

JOHN BILLING



2nd September 1918

1898-1918 Aged 20

Second Lieutenant East Yorkshire Regiment, attached 5th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

John Billing, known as 'Jack', was born on Whetley Hil, Bradford on 29th May 1898. He was the eldest of two children, and the only son, of John Billing and Mary Elizabeth Williamson. His father, who died in 1907, was a partner in Billing, Booth and Co., merchants, importers and exporters. Mary's father was foreman in a Manningham Lane beer-shop, and later a brewer. Jack went to Bradford Grammar School in 1909, and at the end of his first year in the Junior School he won the History and Geography prize, and was in the top three in all subjects. In 3rd and 4th Classical he continued to do well in History and also in Art. He left in 1912 when he was fourteen and took up a clerkship with his late father's business.

Jack attested for military service on the last day of May 1916, two days after he was eighteen. He was posted to the Reserve and it was not until the following February that he was called up. His medical inspection put his height at 5' 10 1/2", his weight at 121 pounds and described his physical development as 'fair'. His basic training was with 91st Training Reserve Battalion at Blyth in Northumberland before he went to France in early July. His first tour of duty lasted for 113 days. At this stage of the war British recruits were no longer posted to local regiments, so Jack joined 'A' Company, 2-8th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment (61st Division). The only men he knew were the draft of thirty-four who joined the battalion on 21st July 1917 while it was in rest and training. In the second half of August the division moved up to Poperinge in Belgium to prepare to participate in the Ypres offensive. This preparation included two days going over a model of the German positions. In late August and early September the 2-8th Warwicks took part in attacks near St. Julien, and was then moved to Arras and provided large working parties for the Royal Engineers.

In early October Jack had applied for a commission. On the 25th he was summoned to the regimental depot in England. His training started on 7th December at Oxford with 4th Officer Cadet Battalion, and



he returned to France on 29th May 1918. Although he had requested a commission in the West Yorkshire Regiment, he was instead sent to the East Yorkshires, and he actually served until his death with 5th Battalion Yorkshire Light Infantry. He is not listed among the replacement officers who joined the battalion during June and July. This makes it likely he commanded one of the drafts totalling 381 men who joined during August after 5/KOYLI returned to the Somme area having participated in the Second Battle of the Marne under French command. The battalion participated in an attack near Bapaume commencing on 24th August, taking 115 German prisoners. After four days out of the line, 5/KOYLI returned on 1st September. The next day three companies were almost completely cut off by a German counter-attack and surrounded until night. Their resistance was described in the battalion War Diary as 'exceptional gallantry'. Billing was reported 'missing believed killed'. His body was later recovered and buried near Vaulx-Vraucourt, then was re-buried in Vaulx Hill British Cemetery.



Acknowledgements:

Jack's 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 year at B.G.S. is recorded in the Annual Reports 1910-1912. He served as Private 29748 in the 2-8th Royal Warwickshire. The battalion's War Diary is T.N.A. Piece 3057, consulted through Ancestry.com. His Officer Personal Record is T.N.A. WO-374-6388, and the 5th K.O.Y.L.I. War Diary is T.N.A. WO-95-3091-2. The practice of the War Diary over the preceding months was to list at the end of the all officers who joined the battalion or became casualties, but this practice was not followed for the August entry. After the 31st August entry there is a simple statement that 381 men joined in several drafts 6th-22nd August. After the diary for September there are type-written narratives of the battalion's actions in mid-later September, then late August-early September. Billing is noted as a casualty. The C.W.G.C. website gives the Burial Return gives the location for the burials of Billings and Lance Corporal Fairchild as Sheet 57C I.10.5.5.

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