

HARRY THORPE 1882 – 1914

Harry Thorpe was born in the 2nd quarter of 1882 in Charlecote, Warwickshire, the third son of John and Ellen Thorpe. John was a blacksmith in the village.

Harry joined the Army in 1899 in Birmingham, where he was residing with a Mrs Bordeaux at the Post Office in Acocks Green, and his occupation was a blacksmith. He was first appointed to the 6th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, No. 7539, on 28th December 1899. At his enrolment he was described as being 17 years and 8 months old, his height was 5ft 4 3/4 inches and weighed 130 lbs. His complexion was fresh, eyes grey, hair brown and his religion was C of E, he also had a small mole on his upper arm. He was transferred to the Border Regiment on 13th February 1900.

In WW1 he was with the 2nd Battalion of The Border Regiment, No. 6181. He was killed in action on 20th December 1914.

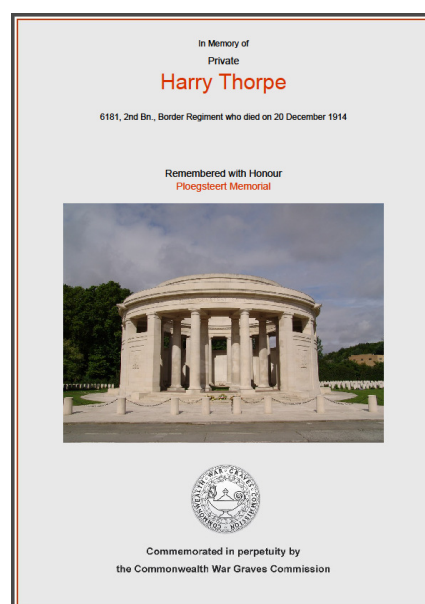
There was an Obituary in the Stratford Herald on January 8th 1915 which stated:-

“Death Announcement

“On the 20th ult., killed in action Harry Thorpe 2nd Battalion Border Regiment third son of Mr and Mrs J.B.Thorpe, Charlecote, Warwick aged 23yrs”.

His two brothers, George and Percy served in the Army in the war and survived.

He is remembered with Honour at the Ploegsteert Memorial in Hainaut, Belgium, and also on The Great War Roll of Honour in Charlecote Church.



Through the War Diaries of the 2nd Battalion of The Border Regiment, it is assumed that Harry died in the first battle of Ypres. The engagement commenced on 18 December and is described in the highlighted paragraph below. Harry died on the 20th December. To give an understanding of what Harry had gone through with his fellow soldiers, included are extracts from October onwards.

"2nd Battalion Border Regiment. This Battalion held a portion of the Kruseik position in front of Ypres during which it was exposed to particularly heavy shell fire for 3 days and nights. Many of the trenches were blown in, but no trench was given up by any portion of this Battalion. On 2nd November this Battalion formed the right of the Brigade at Veldhoek. Owing to troops on the right giving way the enemy was able to occupy some woods and so surrounding the right of The Border Regiment. Nevertheless the Battalion held its line for some hours until the enemy could be driven from these woods by relieving troops. During the fighting this Battalion lost very heavily. The devoted and firm conduct of this Battalion repeatedly called forth the admiration of the Brigadier and of officers in other battalions in the same brigade

"The odds against them were about eight to one; and when once the enemy found the range of a trench, the shells dropped into it from one end to the other with terrible effect. Yet the men stood firm and defended Ypres in such a manner that a German officer afterwards described their action as a brilliant feat of arms, and said that they were under the impression that there had been four British army corps against them at this point". There was no denying that the men of the Division did their part to the best of their abilities in such appalling conditions under violent and hellish fire-fights and hand to hand combat. Their reward: congratulatory messages and the chance to fight again another day

For those of the 2nd Battalion, who were lucky enough not to be killed or wounded, were on the move again. For roughly ten days the Battalion marched from Locre to Meteren, then on to Bac St. Maur and eventually into Saily towards the latter part of the November. It wasn't until 1st December, 1914 that the Battalion resembled something akin to full war strength after several drafts of officers and men joined the service and companies

Almost three weeks later, the Battalion was involved in an unsuccessful attack of German trenches opposite their current position. Captain Warren led 'A' and 'B' Companies of the Battalion and two companies of the Scots Guards commencing at 6.15pm across No Man's Land, reaching the enemy trenches with heavy casualties, unfortunately not only from the German guns but also from our own. As a result, the attacking companies drew back 50 yards or so at which point they laid down and awaited further instruction. Orders were received about an hour later to push on and recommence the attack. The attack again not successful and the men withdrew back to The Border Regiment's trenches where they again awaited further instruction. The Brigadier, who originally gave the order for the attack, saw with forethought that too many lives would be lost and so the operation was abandoned. They couldn't afford to waste more lives and so did the right thing by calling it off. Lieutenant M. N. S. Kennedy and Second-Lieutenant N. Castle were wounded and the total loss of other ranks came to 110.

Two Victoria Crosses were awarded for gallantry to:

"10694 Private Abraham Acton, 2nd Battalion The Border Regiment. 6423 Private James Smith, 3rd Battalion The Border Regiment (attached to 2nd Battalion) For conspicuous bravery on 21st December, at Rouges Bancs, in voluntarily going from their trench and rescuing a wounded man who had been lying exposed against the enemy's trenches for 75 hours, and on the same day again leaving their trenches voluntarily, under heavy fire, to bring into cover another wounded man. They were under fire for 60 minutes whilst conveying the wounded men into safety".

A Christmas Day Armistice

... on Christmas Day ... Later in the morning, 'A' and 'B' Companies of the Battalion who were still holding the front line, received a message from the enemy who had signalled they wished to speak to an officer in agreeing to an armistice. Both sides agreed upon a cease-fire, and in honour of that agreement put down their arms and spent the festive day burying their dead who had been lying out there, cold to the elements since the 18th October.

Extracted from

http://border-regiment.co.uk/index.php?title=The Border Regiment in the Great War#Opening_of the war .28August to December 1914.29

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