

WILLIAM WALMSLEY



27th October 1918

1890-1918 Aged 28

Company Sergeant-Major 221/240011, Croix de Guerre, 1st-6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (T.F.).

Bill Walmsley survived three years on the Western Front before he was taken prisoner and died in captivity two weeks before hostilities ended. He was born in Horton, Bradford on 27th July 1890, the second child and only son of Lister and Caroline Walmsley. Lister was born in Otley, the son of a groom. He must have been a remarkable man, qualities his son inherited. At sixteen Lister was a spinner in Burley-in-Wharfedale, next a spinner's clerk in Horton, then the manager of a worsted spinning mill by the early 1880s. He occupied this position until his death in 1920 when he left effects valued at £21,000 (£1 million in 2018 values). In 1884 he married Caroline Haley from Timble. By 1911 the family lived in a substantial house on Manningham Lane close to the gates of Lister Park.

Bill was ten in 1900 when he started at Bradford Grammar School on the modern side. He performed so well in his first year in the senior school (1902-3) that he was promoted from the Second to the Fourth form. In the latter he struggled in the Arts subjects, but through all six years at the School he came near the top in Maths. In his final year (1906) he played as a batsman for the School second cricket XI and for Greens house first XI. He left school when he was sixteen to work as a wool-sorter for Christopher Waud & Co., a Bradford alpaca spinning company (which was almost certainly his father's employer). Bill's regimental number, 221, indicates that in his spare time he was a volunteer in the Territorial Force, created in 1908, serving in the 6th Battalion based at Belle Vue Barracks near his family home. He was probably on the strength of 'H' Company together with some eighty more Old Bradfordians.

When the war broke out in August 1914, Bill Walmsley was the sort of experienced soldier needed to train new recruits. He took the Imperial Service Obligation to serve overseas and went to France with the battalion on 15th April 1915 as a sergeant in 'C' Company (into which 'H' Company had merged). When the Company Sergeant-Major H. Barker was wounded in July, Colonel Wade (O.B.) promoted Walmsley to replace him. Another



Old Bradfordian later described Bill thus: 'During the whole war he had wielded a tremendous influence in the Battalion. As one of the Battalion "characters" it is impossible to do justice ... to his racy humour, picturesque language, unflinching cheerfulness and "grit". Off parade he was familiar with his men, and knew them by their Christian names. On parade and in action he was treated with a respect which spoke volumes as to his character and leadership. He refused several offers of a commission, as he preferred to stay with his Company and "take his luck with the boys!"'

Walmsley served through five difficult months in the Ypres Salient at the end of 1915 and then on the Somme front for much of 1916. He was one of two companies of the 6th to attempt to advance uphill against the fortified village of Thiepval on the afternoon of 1st July. For his conduct on that day he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre. He also survived the attack in thick mud on Bellevue Spur, near Passchendaele, on 9th October 1917. On 25th April 1918, 'C' Company was in support in the Grand Bois just north of Wyttschaete. After a 'tremendous bombardment' it was attacked by German storm-troops and was quickly overrun. Captain G. Sanders V.C. the Company commander, was last seen on a pill box firing his revolver until he was wounded. He was taken prisoner with Walmsley. In June Bill's parents received a postcard stating that he was unwounded. He was held in Cottbus prisoner of war camp, seventy miles south-west of Berlin, where the conditions were poor. He died of a lung infection, perhaps the result of influenza. His remains were later moved to a large British cemetery near Potsdam.

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

This 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 years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1900-1906 inclusive. The references are in *The Bradfordian*, April and July 1906. For his employer, *Bradford Weekly Telegraph* 1.5.1918 and 14.6.1918. In 1901, the family lived in a cottage in the grounds of 'Ferniehurst', Baildon Road, the home of George C. Waud, alpaca and mohair spinner. The family home at the time of the war was 12 Lindum Terrace, also known as 241 Manningham Lane (census; *Kelly's Bradford Directory* 1912; cwgc.org). For the modern equivalent of Lister's effects, <<https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/bills/article-1633409/Historic-inflation-calculator-value-money-changed-1900.html>> accessed 25.10.2018).

Bradford Roll of Honour (<<https://www.flickr.com/photos/bradfordww1/albums/with/72157638108022256>>) gives Bill's address as 307 Manningham Lane and his enlistment date as August 1914. However, my deduction that Bill was a Territorial, and perhaps a Volunteer before 1908, is based on comparison with the Service Record for C.Q.M.S. Edgar A. Packett whose service number 221 suggests that Walmsley enlisted not long after him. Packett joined the Volunteers in 1903 and the T.F. in 1908, re-enlisting several times thereafter. See <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/interactive/1219/30973_183159-00008?pid=1520431&backurl=https://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc%3Drbz159%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26indiv%3D1%26db%3Dbritisharmyservice%26gsfn%3DEdgar%26gsln%3DPackett%26gsfn_x%3D1%26gsln_x%3D1%26cp%3D0%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26redir%3Dfalse%26uidh%3D6n6%26gss%3Dangs-d%26pcat%3D39%26fh%3D0%26h%3D1520431%26recoff%3D%26ml_rpos%3D1&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=rbz159&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true#?imgeld=30973_183159-00008>. My thanks to Tricia Platts for putting me onto this record.

Walmsley's estate was paid a War Gratuity of £31. 10s. It is difficult to calculate the service this related to from <<https://wargratitude.uk/war-gratuity-calculator/>>. As a Warrant Officer I grade this equated to 55 months service—but for part of his qualifying service he was a Sergeant, and it is not known when he achieved this rank.

For Walmsley's character and his capture, Captain E.V. Tempest, D.S.O, M.C., *History of the Sixth Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, Volume I.—1/6th Battalion*, (Percy Lund Humphries & Co., Bradford, 1921), 230 and 219-24. Also Plates xxxii/5 (Walmsley is nearest camera), xxxix. He was called 'Bill' on several images in a privately-owned album of snapshots taken by a soldier of 1st-6th Battalion (kindly shared with me by Tricia Platts). For his death, <<https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/List/1730079/698/42482/>>. There is a description by a British officer of conditions in Cottbus P.O.W. lager in early December 1918 at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=Report_of_Lt_F_J_Ives>.

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