

WILLIAM BALME NAYLOR



16th September 1916

1897-1916 Age 19

Second Lieutenant, 1st-6th Battalion Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment (Territorial Force).

William was born on 2nd September 1897, the only son and the youngest of three children born to William Beecroft Naylor and Edith, nee Shackleton. The Naylor family were well established in Keighley, where William's grandfather owned a spinning mill. His eldest son William Beecroft Naylor did not go into the family business, and instead became a bank cashier and eventually a branch manager. He married Edith, also from Keighley and the daughter of a wool buyer, in 1891. They had two daughters, Edith and Nellie, before William Balme's birth.

Although it was unusual for boys from Keighley to attend Bradford Grammar, William started in 1910, when he was just short of his fourteenth birthday. In Form Third Classical Upper he was not a high-flyer, but nor was he bottom; in Fourth Classical the best he managed was 15th (of 25) in French and Divinity, and 11th in Art. He left the school during the Fifth Form, after his fifteenth birthday. William must have continued his education elsewhere, for later he became a student of Leeds University, where he joined the Officer Training Corps. The military training he received qualified him to apply for a commission, which he received in November 1915. He was posted to the 1st-6th Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment, a Territorial Force battalion which recruited in Airedale and the Craven district, and in which his father had been an officer prior to the war. Only a fortnight after his commission was announced, William embarked to join his battalion in Belgium. Fortunately for him, he joined them after the great German gas attack of 19th December.

With the start of 1916 the 6th Dukes left Ypres and moved south, where they were engaged in the preparations for the planned Somme attack, digging assembly trenches, working on railway construction and carrying materials to the front. They were not directly engaged in the 1st July attack against Thiepval, but they subsequently spent 48 days facing this German fortress, suffering a steady flow



of casualties. Likewise they were in support for the 3rd September attack, which took place the day after William's nineteenth birthday. On this day he was one of a small group of officers and N.C.O.s kept back as a nucleus to reform the battalion in case it suffered severe casualties. He was appointed the battalion bombing officer, responsible for the specialists in the use of hand grenades, and he met his death carrying out his duties. On 15th September the 6th Dukes were unexpectedly summoned from rest to relieve another battalion in the Leipzig Salient, south of Thiepval. It was here, on the next day, that William was mortally wounded by a shrapnel wound to the head. His body was carried back for burial to Blighty Valley cemetery, where it remains today.

A few days later, William's death was announced in the Leeds Mercury, the Yorkshire Post and the Yorkshire Evening Post. The death of their only son was felt deeply by his parents, who caused a brass plate to be placed to his memory in Keighley Parish Church bearing these words: 'A boy, he spent his boy's dear life for England. Be content: no honour of age had been more excellent.' He is also on the Leeds University war memorial. In 1929, on the anniversary of his death, his parents placed a memorial notice in the Leeds Mercury.



Acknowledgements:

William's photo comes from the O.B.A. Roll of Honour with thanks. The family history was researched using Ancestry.com, where the 1st-6th Duke of Wellington's War Diary is also available. References to his school years are from the Annual Reports for 1911 and 1912. The Bradfordian gives his BGS years as 1910-13, however there is no record of him in the 1913 Annual Report. For his commission, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29376/supplement/11585/data.pdf>, accessed 13-9-2016. For the memorial plate, https://menofworth.wikispaces.com/Naylor_WB, accessed 13-9-2016. I owe the reference to William Beecroft Naylor's service in the 6th Dukes to <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/213132-medal-id-please/>, posted by Andy Wade, author of the Men of Worth website, with photo. For the newspaper announcements, <http://www.genesreunited.co.za/searchbna/results?memberlastsubclass=none&searchhistorykey=0&keywords=balme%20naylor> accessed 13-9-2016. There is a useful summary of the 1st-6th Battalion's war in Craven's Part in the Great War, compiled and edited by John T. Clayton (Skipton, 1919), pp. 16-32.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper, September 1916 (further details from Nhooper1956@googlemail.com).