moved south from Ypres to defend a crossing over the Lys near Armentieres (see John Metcalfe's obituary) and for the next ten days fought a dogged rearguard action around Bailleul. The battalion was then relieved and on 27-28th April it was in brigade reserve at Millekruisse. By night the men worked on digging a new trench. The War Diary had little to report, apart from some enemy shelling. Three Other Ranks were killed and sixteen wounded. Jack Whittaker was the only officer killed. His burial place was not recorded, probably because a heavy German attack opened at 3 a.m. the next day. His name is on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing. His brother Fred lost an eye in May 1915. He was also commissioned in the West Riding Regiment, was wounded again in May 1918 and survived the war.



## Acknowledgements:

Jack's photo is enlarged from the photo below which was taken at Strensall Camp in September 1914. Several of the rugby players pictured were Old Bradfordians and all were in the 6th West Yorkshire. The photo is



from an anonymous album sold at Skipton Market. The family was researched using Ancestry.com. His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1907-1911. His military service was reconstructed from his Officer Personal File (TNA WO374-74017) and his Medal Index Card. It seems unlikely that he served with the 6th West Riding Regiment in France as he is not named in the monthly lists of officers in the 6th West Riding War Diary (WO95/2801/1-4). His name is also not in the list of 1st/4th West Riding Regiment officers who went into action on 9th October 1917 (TNA WO95/2799/1-4). His death is recorded on fol.462. There are references to his service in *ShIPLEY Times & Gazette* (consulted through findmypast.co.uk) 18-9-1914, 5-10-1917 and 1-5-1918. The *Bradford Weekly Telegraph* 10-5-1918 summarized his life.

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/>>.