

Able Seaman Thomas LEE (1879 - 1915)
("Anson" BN - RN Volunteer Reserve)



Thomas Lee appears on the Addendum of Batley War Memorial. There are no known newspaper reports or family stories. The only clue we have is in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Records.

Thomas Lee gives his date of birth as 5th November 1879 and says he was born in Leeds. However, no record has been found. He married Sarah A Taylor in the First Quarter of 1913 in the Dewsbury Registration District. The records show that after Thomas Lee's death a Sarah A Lee marries William H Pearson in 1918 and they are living at 54 King Street, Batley Carr.

Thomas Lee originally enlisted as Private 16483 in The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry on the 2nd September 1914. He transferred to the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve on the 9th September 1914 and then to the Anson Battalion from 16th January 1915 until his death on the 4th June 1915.

The Royal Naval Division was initially formed from those men of the Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and the Royal Marine Reserve. The Admiralty realised that on mobilisation the Royal Navy would have between 20,000 - 80,000 men of the various reserves, for whom there would be no space in any warship's complement. The surplus was sufficient to form two naval infantry brigades and a Royal Marine Brigade that was to be available for home defence or special tasks. Each brigade had four battalions, organised as standard infantry battalions. The eight naval battalions were initially numbered and then named. Thomas Lee was part of one of these - The Anson Battalion.

The Royal Naval Division was next selected to play a major part in Churchill's plan to defeat the German/Turkish alliance by an amphibious attack into what he called 'the soft underbelly of Europe' to seize the entrance to the Bosphorus at Gallipoli. This enterprise became one of the greatest disasters of the Great War.

On the 4th June 1915 the Third Battle of Krithia occurred involving the whole Royal Naval Division for the attack at Krithia. The 2nd Naval Brigade (Anson, Howe and Hood Battalions with the Collingwood Battalion in support and the Drake Battalion from 1st naval Brigade in reserve) was the attacking force on the Royal Naval Division sector of the front. This was the extreme right of the British front, with the French attacking immediately to their right. The Third Battle was effectively over by the night of the 4-5 of June and was a very costly failure. The entire Royal Naval Division suffered heavy casualties.

During WW1 the Royal Naval Division suffered over 42,000 losses and eight Victoria Crosses were awarded together with many other distinguished medals. It is known that many men who had originally joined the armed forces and then transferred to the Naval Division thought they would not have to go to the Front, but for some who did they gave the ultimate sacrifice.

Able Seaman Thomas Lee KW/321, Anson Battalion, Royal Naval Division, Royal Naval Reserve is Remembered with Honour at the Helles Memorial, Gallipoli, Turkey.

Researcher

Susan White, Batley History Group, April 2015