

WALTON DOWNING THOMPSON



2nd September 1918

1895-1918 Aged 22

**Lieutenant 3rd (Special Reserve) Battalion
Royal Welsh Fusiliers, attached 1-6th
Battalion Highland Light Infantry.**

Walton Thompson was the son of a Baptist Minister, one of many clergymen's sons who attended Bradford Grammar School and who died in the First World War. He was born in Luton on 10th September 1895 during his father's 'fruitful' pastorate of eleven years at the Park Street Baptist Church there. The Reverend Frank Thompson was the son of a ship's carpenter from Maryport in Cumberland. In 1888 in Bethnal Green he married Florence Thompson who was born in Bermondsey, Surrey. Despite their long marriage their only child was Walton. From Luton the Reverend Thompson moved to South Street Baptist Church at Greenwich, and the family lived in Lewisham. Walton attended Colfe's Grammar School from 1904 until 1913. His father moved again in 1913, to the Zion Jubilee Baptist Church in Bradford, and so Walton also moved schools. He spent a single year at Bradford Grammar School, in the Matriculation Form. His results indicate he was a talented student, coming first in Latin, French, English, History and Maths, and fifth in Chemistry. In July 1914 he passed the Matriculation exam for Leeds University, where he commenced medical study on 5th October.

With the outbreak of war it is clear that Walton was keen to do his bit. In November he joined the university's O.T.C., and it seems he was frustrated the following July when he was instructed to resign in order to continue his medical studies. In November 1916 he applied for a commission in the Special Reserve Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and was gazetted Second Lieutenant on 21st January 1916. However, he was already serving with 10th Company Royal Army Medical Corps at Fort Pitt, Chatham and his C.O. was unwilling to part with him until forced to do so. Walton reported to the Oxford O.T.C. in late January, and after officer training there he was posted on attachment to 1/6th Battalion Highland Light Infantry. He joined his battalion in the Sinai Desert in Egypt



on 16th August 1916. Over the next months he was seconded to the Royal Flying Corps at Aboukir, returning to 6/HLI at El Arish in January 1917. He was hospitalized for several weeks during the summer suffering from Dysentery and burns to his hands, before he again rejoined his unit for the advance into Palestine. On 26th November he was slightly wounded in the face by a bullet.

In April 1918 52nd Highland Division was withdrawn from the Middle Eastern Expeditionary Force and sent to the Western Front. It spent May to July acclimatizing, training and line holding in the Vimy Ridge sector. During this time Thompson, who was by now a full Lieutenant, enjoyed a fortnight's home leave, and he also led two patrols into no man's land. In late August the 52nd Highland Division took its part in the general allied offensive against the Germans. 6/HLI's orders were to advance against the Hindenburg Line at Boiry-Becquerelle, on the south-east outskirts of Arras, 'to allow the enemy no respite in this retreat'. However, the Germans put up a stiff resistance based on machine-gun posts. On 24th August heavy casualties were suffered, and on the following day Thompson received a bullet wound to the head. He was evacuated to 2nd British Red Cross Hospital in Rouen, but he could not be saved and died on 2nd September.



Acknowledgements:

Walton'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. For Revd. Frank Thompson's career see *Luton Reporter* 17.3.1910 and *Yorkshire Evening Post* 10.10.1913, both accessed through findmypast.co.uk. For Walton's time at Colfe's G.S. I used the School Archives website, <<http://colfesarchive.daisy.websds.net/Filename.ashx?systemFileName=ColfRoh000001.pdf&origFilename=ColfRoh000001.pdf>>; his year at B.G.S. is recorded in the Annual Report for 1914. For Leeds University, the *Medical and Dental Students' Register* was consulted through Ancestry.com. His military career is taken from his Officer Personal Record, T.N.A. WO-339-53645. For 1-6th Highland Light Infantry in Egypt and Palestine I used F.L. Morrison, *The Fifth Battalion Highland Light Infantry, 1914-1918*, privately printed, Glasgow, 1921 (<<http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/bookmark/the-fifth-battalion-highland-light-infantry-in-the-war-1914-1918-by-officers-of-the-battalion-project-gutenberg/>>, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20250/20250-h/20250-h.htm#CHAPTER_VII>) as it was in the same brigade. The 1-6th Battalion's War Diary for France 1918 is Piece 2898/3, consulted through Ancestry.com.

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