

FRANK WATSON



30th June 1916

1890-1916 Age 26



Lieutenant 18th Service Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment 2nd Bradford 'Pals', attached 93rd Trench Mortar Battery.

Frank Watson was born in Bradford in 1890. His grandfather William established a successful drapery business dealing in fabrics and became an alderman of Bradford. In 1871, he was employing more than fifty adults and children. Frank's father Peter took over the business, which in 1912 was located in the heart of Bradford at 15 Kirkgate. Frank was the youngest of three children born to Peter and Fanny Watson. The family lived in the same house on Oakroyd Terrace in Manningham for over thirty years. Frank attended Bradford Grammar School up to the age of fifteen. He was on the Modern side of the School, not intended for university but for a commercial career. He was near the top of his form in French and was competent at Physics and Chemistry. Upon leaving school neither he nor his elder brother William worked for their father. William became a draughtsman and a civil engineer. We find Frank in 1911 (census) working as a fitter for a company manufacturing motor-cycles. In 1914 he was an engineer's draughtsman. It is likely he was still living at home as a single young man.

When war broke out, Frank was one of the first thousand volunteers to join the Bradford 'Pals' Battalion which was formed in September 1914. A second Pals' battalion followed early in 1915, and he was quickly transferred and promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant (with effect from 9th February). He was subsequently promoted again to Lieutenant. In the Summer of 1915, a few months before the Bradford Pals were sent overseas, Frank married Winifred Mary Hill, whom he possibly met through his father's business contacts.

The Bradford Pals were sent first to Egypt with 31st Division, and then to France early the next year. In March 1916, light trench mortar batteries equipped with the versatile 3" Stokes gun were formed for each infantry brigade. Frank was transferred to the 93rd Trench Mortar Battery which had the task of giving supporting fire to the Leeds and Bradford

Pals' battalions.

On Sunday 25th June, the two Pals' Battalions left their training area at Gezaincourt and marched to Bus-les-Artois where they were billeted behind the front until the 'Big Push' began. On the morning of 29th June there was a call for volunteers to participate in a raid on the German trenches that night with the purpose of taking prisoners for interrogation and assessing the state of the German defences following a week of bombardment. Forty-two men responded. Frank Watson was one of two leaders of the sortie. The raiders left the British trench at 12.28 a.m. on 30th June, but they were soon spotted and met with a hail of grenades. Lieutenant Clough was able to return with his party after some two hours. He reported that the German barbed wire was cut and the trenches were knocked about, but that many British shells were falling short in no man's land. However, ten men were killed and twelve wounded, and Watson and another officer were missing.

The body of Frank Watson was never found, and there was considerable confusion regarding his fate. It was only in 1920 that it was officially pronounced '*Death accepted on or since 1st July 1916*' in order that his wife could re-marry. The War Office made a charge on his estate of £3. 6s 2d was made to cover the cost of his service revolver. His name is on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.



Acknowledgements:

Frank Watson was a common name and Ancestry.com is not very helpful in making links. However, with perseverance a family history can be assembled. I am grateful to Tricia Platts for her assistance with the family research; to the O.B.A. for permission to use the photo; and to the School Archives for the Annual Class Lists. The tale of the trench raid comes from David Raw, *Bradford Pals* (Barnsley, 2005), pp. 155-8, who has had the benefit of reading his Officers' file in the National Archives.

The other missing officer was Second Lieutenant J.W. Worsnop, who David Raw describes as Frank's school friend from B.G.S. I can not find a J.W.Worsnop in the Class Lists while Frank was at the School. There was a T.W. Worsnop in a different year. I am confident this is not a misprint, as initials mattered (and matter) in a school like Bradford Grammar, and are repeated in the Class Lists over several years. Nevertheless, the book is a monument of research into the Pals.

Compiled and composed by Nick Hooper, June 2016 (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com).