

FRANK WILKINSON



27th July 1916

1894-1916 Age 21

Second Lieutenant, 3rd Battalion Dorset Regiment, attached 2nd-5th Gloucester Regiment.

Frank Wilkinson was the son of Joseph Wilkinson and Jane Robertshaw, both of Bradford. They married in 1873 and had four children, three of whom survived, a daughter and two sons. After a gap of thirteen years Frank was born in 1894. The family business was coal. Frank's great grandfather Joseph was a miner working in the Bowling pits as far back as 1822. He laid the foundations for his son Henry, grandson Joseph and great grandson Percy who were coal merchants and colliery agents.

Frank studied at Bradford Grammar School from 1906 until 1912, on the Modern side of the school, preparing for a life in commerce. He showed great aptitude for French and German, winning the Modern Languages and Art prizes in 1910. He also did well in Book-keeping and Shorthand. By the time he reached Sixth Science in his final year, it was clear from his results that his commitment to school had waned, and he left with no school certificates. He took a position with Messrs. Major and Co. of Hull, a firm of tar distillers.

When war began, Frank quit his position in Hull and returned home. He joined the Leeds University Officer Training Corps in order to be qualified for a commission. He was initially posted to the 3rd Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment. This was a depot and training unit which never left the U.K. In the photo he is shown wearing its cap badge. When he went to France in June 1916, he was one of six second lieutenants from the 3rd Dorsets who joined the 2nd-5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment on attachment on 9th July. This battalion had itself only arrived in France on 25th May with 61st Division. Within a few weeks they were thrown into the disastrous diversionary attack at Fromelles on 19th July, in which the 5th Australian Division lost 5,500 men and the 61st a further 1,500. Fortunately for the 5th Gloucesters they were in reserve and did not suffer any losses.



A week later, they were holding the line near Laventie when the Germans made a determined night attack. Frank Wilkinson was in command of the platoon which garrisoned a mine crater known as the 'Duck's Bill' in advance of the British front and the connecting trench called 'The Neck'. After an intense bombardment starting at 9.30 p.m., German infantry attacked at 10.30. The company commander handled his resources effectively in beating off this and a subsequent attack. However, as the Brigadier-General described in his report, *'one German with a telephone actually jumped into the Neck. As he got in he threw a bomb [grenade] which killed an Officer; this man was wounded and taken prisoner.'* The dead officer was Frank Wilkinson. He had been at the front for less than three weeks. His body was buried in Rue-du-Bacquerot No. 1 Military Cemetery near Laventie.



Acknowledgements:

Wilkinson's photo is from the O.B.A. Roll of Honour. His family was researched using Ancestry.com., and his school years from the Annual Class Lists in the School Archives. The Bradford Daily Telegraph reported his death on 3rd August 1916. The circumstances of his death are from the War Diary of the 2nd-5th Battalion Gloucester Regiment, downloaded from the National Archives (WO-95-3066-1).

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